

Guidelines and Procedures for Admission to Candidacy (ATC) Exam for MSc Agriculture

What is the Admission to Candidacy?

This is an opportunity for the student to present their proposed research, to defend this to a committee and to receive feedback. It is both a formal meeting of the supervisory committee and an opportunity for the input of a faculty member external to the supervisory committee and for input from the Graduate Studies Office.

When does this have to be done?

The ATC must be done within the first six months of beginning the MSc Agriculture. It is preferable to do this within the first four months. The ATC should be completed before actual experimental work is begun, although students may have done a pilot study.

It is realized that for students who begin in May, and who will be doing field work, that actual project work may need to start before the ATC is completed. However, students should be developing their ATC document at the same time and be able to justify the work done in the context of their overall project.

Why do this so early in the program?

The external examiner and the discussion of the supervisory committee may identify areas that can be improved, or suggest additional resources.

The committee may find that the student is lacking in some background, and suggest a course or additional reading that would be helpful to the student in carrying out the research.

What happens if the ATC is not done in the first six months?

The student must submit a request for an extension with a detailed timeline for completion and the reason why the ATC has to be delayed. This must be signed by the supervisor. This is to be submitted to the Faculty Graduate Coordinator, who may allow for a certain period of extension after consultation with the supervisor.

Students who have not completed the ATC by the end of their second semester will need to meet with the Graduate Coordinator. Students who have not completed by the end of the third semester may be required to withdraw on the basis of non-completion of an academic requirement.

What needs to be done for the ATC Research Proposal?

The student prepares a Research Proposal, following the format given below. The proposal is prepared in consultation with the supervisor and supervisory committee members. This should include the rationale for the proposed research, the general outline of the planned project, the resources available and any practical limitations to the project, and the timeline for the student to complete the project and defend the thesis. The document is not expected to have a complete and thorough literature review; the literature cited should set the framework for the project. The methods used should give the broad outline; it is not necessary to include every aspect of methodology.

It is recommended that students have all members of their supervisory committee review, comment and edit, and critique the proposal before submission for the ATC exam. The supervisor is required to sign the Planning Form to indicate agreement that the student is ready to come forward for the ATC. (A student may choose to bring the ATC document forward without this signature, but arrangements will not be made without discussing this decision and approval by the Graduate Coordinator.)

Who is on the ATC committee?

The Committee consists of the supervisor, the members of the supervisory committee, an external examiner, and is chaired by the Faculty Graduate Studies Coordinator or designate.

It is important that the supervisory committee be defined well in advance of the ATC, and strongly recommended that the committee has met as a whole before the ATC.

Dalhousie faculty who are [members](#) of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, but not in the student's department, may act as external examiners for ATC examinations. Adjunct FGS members in the Faculty of Agriculture, or FGS members from another department at Dalhousie University may also serve as external examiners. The external may not be directly involved with the student's proposed research area. Names of external examiners are suggested by the student in consultation with the supervisor; approval of suggested names is given by the Graduate Coordinator.

Who covers the cost?

Travel expenses incurred by the external examiner or any member of the supervisory committee to attend the ATC will not be reimbursed by the Faculty of Agriculture or Dalhousie University. The supervisor may choose to reimburse these costs, and should discuss any specific

arrangements for travel with the Graduate Program Assistant.

What is the process to set the ATC?

The student consults with the supervisor and supervisory committee to arrange available dates (at least five (5) separate dates should be confirmed) and then contacts potential External Examiners (*after approval by the Graduate Coordinator*) to determine their availability on those dates. Once dates and External Examiner are confirmed the student completes the **ATC Planning Form & Part 1**. This form must be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, Faculty of Agriculture (gradagri@dal.ca), *at least four (4) weeks before* the proposed date of the ATC. The **Research Proposal** must be submitted at least three (3) weeks prior to the date of the ATC.

All forms are available on the Faculty of Agriculture Graduate Studies [website](#).

The Graduate Program Assistant will confirm the time of the examination with the student and examining committee. The proposed dates are not guaranteed. Students should have alternate dates in mind, particularly at busy times of the year.

The Graduate Coordinator will approve the ATC Chair. For virtual exams, the Graduate Program Assistant will send the examining committee and student a calendar invitation with the appropriate meeting details and link. For in-person or hybrid exams, the Graduate Program Assistant will arrange for the room. It is the student's responsibility to obtain the necessary computer resources.

Can the documents be submitted electronically?

Paper documents are not required. An electronic copy of the Planning Form, with digital signatures, may be sent to the Graduate Program Assistant (gradagri@dal.ca).

The Research Proposal must be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word file to the Graduate Program Assistant.