

## ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY (ATC) GUIDELINES

### **General**

Admission to Candidacy is based on presentation of an acceptable research proposal and successful defense of this proposal before an examining committee. The examiners will consider the merit and feasibility of the proposal as well as the student's knowledge of methodology, literature and general academic background in areas relevant to the research.

Each student must pass an Admission to Candidacy examination early in their program, normally within the first **four to six months** in which a student is registered. If the ATC examination is not completed within the first six months of the student's program, the student must submit a request for an extension with a detailed timeline for the completion of the examination before registration for their third term of study will be permitted. The request for the extension and timeline for completion must be approved and supported by the student's supervisory committee. Students who do not complete the ATC examination within their first year of study will not be permitted to register for their second year of study.

### **Research Proposal**

A Research Proposal must be prepared by all students as a requirement for Admission to Candidacy (ATC). The proposal should provide a suitably documented account of the project that the student wishes to undertake for the M.Sc. degree. The research proposal must be **no more than 25 single-sided pages**. The proposal must be written in 12 point font with 1" margins (top, bottom, left, right), and be double-spaced. The 25-page limit must include the cover page, table of contents, reference list, figures, tables, appendices and a time-line for completion detailing the completion of all program requirements. Students are to develop the research proposal in consultation with their supervisor and supervisory committee members. Students should consult with their supervisory committee on issues such as the rationale behind the proposed research, important background literature, resources available, practical limitations, and the nature of the ATC examination. Students and supervisors are advised that the research proposal is not expected to contain a complete and thorough literature view or a detailed description of every aspect of the methodology.

Students may find the Writing Centre Resource Guide to be a useful resource in preparing their research proposal. The aim of the guide is to give specific guidance to students who require a standard format for writing assignments of various types. While supervisors, scientific journals, and other textbooks will provide a great deal of help, this guide will provide supplemental information, to assist students in research, note taking, paper planning, and citation forms. The Writing Centre Resource Guide is available on the web site at <http://dal.ca.libguides.com/writingcentre> .

Students may need to consult the Agricultural Campus Writing Centre for general assistance. The Writing Centre is located on the main floor of the MacRae Library. Contact [Marg.Rovers@dal.ca](mailto:Marg.Rovers@dal.ca)

It is recommended that students have all members of their supervisory committee review, comment, edit and critique the proposal prior to submitting the proposal for the ATC examination. It should be submitted, together with a research proposal information form (ATC Part 1 Form) and the ATC Planning Form, to the Faculty Graduate Coordinator (Rm. 112, Cumming Hall) who will schedule the ATC examination. The ATC Part 1 Form and the ATC Planning Form are available on the Graduate Studies web site at <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/agriculture/programs/graduate-studies/forms.html>. Sufficient additional copies of the research proposal must be provided to the Faculty Graduate Coordinator for distribution to the supervisory committee, external examiner, and chair of the exam three weeks prior to the ATC examination. One additional copy must be submitted to the Faculty Graduate Coordinator for the student's official file.

### **Purpose of the Examination**

- i) to evaluate the student's competency to pursue graduate studies in the student's chosen discipline within the context of the proposed research;
- ii) to identify and address any specific weaknesses in the student's background relevant to the proposed research area; and
- iii) to assess the merit, feasibility, and suitability of the proposed research as a graduate-level thesis.

### **Nature of the Examination**

The ATC Examining Committee will include a Chair, one external examiner and the members of the supervisory committee. The Chair of the ATC will normally be the Department Head of the student's academic department of study or his/her designate. The Chair of the ATC must be a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Dalhousie University. In the event that the Department Head is not available to Chair the exam and a designate cannot be obtained, the Faculty Graduate Coordinator may act as Chair. The External Examiner may be a qualified scholar from outside Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture, an Honorary Research Associate or Adjunct Professor of Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture of Agriculture or an Dal Agriculture faculty member preferably from outside of the student's department or not involved in the student's research area. Supervisors are advised that travel expenses associated with bringing an external examiner to an Admission to Candidacy examination will not be reimbursed by Dalhousie AC or the Office of Graduate Studies. Supervisors are responsible for all costs associated with the Admission to Candidacy examination (e.g., travel expenses of external examiner). In addition to the Chair and External Examiner, the ATC Examination Committee will normally consist of three to four examiners. Larger numbers of examiners are at the discretion of the student and the supervisor. One committee member may be replaced by an alternate examiner if it is impossible to have all members present.

The examination begins with a 15-minute oral presentation of the proposal by the student, highlighting the goals and objectives of the research, the research strategy/methodology, and the impact, significance or benefit of the proposed research. The chairperson, supervisory committee members and external examiner then question the student on the proposal and on concepts relevant to the proposal.

The examiners will keep in mind that the ATC proposal is not a detailed description of how the research will be conducted. Thus, examiners' questions will focus on general knowledge of methodology required for the project and theory relating to it. At the same time, examiners will keep in mind that the ATC is not a comprehensive examination. Questions will arise from the scientific content of the work presented but will not range randomly over the entire field. The student is being examined for competence by evaluating his/her ability to put together a viable research project and to defend the rationale and methodology.

The chairperson is expected to intervene on behalf of the student if examiners' questions are not consistent with the purpose of the ATC examination.

### **Evaluation**

Decision will be by consensus and the alternatives are pass or fail. The Chair will vote only if the committee vote is tied. Recommendations and/or conditions may accompany a passing outcome. If the student requires further background preparation, the student may be required as a condition of the ATC examination to take additional courses. Appropriate classes or remedial effort will be assigned for the following academic year. If the research proposal is not deemed to be satisfactory, the student may be required as a condition of the ATC examination to rewrite the research document. The Faculty Graduate Coordinator will verify that these assignments are completed. A student who fails the ATC examination is required to withdraw from the program. A failed ATC examination can be appealed to the Faculty Graduate Coordinator within three working days. The student will then be re-examined within two weeks by the Chair, the student's supervisor, and three faculty not on the original examining committee.

revised: July 31, 2013