

Department of Biology

PROCEDURES FOR MASTERS' THESIS DEFENCE Revised February 2026

A. Selection and Appointment of External Examiner After consultation with other members of the Supervisory Committee, the supervisor is to submit the names including email addresses and information as to reputations) of at least three potential External Examiners and tentative title of the MSc thesis to the Graduate Coordinator in order of preference at least **ten weeks** before the anticipated date of the defence and the window of time (usually 2 weeks) within which they would like to schedule the defence. The Graduate Coordinator will contact the potential examiners in turn to ask if each is agreeable and will evaluate the thesis within three weeks of receipt. Once a suitable examiner is identified, the Departmental Chair will be provided with a copy of his/her CV for final approval. The potential External Examiner should be knowledgeable and experienced in the area of research covered by the thesis and must not have been involved in the thesis work, or other research, of the student or supervisor(s). They can be anywhere in the world, and do not have to, but can attend the defence. They should not be currently associated as employees of Dalhousie University (but they can have Adjunct appointments).

Once approved, the following will be sent to the External Examiner:

1. A letter of invitation from the Department Chair (with statement of time frame for evaluation and date of defence)
2. One copy of the thesis (if requested, a hard copy is sent by courier) [?](#)
3. Department of Biology Master's Thesis Evaluation Form (to be returned to the Graduate Secretary for distribution to the Examining Committee) [?](#)

The external examiner is informed that the Master's Thesis Evaluation Form (plus any other comments) should be returned (via email) at least one day prior to the defence.

B. The Examining Committee

The thesis will be evaluated by an Examining Committee consisting of:

1. Chair (selected from full-time tenured associate and full professors in the Biology Department)
2. Supervisor or two Co-supervisors
3. Supervisory Committee members (at least two individuals)
4. External Examiner (may or may not be present)
5. Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) Representative (only if appointed by the Dean, possibly at the request of the student or Chair of the examining committee).

The External Examiner, Supervisor/Co-supervisors and Supervisory Committee members (categories 2 to 4 above) must each complete a Master's Thesis Evaluation Form. Each member of the defence, except for the External Examiner, must be present for the defence. Only one member of the committee is allowed to participate remotely by video conferencing unless the defence is conducted entirely online.

C. Scheduling the Examination

Once the supervisor(s) or student submits a signed copy of the Department of Biology Master's Thesis Submission Form to the Graduate Secretary, with the External Examiner confirmed, the Graduate Secretary if necessary in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator and Department Chair will:

1. Find a suitable chair for the Examining Committee.
2. Consult with the student and examiners to finalize a day and time of the defence
3. Arrange a room for the defence.
4. Make, post and distribute via email posters advertising the defence. The posters list the date, time, place, student's name, thesis title, names of the examining committee, and affiliation of the external examiner and other non-Dalhousie examiners.
5. Distribute copies of the thesis and Master's Thesis Evaluation Forms to all examiners. NOTE: The Examining Committee is allowed at least three weeks to review the thesis.
6. Ensures that the External Examiner's report is received before the defence and given to the Chair of the defence.
7. Give the Chair of the defence and other examiners the necessary forms.

D. Submission of Thesis for Distribution

The completed thesis in electronic format (e.g. PDF) is submitted to the Graduate Secretary for distribution to all members of the Examining Committee (see section B for description). If requested, the student is to provide unbound copies of the thesis to the Graduate Secretary for distribution to members of the Examining Committee. It is important that the student review and follow the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) 'Thesis Format Guidelines'. A copy of the Biology Department Master's Thesis Submission Form, signed by the supervisor(s) and/or student, should be submitted prior to or along with the thesis. The form must be signed by the supervisor/co-supervisors, verifying that the s/he has read the thesis and that it is complete and suitable for defence, or by the student attesting that they wish to proceed with the

defence of the thesis without the support of his/her supervisor(s). **A minimum of three weeks must be allowed for the Examining Committee to read the thesis before the scheduled date of the defence.**

E. Nature of the Defence

The student gives an uninterrupted presentation for approximately 20 minutes on his/her research. If the External Examiner is not present, the Chair of the Examining Committee then reads aloud appropriate sections of the evaluation of the thesis by the external examiner after which the student defends her/himself verbally. This is followed by two or more rounds of questioning by the examiners (supervisor(s) and Supervisory Committee members). If the external examiner is present, then she/he will begin each round of questioning. The supervisor(s) actively participates in questioning the candidate. The audience is then allowed to ask questions (defences are open to anyone inside or outside the university). The in-camera meeting then takes place. The Examining Committee discusses the candidate's performance. The outcome is decided by the majority opinion of examiners present.

The student is asked to return and the Chair informs him/her of the results of the examination. In the case of a 'approved as submitted' outcome, the examiners sign the Master's Thesis Approval Form. The external examiner, if absent, is not required to sign this form. In the case of a 'approved with changes' outcome, the supervisor (or some other designated examiner) may withhold their signature until the revisions are completed. FGS requires only original signatures on the Master's Thesis Approval Form; the Chair and FGS Representative do not sign and examiners participating remotely may sign and return via mail a separate copy of the form. **NOTE: Students should bring a filled (typed) copy of the Master's Thesis Approval Form to the defence and provide a copy to any member of the Examining Committee participating remotely.** The form can be found on the FGS website: "[Master's Thesis Approval Form.pdf](#)".

- After the defence, the chair of the Examining Committee informs the Graduate Coordinator in writing of the results of the examination, including any deadline for the approval of the revised thesis, and attaches thesis evaluation forms from all examiners (except the Chair and FGS Representative). The Graduate Coordinator then places this information in the student's departmental file and gives copies to the student and his/her supervisor. In the case of an outright failure, or failure with a right to resubmit, the Graduate Coordinator sends notification to the Dean of Graduate Studies. If corrections to the thesis are

required by the Examining Committee, the supervisor (and/or anyone else specified by the Examining Committee) oversee the changes and informs the Graduate Coordinator in writing when these corrections have been completed satisfactorily.

F. Evaluation and Outcomes

Each examiner (except the Chair and FGS representative) will independently complete the Master's Thesis Evaluation Form. The examiners discuss the evaluation amongst themselves. The result of the evaluation is decided by majority vote. The chairperson enters all useful comments and the final result on the Master's Thesis Defence Report. The signed evaluation forms and defence report are returned to the Graduate Coordinator. The defence results are as follows:

- Approved as submitted. ☐ Approved with changes (a deadline must be given for the approval of the revised thesis by the supervisor and/or other examiners, generally less than one month. The supervisor oversees the changes).
- Rejected with permission to submit a revised thesis (a deadline must be given for the submission of the revised thesis, generally less than one year).
- Rejected with no possibility of resubmission.

G. Final Thesis Submission to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS)

All theses are submitted electronically to the Dalhousie Institutional Repository (DalSpace); review instructions for submission on the FGS website. At the same time submit to FGS the Master's Thesis Approval Form signed by the Examining Committee (except the Chair and FGS Representative). Note that FGS requires only original signatures on the Master's Thesis Approval Form; remote participants of the defence may sign and return via mail a separate copy of the form. It is important that the student review the FGS regulations for thesis formatting and submission. Students should also make note of the FGS thesis submission deadlines in the Graduate Studies Calendar. This gives the dates by which theses must be submitted to FGS after the examination with the thesis approved, for graduation during the different convocations. This affects whether you pay fees!