

Guidelines for serving as a Chair in the Department of Oceanography

The guidelines below pertain to chairing the following academic events that occur within the Department of Oceanography at Dalhousie University:

- **MSc Thesis Proposal Defences**
- **MSc Defences**
- **Qualifying Examinations**
- **PhD Proposal Defence**

The Chair of the academic event has the ability to make executive decisions on the implementation of any of the guidelines below.

Guidelines for the Chair

- Start on time. If only one examiner is late, wait only 5 minutes and then proceed. If more than one is late, discuss with the Advisor(s) whether to wait or reschedule.
- Introduce yourself, the Candidate, the External and other members of the Examining Committee.
- If the defence is virtual or hybrid, confirm that the Host capabilities have been assigned to the correct attendee.
- Summarise the procedure: presentation; questioning; and in camera meeting to discuss outcome.
- Invite the Candidate to begin their 20-minute presentation with no interruptions. If it gets to 25 minutes, signal a one-minute cut-off.
- Announce the order of examiner questioning, beginning with External and ending with the Advisor(s).
- Limit the examination to two rounds of questions, the second round being shorter.
- Keep the examiners on time: no more than 10 minutes each with ~15 minutes for the External on the first round, and less on the second round. If the examining committee is large (>4), curtail the time allowed for questioning.
- Keep notes on the time used by examiners.
- Do not let examiners go astray – keep everyone on track.
- Discourage discussion among members of the Examining Committee; questions must be directed to the Candidate who should be permitted to respond without interruption.
- Do not allow the Advisor(s) to answer questions directed to the Candidate.
- Keep the process just, calm, and professional.
- The entire academic event should last no longer than 2 hours.
- Keep notes on significant issues that arise during questioning.
- After the first round of questions, it is helpful to suggest a 5-minute comfort break for the Candidate and Committee members. Virtual attendees should remain logged into the Teams meeting, and simply turn their audio and video off during this break.
- If there is a second round of questions, the Chair should invite audience members to depart if they wish, prior to the commencement of the second round.
- If the academic event being chaired allows for audience members, the Chair may invite a few questions from the audience after the second round of questioning has finished.
- At the end of questioning ask the Candidate and audience to retire and begin the in-camera discussion.
- Remind the Committee of the defence outcome options (below).

- Ask for recommendations and comments beginning with the External and then the other members of the Committee in the order of questioning.
- Encourage a consensus decision if possible. Only the decision of the Committee is to be reported and not how it was reached.
- Keep notes on significant issues that the Committee agree should be included in the report of the outcome.

Outcomes for the Academic Event

The outcomes for the following academic events are either *approved* or *not approved*.

- **MSc Thesis Proposal Defences**
- **MSc Defences**
- **Phd Proposal Defences**

The categories of outcomes are:

- Approved as submitted.
- Approved upon specific corrections with a clear timetable for completion, normally within one month.
- Rejected but with permission to re-submit a revised thesis/proposal for re-examination with a clear timetable for completion, within one year.
- Rejected outright.

The outcome for the following academic event is either *passed* or *failed*.

- **Qualifying Examinations**

The categories of outcomes are:

- The Candidate passes without extra conditions.
- The Candidate passes but is informed of weaknesses that should be addressed during their tenure in the form of courses, audits, or directed studies.
- The Candidate passes conditionally and is asked to fulfill specific requirements that address weaknesses identified during the QE that need to be resolved. The format and timeline for additional requirements will be determined by the Examining Committee during the in-camera session. These requirements may include a written examination, completion of a directed study course, or a research paper on a specific topic. In their communication with the Candidate, the Examining Committee must clearly specify the evaluation criteria and process. In the event that the requirements are deemed by the Examining Committee to have not been met, the Candidate is transferred to the MSc program.
- The Candidate is transferred to the MSc program.

The possible outcomes of a follow-up written examination are:

- The Candidate passes without extra conditions.
- The Candidate passes, but is informed of weaknesses that should be addressed during their tenure, in the form of courses, audits, or directed studies.
- The Candidate is transferred to the MSc program.

The above outcomes are based on a majority vote of all examiners except the Chair who votes only in the event of a tie.

The Chair of the Examining Committee will submit (within a day or two) a report on the outcome of the academic event to the Graduate Secretary. It will indicate the nature of any action items and the time frame within which they are to be completed. In the event of an unsuccessful academic event, an explanation of the outcome must be provided in the report. The Chair must provide a copy of the report to the Candidate, the Advisor(s) and the members of the Examining Committee. The report will be appended to the Candidate's departmental file.

Appendix

[Academic Calendar, Faculty of Graduate Studies: 10.3 Master's Thesis](#)

[Department of Oceanography Graduate Handbook](#)