University of Toronto
Faculty of Information

Procedure for Oral Defense of
Doctoral Thesis Proposals

Doctoral students must defend a thesis proposal before the proposed Supervisory Committee before entering candidacy. After a successful defense of the thesis proposal, and after all other pre-candidacy requirements are met, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) will be informed, the Supervisory Committee will be formally constituted, and the student will enter candidacy.

The Proposal and its Purpose

The Faculty of Information encourages and supports the wide range of thesis topics and methodologies appropriate to the study of information. The thesis proposal represents a formal understanding between the Supervisory Committee and the doctoral Candidate. This agreement outlines the work to be done and the intellectual rigor the Committee expects from the Candidate. The proposal functions as a map guiding the Candidate towards the effective completion of the thesis project.

The Elements

The doctoral student works closely with her or his Research Advisor in determining the composition of the proposed Supervisory Committee and in writing the proposal.

The proposal should contain detail sufficient to describe the significance, background and rationale for the thesis and the work the Candidate will perform for the thesis.

The following list of elements is typical for a thesis proposal in information. However, the Faculty recognizes that this list may not fit all thesis proposals and thus should be considered as illustrative only.

1) **Statement of the Problem** – includes the background, context in the information field and in the broader scheme of academic pursuits, key questions, significance of the problem, and description of chosen methodology.

2) **Grounding and Rationale** – provides a discussion of need in the area of study which may include a comprehensive review of theoretical, conceptual, technological or methodological precedents which directly relate to the thesis topic. This section may also include a detailed analysis of the precedents that justify the need for the research, or it may review the literature that relates to the research.

3) **Research Plan** – details the methods that will be used or the processes that will be followed during the course of investigation. This section describes how the questions posed by the thesis will be addressed.
The Defense of the Thesis Proposal

The student, assisted by the Research Advisor, as necessary, schedules a date, a time, and a room for the defense of the thesis proposal. The student submits details regarding the defense to the Chair of the Doctoral Program.

At least three weeks before the scheduled defense date, the thesis proposal must be submitted to all members of the proposed Supervisory Committee, and the proposed Supervisory Committee shall be constituted as the voting members of a Thesis Proposal Defense Committee. The Chair of the Doctoral Program appoints a non-voting chair of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee.

The Process

The thesis proposal defense proceeds as outlined below. All members of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee must be present at the exam which will normally not exceed two (2) hours, and a majority must be present in person.

1) The Thesis Proposal Defense Committee meets initially in camera, without the student present.
2) The Chair invites the student to join the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee for the defense.
3) The student makes a brief (maximum 20 minutes; with visual aids, if desired) oral presentation of the key elements of the thesis proposal to the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee.
4) The voting members of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee question the student.
5) Once all questions have been asked, the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee reconvenes in camera for deliberations. The voting members vote for one of the following:
   a. Accept—a paper copy and PDF version of the proposal is submitted to the Chair of the Doctoral Program, who announces to the Faculty the successful completion of the thesis proposal defense requirement.
   b. Accept with revisions—revisions require approval by the student’s Research Advisor and selected members or the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee. See Process** below.
   c. Reject – the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee may recommend either 1) that a second defense is permitted after a period of additional preparation, or 2) that the student is required to withdraw from the PhD program.

In all cases, a document attesting to the decision of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee will be signed by all members of that Committee. The Chair may sign on behalf of any Thesis Proposal Defense Committee members who are not physically present.

The Thesis Proposal Defense Committee must reach agreement with at most one dissenting vote. In the event that such agreement does not occur, the deliberations of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee are continued with a decision required to be made within ten days of the thesis proposal defense date.
If the Committee cannot come to a decision, then the student, in consultation with the Research Advisor, may reconstitute the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee and schedule a new defense.

**Process for “Accept with Revisions”**

The revision process proceeds as follows:

- The Thesis Proposal Defense Committee informs the student verbally of the revisions that must be completed;
- The Chair of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee, in consultation with members of that Committee, prepares a written description of the required revisions;
- The Thesis Proposal Defense Committee and the student determine the date by which the revisions must be completed;
- The Chair of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee distributes the written description to the student and the Committee;
- Two weeks after the revisions are submitted by the student, the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee informs the Chair of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee and the student whether the revisions are accepted or rejected. The Chair of the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee communicates the decision to the Chair of the Doctoral Program;
- If accepted, a paper copy and PDF version of the thesis proposal are submitted to the Chair of the Doctoral Program, who announces to the Faculty the successful completion of the thesis proposal defense requirement;
- If rejected, the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee recommends, as outlined above, to either permit a second defense or to require the student to withdraw from the program;
- If the revisions are not completed successfully within the specified time period, the Chair of the Doctoral Program, in consultation with the Thesis Proposal Defense Committee, may extend the time for revision to up to one year from the date of the thesis proposal defense. After one year, the student may petition the Chair of the Doctoral Program and the Committee on Standing for a further extension;
- If the revisions are not completed successfully in the time frame designated, the student is required to withdraw from the PhD. program. The student may appeal this requirement to the Chair of the Doctoral Program and the Committee on Standing.

Approved by the Faculty of Information Committee on Programs, June 5, 2012