Guidelines for Neutral Chair

A Neutral Chair ensures that policy and procedure are correctly followed during and after an oral examination, and guards against perceived conflict of interest or undue influence.

Choosing a Neutral Chair for an Oral Thesis Examination

- The Graduate Program Director appoints the Neutral Chair no later than one week from the date of the examination and informs FGS prior to the examination.
- Neutral Chairs, normally University of Calgary members with a professorial appointment (Senior Instructors with experience supervising graduates, as well as Emeriti Professors) can be from within or from outside the program.
- The Neutral Chair does not have a close relationship with the candidate or the supervisor, and is not involved in the candidate’s or the supervisor’s research.

Duties of the Neutral Chair

A Neutral Chair:

- is not a member of the examining committee and therefore does not read the thesis, participate in the discussion of the thesis or the oral defense of the thesis, or vote.
- must be familiar with the Regulations for Thesis and Thesis Examination and the Thesis and Thesis Examination Administrative Processes in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and will review the procedures of the examination with the committee (for examinations conducted under the old regulations, refer to the Handbook of Supervision and Examination in the 2014-2015 Graduate Calendar).
- is responsible for contacting the Faculty of Graduate Studies if an examiner fails to appear or leaves prior to the completion of the exam. Call 403-220-4938 and you will be put in contact with an available Associate Dean.
- collects Examiners’ Assessment of the Thesis from the Examination Committee prior to the start of the examination
- presides over the oral examination and ensures that all examiners have appropriate opportunity to question the candidate
- guards against any tendency of examiners to interact with each other instead of concentrating on the examination of the candidate
- documents the examination procedure and records any procedural anomalies (see Neutral Chair Report Guidelines below)
- administers and reviews non-binding straw vote (see below for Managing tele- or videoconferences)
- facilitates the confidential discussions pertaining to the examination outcome. If questions arise at any point during the deliberations that the committee is unable to resolve, the Neutral Chair should consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies for advice.
• communicates the result of the examination to the student, and gives the *Final Thesis Oral Examination* form to the Graduate Program Director who ensures that it is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies within 24 hours of the examination.

• reports failed examination or lack of unanimity outcomes to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (see Neutral Chair Report Guidelines Below)

**Neutral Chair Report Guidelines**

In the case of a failed examination, lack of unanimity, or procedural anomaly(s), the Neutral Chair is responsible for submitting a report of the examination procedures (generally 1 page) to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies within 5 working days. The Neutral Chair’s report should:

• give a description of the procedure followed during the exam.

• highlight any procedural deviations or unusual events that could have had a bearing on the outcome.

• give a brief summary of noteworthy post-exam discussion relevant to the outcome of the exam.

• identify names of examiners, as relevant, in discussing any procedural anomalies or post-exam discussions. Names would be removed in the case of a FOIP request.

**Managing Tele- or Videoconference Examinations**

A Neutral Chair:

• must be familiar with the *Guidelines for Oral Examinations with the Candidate at a Distant Location*.

• receives a faxed or electronic version of the Examiner’s Assessment of the Thesis from a Distance Examiner prior to the examination.

• will, in the event of a technical problem inform the examination committee, student and proctor, that the examination may be interrupted for up to 30 minutes. If connections cannot be re-established within that time, the examination will be rescheduled.

• Will ensure that the private deliberation of the Examination Committee after the oral part of the examination is concluded are not heard at the distant side

• Ensures the anonymity of the straw vote for any distant examiner

• must obtain an email or fax, which will be included along with the Report, after the examination giving him/her permission to sign off on behalf of the distance examiner.

**Related Documents:**

• *Guidelines for Oral Examinations with the Candidate at a Distant Location*

• *Guidelines for Proctors*