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# 1. Supervisors and Committee Members

## 1.1 Eligibility Criteria

The academic unit shall ensure that the members of a supervisory committee are sufficiently competent and experienced to serve at the required level. In forming a supervisory committee, the academic unit should consider the rank and experience of the supervisor and prospective members, their publications and other demonstrations of competence in the field of specialization, and the prospective members’ experience in graduate supervision.

As minimum criteria, supervisors and supervisory, candidacy, and examination committee members must normally:

* be full-time, continuing Athabasca University (AU) faculty;
* be active in the general area of the student’s research;
* have a tenured (or tenure track) faculty appointment;
* hold a degree equivalent to or higher than that for which the student is a candidate; and,
* demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity of an original nature as defined in item 3.7.3.b. of the [AUFA Collective Agreement](http://www1.athabascau.ca/hr/labour_relations/0910_aufa_agreement.pdf).

Because of diverse interpretations of the term “scholarly or creative activity,” the FGS will always find it necessary to rely on sound and informed judgment of the academic unit to ensure adherence to minimum faculty criteria.

## 1.2 Other Categories

Individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria, above, may be recommended to serve as co-supervisors and as members of the supervisory, candidacy, and examining committees. For approval of the following categories, the academic unit graduate program designate shall formally apply to the FGS:

* retired professors or professors emeriti;
* professors from academic units not offering a graduate program;
* Adjunct professors (an adjunct professor is an honorary appointment at AU; see [AU Policy 025 003](http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/humanresources/025_003.htm));
* faculty members who do not hold a degree equivalent to or higher than that for which the student is a candidate, but are exceptional in their scholarly work and well-recognized as experts in their field;
* faculty in non-continuing positions teaching in an AU program; and,
* other experts (e.g., First Nations’ Elders, or a well-known expert in industry).

The request from the academic unit graduate program designate to the FGS for committee membership approval of someone from the ‘Other Category’ should include submission of the form “Recommended Graduate Committee Supervisor or Member” with the individual’s CV. This form allows the graduate program designate to indicate the reasons for, and the benefits of, having such a colleague as co-supervisor or on the proposed supervisory, candidacy, or examining committee. If approved, the colleague will remain eligible for appointment to other supervisory committees for a three-year period after the initial decanal approval. Additional approvals will be dependent on a favorable recommendation from supervisors working with the colleague. Appointments will only be made of those individuals expected to be able to remain on the committee until completion of the student’s degree program. The FGS may waive the approval mechanism where circumstances warrant.

Requests for continuing supervision by supervisors who have taken retirement will be dealt with by the FGS on a case-by-case basis. The guiding principle will be that faculty who take retirement can continue to supervise their graduate student(s) upon recommendation by the academic unit graduate program designate to the FGS.

In all cases, colleagues from the above groups should demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity as demonstrated by satisfying the criteria set out in item 3.7.3.b of the [*AUFA Collective Agreement*](http://www1.athabascau.ca/hr/labour_relations/0910_aufa_agreement.pdf).

## 1.3 Selection, Composition, and Approval of the Supervisor and Supervisory Committee

Graduate students who write a thesis or dissertation are required to have a supervisor.

* In the master’s program, the selection of a supervisor should occur once the student has been approved to the thesis route.
* In the doctoral program, the supervisor should be identified as soon as feasible after admission to the program, subject to the graduate regulations of the academic unit. In some academic units, an interim supervisor is assigned when the student is accepted to the program. In this case, the interim supervisor will provide advisement to the student until the supervisor is selected and approved.

Students normally identify their supervisor, who is usually a faculty member from the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. In cases where the supervisor is from an academic unit at AU other than the student’s academic unit, the supervisor must agree to follow the policies and regulations of the student’s academic unit in all matters related to the supervisory responsibilities. If the faculty member agrees to become the supervisor, the student obtains the “Doctoral Program Supervisor Approval” form from the FGS website, completes initial information, then submits it to their supervisor to confirm their agreement to supervise the student. The supervisor sends the form to the academic unit graduate program designate. Rationale outlining the suitability of the supervisor for the student’s research focus is attached to the form. Upon approval by the academic unit’s graduate program designate, the designate then submits the material to the FGS for approval.

### Doctoral Degree Supervisory Committee

The supervisor works with the student on selecting the supervisory committee. The supervisory committee consists of a supervisor and a minimum of two other members:

* The Chair of the committee shall be the supervisor, normally from the student’s Academic Unit;
* One of the committee members shall be from outside the student’s Academic Unit, but from an Academic Unit within Athabasca University;
* If there is co-supervision, the supervisory committee would consist of the supervisor, co-supervisor, and a minimum of two additional members.

The committee must meet the eligibility criteria requirements, and must not be in a position of conflict of interest ([*AU Policy 150 002*](http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/humanresources/150_002.htm)). Once the committee is selected, the supervisor completes the “*Doctoral Appointment of Supervisory Committee*” form, seeking approval from the student’s Academic Unit graduate program designate, with rationale for the selection of the specific members. The Academic Unit graduate program designate shall recommend and submit the names to the FGS. The final authority for the approval of the supervisor and supervisory committee rests with the FGS.

## 1.4 Co-supervision

In some cases, co-supervision of a student may be recommended to the FGS. Co-supervisors must meet the eligibility criteria outlined for members of supervisory committees, which includes the criteria under “Other Categories.”  There should normally be no more than one co-supervisor. When a supervisor and co-supervisor are assigned, together they shall fulfill the role of the supervisor (that is, neither shall fulfill any other supervisory or examining role on that committee). The signatures of both the supervisor and the co-supervisor are required on all documents where the supervisor’s signature is required.

## 1.5 Guidelines, Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors and Students

The parameters set out in this document, and the FGS guidelines for supervisors, interim supervisors, committee members, and students, shall be followed (*Guidelines for Graduate Student Supervision; Roles and Responsibilities of the Supervisor; Roles and Responsibilities of the Interim Supervisor and Responsibilities of the Graduate Student*). The guidelines include the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and graduate students. More specific guidelines, pertinent to the specific discipline or program, may be developed by the academic unit, and should be posted in the academic unit’s regulations.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor or designate to keep committee members of the student’s progress and meetings of the committee. The supervisor and the supervisory committee (if formed at that time) shall meet with the student at least once per year. At this time, the “*Annual Progress Report”* form is completed, in which the student discusses the achievement of goals during the past year, expresses goals for the subsequent year, and provides dates for significant milestones in the program, such as dissertation proposal completion date or commencement of data collection. If the supervisory committee has been formulated, then signatures from each of the committee members and the student are required on the form. The form is submitted to the academic unit graduate program designate, and the FGS, for approval.

## 1.6 Changing a Supervisor or Supervisory Committee

The academic unit graduate program designate may recommend changes of a supervisor and/or revisions to the supervisory committee by formally seeking approval from the FGS “*Change to Supervisor or Supervisory Committee”* form. In cases of sudden or unexpected interruption of supervision, such as resignation, illness, or death, the academic unit’s graduate program designate must, without delay, make arrangements to provide continuity of supervision, pending the appointment of a new supervisor or supervisory committee member.

## 1.7 Supervisor on Leave

It is the responsibility of supervisors to make adequate provision for supervision of their graduate students during a leave. Supervisors who intend to take leave (exceeding two consecutive months) during a period in which they have graduate students under their supervision shall discuss alternative arrangements with their student(s). The supervisor shall submit a written statement to the student’s academic unit graduate program designate for approval, describing the arrangements which have been made to provide satisfactory supervision during the period of leave. Once approved, the finalized arrangement will be communicated in writing to the student(s) involved.

# 2. Program of Study

As soon as feasible after a student has been accepted to a doctoral program, the student shall identify a supervisor and outline a program of study, which includes the projected time for completion of the degree, course work, any supplementary work required, and the research area of the dissertation. There are several program timeplans that are available on the FGS website that can be used by students to identify dates for the completion of [various milestones in the program](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/docs/Timelines_forForms_forDoctoral_Program.pdf).

In some academic units, an interim supervisor may be assigned when the student is accepted into the program. In this case, the interim supervisor will provide advisement to the student until the supervisor is selected and approved. When the supervisor is identified, the “*Doctoral Program Supervisor Approval*” form should be submitted to the academic unit graduate program designate and the FGS.

At the appropriate time in the program, determined by the supervisor and student, a supervisory committee will be struck. (See the section of the guidelines entitled “[Selection, Composition, and Approval of Supervisor & Supervisory Committee](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/supervisors_and_committee_members.php#committee)”, for details on the nature of the committee.) The “*Doctoral Supervisory Committee Approval*” form should be completed and submitted to the academic unit graduate program designate and the FGS for approval.

Any changes to the student’s program of study, their supervisor, or supervisory committee since the initial completion of the form, can be made on the “*Change to Supervisor or Supervisory Committee*” form. This is then submitted to the academic unit graduate program designate and FGS for approval.

[Figure 1](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/appendixA.php#figure1) provides an *Overview of Doctoral Program*.

# 3. The Candidacy

At the time specified by the supervisory committee, normally within the first three years after admission to the program, but in no case later than one year prior to anticipated graduation or the maximum time for completion of the program, whichever is sooner, the student must take the formal candidacy examination.

The candidacy examination should determine whether the student is adequately prepared to continue as a doctoral candidate. Students must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the examination committee that they possess:

* an adequate knowledge of the discipline and of the subject matter relevant to their program of research; and
* the ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level.

The requirements that the student must meet in order to become a doctoral candidate may vary by academic unit. The requirements may comprise **one** of the following:

* a written and/or oral examination that tests the student on **both** their knowledge gained from their program of study (which includes their coursework) and their written dissertation proposal; or
* a written or oral examination that test(s) the student on their knowledge gained from their program of study (which includes their coursework), **and** an examination on their written dissertation proposal. The student must pass the examination on their program of study (coursework) before they can be examined on their proposal.

FGS is responsible for establishing detailed examination procedures for the candidacy (*Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs*). These procedures are available on the FGS website and should be made available to faculty members and students in the academic unit. A diagram illustrating the *Overview of Doctoral Candidacy Process* can be seen in [Figure 2](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/appendixA.php#figure2).

## 3.1 Preparation for the Candidacy

Before the proposal is forwarded to the examination committee, the supervisory committee members shall declare in writing to the supervisor either:

* that the proposal is of adequate substance and quality to warrant that the proposal is ready to be reviewed by the examination committee and that the student is ready to proceed to the candidacy; or
* that the proposal is unsatisfactory (that further work is needed), and the student should not be allowed to proceed to the candidacy.

It is important that this preliminary acceptance of the proposal is conducted in order to protect and uphold the reputation of the program and the University, for excellence in graduate programs. It is also critical to ensure that the examination committee members are not asked to invest time reading a substandard document.

If the supervisor considers the proposal ready for the examination committee, the “*Preliminary Acceptance of Proposal prior to Distribution to Candidacy Committee”* form must be completed by the supervisory committee indicating their opinion of the readiness of the proposal and the student to proceed to the candidacy. This form must be completed and submitted **4 to 6 weeks** prior to the anticipated date of the examination. At this time, the supervisor may also submit their recommendation for the examination committee to FGS (see Section 3.3 of this document).

## 3.2 Responsibilities of the Supervisor

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that the *Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs* are followed, and that proper arrangements are made for the examination(s). The student is not required to make any of these arrangements. In the absence of the supervisor, a designate shall be responsible for these arrangements.

## 3.3 Selection, Composition, and Approval of Doctoral Candidacy Examination Committee

Regardless of the nature of the candidacy examination chosen by the academic unit, only one examination committee will be struck to oversee and evaluate the student’s ability and knowledge to meet these requirements.

The examination committee will consist of the supervisory committee and the addition of one or two other members. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to nominate the additional member(s) of the examination committee to the academic unit graduate program designate, and then to the FGS, for approval, using the “*Candidacy Examination Committee Approval*” form. The proposed examination committee members must meet the eligibility criteria, and must not be in a position of conflict of interest (see [AU Policy 150 002](http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/humanresources/150_002.htm)).

A maximum of five members shall comprise the committee:

* The supervisory committee members, and normally the addition of one or two new faculty members;
* At least one of the new members shall be from outside the student’s academic unit;
* At least one of the new members must be at arm’s length from the student and the proposal development; and
* All members must agree to participate in the examination.

## 3.4 Written Candidacy Examination(s)

The questions and the format of the responses (such as length, writing style, deadline for submission) are developed by the examination committee, according to the regulations of the academic unit, and then submitted to the graduate program designate, with a copy for FGS. The graduate program designate distributes the questions and instructions to the student. The student submits their responses to the graduate program designate, within a specified time period as set out in the regulations of the academic unit and FGS. The graduate program designate then distributes the responses to the examination committee. The committee has a specified time within which to grade the responses and submit their adjudication results to the graduate program designate.

## 3.5 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for Written Examination(s)

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#pass)
* [Resubmit](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#resubmit)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#fail)

Normally, one of the following outcomes of the written examination must be recorded on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*”: **Pass, Resubmit**, or **Fail**.

The decision shall be that of the majority. If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor’s report should record the recommendation of each committee member on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*,” form which is submitted to the FGS, who will determine an appropriate course of action.

In the case where the examination committee recommends a resubmission to the FGS, the student has a second opportunity to re-write the examination. At the **second attempt**, the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories – **pass** or **fail**. The student cannot proceed to the oral examination (if this is a requirement) unless they pass the written examination. Students will not be allowed to resubmit the examination after the second attempt.

If the student receives a **fail** at the first attempt, or after the resubmission, they are required to withdraw from the program and will receive a fail on their transcript.

### Pass

Examination committee members approve the written examination(s).

#### Procedure:

The student can proceed to the oral examination (if one is required). The supervisor must complete the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form and submit it to the FGS.

### Resubmit

The responses to the examination question(s) lack adequate support from the literature, show limited knowledge of the research area, or do not reflect an advanced level of analysis and synthesis.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor shall inform the student of the recommendation and problems immediately after the deliberations.
* The supervisor shall specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and the necessary remedial work that will be required.
* The student is given one more opportunity to rewrite the question(s) on which they performed poorly. A timeline for rewriting of the examination may be identified, which shall be no later than 6 months from the initial submission of the responses.
* The supervisor must complete the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form and submit it to the FGS.

### Fail

The examination(s) is unacceptable.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor shall inform the student of this recommendation immediately after the deliberations of the examination committee.
* The supervisor shall provide the reasons for the fail to the student immediately after deliberations and within two business days in writing. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible.
* The “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form is completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the fail and recommendations for further action.
* In exceptional circumstances, the FGS will arrange to meet with the student and the examination committee representatives before acting upon the committee’s recommendation.

##

## 3.6 Preparation for the Oral Candidacy Examination

At least **four** weeks prior to the oral Candidacy examination, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to submit the “*Notice of Oral Examination*” to FGS that outlines the date of the oral examination, the preferred technology, back-up numbers of the examination committee members for during the oral examination, recommended name of the proctor, and other information as listed in Section 2.0 of the *Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs*.

Unless a member of the examination committee is present with the student for the entire process, a mechanism must be in place to ensure both the identity of the student, effective application of the examination procedures, and the integrity of the examination. In the case when a proctor will be used, they must be preapproved by FGS as part of the “*Notice of Oral Examination*”.

FGS will make the necessary arrangements for the technology. Upon FGS approval of the details related to the oral examination, the supervisor can then confirm the examination date, time, and other necessary arrangements with the student and the examination committee.

In the absence of the supervisor, the above responsibilities shall be carried out by a designate of the supervisor. The student is not required to make the arrangements for the examination.

## 3.7 Oral Candidacy Examination

The candidacy oral examination is considered a ‘closed’ examination. Only the examination committee members, the student, the neutral chair, and proctor (if needed) are in attendance.

The oral examination shall be chaired by a neutral chair, appointed by the FGS. This neutral chair is normally from outside the student’s academic unit and is considered at arm’s length to the committee and student. The chair is responsible for moderating the discussion, directing questions, and ensuring the FGS *Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route & Doctoral Programs,* section 4.0is followed. The chair is not considered a member of the examination committee and therefore has no voting privileges. A report on the proceedings must be completed by the neutral chair, "*Report of the Neutral Chair*" and submitted to FGS after the oral examination. In the case where a proctor is present, the “*Report of the Proctor*” must be submitted to FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations and no later than **5 days** after the oral examination. The duties of the proctor are specified in *Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs*, section 3.0.

## 3.8 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for the Oral Candidacy Examination

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#pass2)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#fail2)
* [Adjourned, Repeat Oral](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#repeat)

Normally, one of the following outcomes of the oral examination must be recorded on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form: **Pass;** **Fail**; or **Adjourned**, **Repeat Oral.**

The decision shall be that of the majority. If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor’s report should record the recommendation of each committee member on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form with their signatures. This is submitted to the FGS who will determine an appropriate course of action.

In the case where the examination committee recommends ‘**Adjourned, Repeat Oral**’ to the FGS, the student will be given a second opportunity to conduct another oral examination.  At the **second attempt**, the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories – **pass** or **fail**. If the student receives a fail, they are required to withdraw from the program, and will receive a fail on their transcript. Under extraordinary circumstances, the student may obtain an adjournment on the second attempt.

Normally, if the student receives a fail at the first attempt they are required to withdraw from the program and will receive a fail on their transcript. Depending upon the reason for the fail in the oral examination, the committee may recommend to the FGS that the student be allowed a second attempt on the oral examination. If the recommendation is agreed upon, at the second attempt the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories– pass or fail. Any student who is granted permission for a second attempt, and receives a **fail** on the oral examination at that second attempt, must withdraw from the program, and will receive a fail on the transcript.

The chair is responsible for completing the “*Report of the Neutral Chair*.” The report should include the recommendations, the distribution of the votes, a summary of the committee’s comments, and any remarks that the chair may wish that may help the Dean, FGS, in reaching a decision.

### Pass

The student passes the oral examination.

#### Procedure:

* The “Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report” form is completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members.
* The “Report of the Neutral Chair” must be submitted to the FGS by the chair as soon as possible after the examination.
* The “Report of the Proctor” must be submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, and no later than 5 days after the oral examination.

### Fail

The student did not demonstrate an adequate breadth or depth of knowledge.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor shall inform the student of this recommendation immediately after the deliberations, in the presence of the examination committee.
* The supervisor shall provide the reasons for the fail to the student immediately after deliberations, and within two business days in writing. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible.
* The “Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report” form is completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The “Report of the Neutral Chair” must be submitted to the FGS by the chair as soon as possible after the examination.
* The "Report of the Proctor" must be submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, and no later than 5 days after the oral examination.
* In exceptional circumstances, the Dean for FGS may arrange to meet with the student and the examination committee before acting upon the committee’s recommendation.

### Adjourned, Repeat Oral

The candidacy examination should be adjourned in compelling, extraordinary circumstances.

#### Procedure:

* The “Report of the Neutral Chair” must be submitted to the FGS by the chair as soon as possible after the examination.
* The “Report of the Proctor” must be submitted to the FGS by the proctor as soon as possible after the examination.
* The supervisor ensures that the “Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report” form is submitted to the FGS by the supervisor, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the adjournment, and recommendations for further action.

## 3.9 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for Written Dissertation Proposal

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#pass3)
* [Resubmit with Revisions](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#resubmit2)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/candidacy.php#fail3)

Each student is required to develop a written dissertation proposal in their chosen field of study. The dissertation proposal is developed under the mentorship of the supervisor and the supervisory committee. At the time of candidacy, the examination committee must formally approve the written dissertation proposal. Each academic unit offering a doctoral degree is responsible for establishing detailed examination procedures for the adjudication process for the dissertation proposal, in conjunction with the FGS.

One of the following outcomes of the written dissertation proposal must be recorded on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form: **Pass**, **Resubmit** **with Revisions**, or **Fail**. The decision shall be that of the majority. If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor’s report should record the recommendation of each committee member, and the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form should be submitted to the FGS, who will determine an appropriate course of action.

At the second review of the proposal, after the resubmission, the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories– **Pass** or **Fail**. Students will not be allowed to resubmit the proposal after the second attempt. If still inadequate, they will receive a fail, requiring the student to withdraw from the program with a fail appearing on their transcript.

If the student receives a fail at the first attempt, they are required to withdraw from the program and will receive a fail on their transcript.

The dissertation proposal shall be given one of the following ratings:

### Pass

Examination committee members approve the proposal. The proposal may or may not require some minor revisions.

#### Procedure:

The supervisor may decide to withhold their signature until the revisions/modifications have been made. The nature of the revisions, and the withholding of the signature to ensure the changes have been made, should be indicated on the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form.

### Resubmit with Revisions

The revisions to the dissertation proposal are sufficiently substantial (e.g., major reworking of sections is required).

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor must specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and the extent of the revisions required. It must be clear to the student what will be required to receive a pass.
* The nature of the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in making the necessary revisions should be specified. A timeframe for completing the changes must be identified, which shall be no later than 3 months from the “resubmit” decision.
* The supervisor submits the “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form to the FGS, indicating the required changes and plans. If problems arise in the revision process, the supervisor may solicit opinions from the other committee members.
* Other committee members may also wish to withhold their signature until they can verify that revisions have been made to their satisfaction.

### Fail

The dissertation proposal is unacceptable.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor must meet with the student to inform them of the adjudication result and their reasons for the fail.
* The reasons for the fail must be provided to the student as soon as possible after deliberations (verbally), and within two business days in writing. Specify, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies.
* The “*Candidacy Oral Examination and Proposal Final Report*” form is completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS, as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the fail, and recommendations for further action.

The FGS may arrange to meet with the student and the examination committee before acting upon the committee’s recommendations.

# 4. Doctoral Candidate Status

Upon successful completion of the candidacy examination and the dissertation proposal, the student shall be known as a *Doctoral Candidate*, until such time that they have met all requirements for the degree, paid all of the appropriate fees, and graduated with their doctoral degree.

# 5. Ethics/Access Approval

Upon successful completion of the candidacy process and acknowledgement from the supervisor and supervisory committee that the doctoral candidate is ready to proceed with data collection for their research, a submission must be made to the [*AU Research Ethics Board*](http://www.athabascau.ca/research/ethics/board.php) (in the case of research involving human subjects), and any other approval bodies. When such approvals are obtained, a copy of the approvals must be provided to the supervisor and the Academic Unit. A copy is retained in the doctoral candidate’s file held by the supervisor, and in the doctoral candidate’s file within the academic unit. The doctoral candidate must also retain a copy of the approvals for inclusion as an Appendix in the dissertation.

# 6. The Dissertation

## 6.1 Preliminary Acceptance of the Dissertation

Before the dissertation is forwarded to the external examiner, the doctoral supervisory committee members shall declare in writing to the supervisor either:

* that the dissertation is of adequate substance and quality to warrant that the dissertation is ready to be reviewed by the external examiner, and that the student is ready to proceed to the final oral examination; or
* that the dissertation is unsatisfactory (that further work is needed), and the student should not be allowed to proceed to the final oral examination.

It is important that this preliminary acceptance of the dissertation is conducted in order to protect and uphold the reputation of the program and the University, for excellence in graduate programs. It is also critical to ensure that the external examiner and other additional members of the committee are not asked to invest time reading a substandard document.

If the supervisor considers the dissertation ready for the examination committee, the “*Preliminary Acceptance of Dissertation Prior to Distribution to External Examiner & Examination Committee*” form must be completed by the supervisory committee indicating their opinion of the readiness of the thesis and the student to proceed to the final Oral Examination. This form must be completed and submitted **eight (8) weeks** prior to the anticipated date of the oral examination. At this time, the supervisor may also submit their recommendation for the examination committee to FGS.

## 6.2 Dissertation Examination Committee Composition and Approval

The doctoral dissertation examination committee shall be composed of a maximum of five (5) examiners and will include:

* The existing supervisory committee, with (normally) the addition of one or two new members;
* One of the new members must be from outside Athabasca University. This committee member shall be called the external examiner; and
* If there is to be a fifth member, this individual may be from within or outside the student’s academic unit, but is someone who comes to the finished dissertation having read none of its earlier drafts.

The supervisor will recommend names of all members of the dissertation examination committee, and forward them to the FGS for approval, at least eight weeks before the proposed date of the oral examination, using the “*Dissertation Examination Committee Approval*” form. Before proposing the dissertation examination committee, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that eligibility criteria are met and that the members are not in a position of conflict of interest.

## 6.3 Appointment of the External Examiner

At least **eight weeks** before the proposed date of the oral examination, the academic unit graduate program designate, in discussion with the student’s supervisor, shall submit the names of two potential individuals for the role of external examiner to the FGS. The names, contact information and qualifications of the nominees are included on the form “*Dissertation Examination Committee Approval.*”

A brief rationale in terms of the special field(s) of expertise and achievements of each individual must be provided. This may include a list of publications by the individual, that have been of central importance or are closely related to the doctoral candidate’s research.The individuals whose names are submitted to the FGS should be individuals who are recognized authorities in the special field of research of the candidate’s dissertation, and who have had experience in supervising doctoral candidates.

The proposed external examiner must be in a position to review the dissertation objectively and to analyze critically the work and the presentation. It is therefore essential that the external examiner not have a current or previous association with the student, the supervisor, or the academic unit, that would impair the objectivity of this analysis. For example, a proposed examiner who has recently been associated with the candidate as a research collaborator or co-author would not be eligible. Also, a proposed external examiner must not have had recent association with the doctoral candidate’s supervisor (e.g., as a former student, supervisor, or close collaborator). Supervisors who have questions about the eligibility of a potential external examiner should contact the FGS to review the case before providing the FGS with names.

The FGS will select and invite the external examiner, after preliminary discussion with the individuals regarding their research area, availability, and interest in participating as an external examiner. When the FGS approves the external examiner, the FGS will issue a formal letter of confirmation to the external examiner specifying the responsibilities of the role.

## 6.4 Responsibilities of the External Examiner

The FGS will request that the external examiner provide a detailed report on the merits and deficiencies of the dissertation overall, and more specifically:

* Rate the dissertation using the two categories to indicate whether the dissertation is acceptable and the student can proceed to the examination;
* A brief, written commentary on the scope, structure, methodology, and findings of the thesis;
* A list of corrections (if any); and
* A list of clear, direct, contextualized questions (preferably no more than five) for the candidate to address during the examination, if the external examiner is unable to attend the oral examination.

The external examiner will be asked to provide the report to the FGS within four weeks of receipt of the dissertation. There should be no contact between the External examiner and the supervisor, committee, or student regarding the dissertation, nor should arrangements be made related to the examination during this period.

It is expected that the external examiner will participate in-person or by teleconference in the dissertation oral examination, but, in exceptional circumstances, this may not be possible. In such cases, the neutral chair will present the external examiner’s report and questions to the candidate during the examination, and the committee will evaluate the candidate’s answers as part of the examination.

## 6.5 Responsibilities of the Examination Committee

Each member of the examination committee, including the external examiner, but excluding the candidate’s supervisor, shall submit to the FGS, within four weeks of the receipt of the dissertation, a written report giving an evaluation of the dissertation, identifying its merits and deficiencies, and noting any required revisions. The examination committee members are to rate the dissertation as either “Acceptable and ready to proceed to Oral Examination” or “Unacceptable and not ready to proceed to Oral Examination.” This written report can be submitted electronically.

## 6.6 Changes in the Examination Committee

The FGS must approve any changes to the examination committee. A memo informing the FGS of the reasons for the changes and the details about the new examination committee member must be provided in writing. No changes shall be made in the examination committee after the dissertation is distributed by the FGS to the committee. In certain circumstances, if a committee member becomes unavailable to review the dissertation or attend the oral examination, discussions must occur between the FGS, the supervisor, and the candidate to arrive at the most suitable solution for both the candidate and the committee.

## 6.7 Distribution of the Dissertation for Examination

The candidate must submit to the FGS the dissertation in pdf format or provide sufficient paper copies, depending upon the preference of the examination committee members. The FGS will distribute the copies to each of the members of the examination committee, with instructions on the criteria for final review. The distribution must occur at least 6 to 8 weeks prior to the anticipated oral examination date. This means that the candidate must supply the FGS with the copies 5 working days prior to the distribution date. The examiners will be given up to four weeks to review the dissertation and provide their comments and adjudication decision. Both electronic and paper files must conform to the dissertation guidelines as set out in the *Thesis Guidelines (in progress of development)*.

Since this final period can become complex and timelines are critical to successful completion and convocation, a diagram illustrating the *Overview of Doctoral Dissertation Final Oral Examination* is available as [Figure 3](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/appendixA.php#figure3).

## 6.8 Adjudication on the Doctoral Dissertation prior to Oral Examination

* [Acceptable](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/dissertation.php#acceptable)
* [Unacceptable](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/dissertation.php#unacceptable)

The recommendation of the majority of the examiners will determine whether the candidate proceeds to the oral examination. If a majority decision is not evident, the Dean of FGS will discuss the recommendations with the supervisor, and a course of action will be determined.

### Acceptable and ready to proceed to oral examination

The dissertation is given preliminary approval. It may or may not need some revisions. However, the examiners consider the quality of the dissertation adequate and the dissertation indicates the candidate has sufficient knowledge in the research area to proceed to the oral examination.

#### Procedure:

* The “*Approval for Advancement to Doctoral Oral Examination*” form will be completed by the FGS, upon receipt of all the examination committee members’ commentaries; the report will then be forwarded to the supervisor.
* The supervisor can then notify the candidate and the remainder of the committee (except for the external examiner) of the outcome. The FGS will contact the candidate, examination committee, and external examiner to arrange a date for the oral examination.

### Unacceptable and not ready to proceed to oral examination

The dissertation is unacceptable and needs major revisions. The candidate cannot proceed to the oral examination until the concerns are addressed.

#### Procedure:

* The FGS contacts the supervisor and the examiners regarding this recommendation, to discuss the nature of the concerns.
* The supervisor will meet with the candidate and indicate in writing the concerns, a time frame within which to address the issues, and the possibility that the oral examination may have to be postponed. The candidate then resubmits the dissertation to the FGS, who then distributes the dissertation to the committee members again for their determination whether the document is “acceptable and ready to proceed to oral examination.” The candidate will need to clearly indicate what changes have been made in response to the committee’s comments. The oral examination shall be held no later than 6 months after the first adjudication.
* If and when a majority decision is made that the dissertation is acceptable (a preliminary acceptance), then the FGS will contact the candidate, examination committee, and external examiner to arrange a date for the oral examination.

A candidate has the right to an examination of the dissertation if they believe it is ready for examination.

# 7. Preparation for the Oral Examination

## 7.1 Responsibilities of the FGS

It is the responsibility of the FGS to ensure that:

* Proper arrangements are made for the candidate’s oral examination;
* The results of the review of the dissertation by the examination committee are communicated to the supervisor, the remainder of the committee, and the candidate, immediately after all the commentaries have been received by the FGS;
* All committee members are aware that they must attend the examination;
* The oral examination is scheduled and held in accordance with FGS regulations;
* The neutral chair for the oral examination is appointed by the FGS;
* The external examiner is contacted and provided with appropriate instructions on their role at the oral examination; and
* The candidate is notified of, but is not required to make, any of these arrangements.

## 7.2 Appointment of the Neutral Chair for the Oral Examination

The doctoral dissertation oral examination shall be chaired by a faculty member who is considered neutral to the examination committee and the student, and who is not from the candidate’s academic unit. The FGS will appoint the chair and provide them with the appropriate instructions for the conduct of the oral examination, the procedure for the deliberations, and the necessary forms that require completion and return to FGS. See “*Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs*”, section 4.0 for the procedures for chairing the oral examination and the instructions to be given to the student and committee.

## 7.3 Appointment of the Proctor

Unless a member of the examination committee is present with the student for the entire process, a mechanism must be in place to ensure both the identity of the student, effective application of the examination procedures, and the integrity of the examination. In the case when a proctor will be used, they must be preapproved by FGS as part of the “*Notice of Oral Examination*”. For further information on the criteria for invigilators and their duties see “*Procedures & Guidelines for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs”,* section 3.0.

## 7.4 Notice of the Examination

At least **four** weeks prior to the oral examination, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to submit the "*Notice of Oral Examination*" to FGS that outlines the date of the oral examination, the preferred technology, back-up numbers of the examination committee members for during  the oral examination and other information as listed in Section 2.0 of the “*Guidelines and Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs”*.

FGS will make the necessary arrangements for the technology. Upon FGS approval of the details related to the oral examination, the supervisor can then confirm the examination date, time, and other necessary arrangements with the student and the examination committee.

In the absence of the supervisor, the above responsibilities shall be carried out by a designate of the supervisor. The student is not required to make the arrangements for the examination.

At approximately 3 to 4 weeks prior to the oral examination date, the student is to complete the "*Announcement of Final Oral Examination*" and submit the form to FGS. The Faculty of Graduate Studies will post the announcement of the oral examination with the name of the student, their research and scholarly accomplishments, the title of the dissertation and the abstract on the FGS website about 2 weeks before the oral examination. Students or faculty interested in attending the oral examination would contact the FGS by email to obtain permission to attend.

## 7.5 Attendance of Visitors at Examinations

Normally the final oral examination will be considered an ‘open’ session, at which faculty members and students of the candidate’s academic unit may attend. All observers must apply in advance to the FGS for permission to attend.  The academic unit sets the maximum number of attendees present. Observers, if approved by the FGS will be provided with the teleconference number or other appropriate number in order to connect to the oral examination. FGS will inform the supervisor of the list of approved observers at least 72 hours prior to the oral examination.

At the oral examination, persons who are not members of the examination committee:

* are not allowed to exit or enter during the oral examination. They must be present for the duration of the presentation and question period;
* may participate in the questioning only by permission of the chair;
* are not permitted to participate in the discussion of the candidate’s performance, and
* must withdraw before the committee deliberates on the outcome of the candidate’s dissertation and oral examination.

At the completion of the questioning period, the chair will disconnect the audience and the candidate in order for the committee to deliberate. The chair, candidate and the examiners will reconvene when the examiners have completed their adjudication.

Only in certain circumstances, the oral examination may be ‘closed’; for example, when the results of the dissertation must be kept confidential for a period of time. In such cases, the candidate’s supervisor and academic unit graduate program designate shall recommend such action to the FGS, who shall then approve that the final examination be closed to all but the examination committee, the external examiner, the chair, and the FGS.

# 8. Oral Examination Procedures

The FGS has established examination procedures for the dissertation oral examination (*Guidelines & Procedures for Oral Examinations for Master’s Thesis Route and Doctoral Programs*). The neutral chair is responsible for moderating the discussion and directing questions. As the neutral chair is not a member of the committee, they do not vote or sign the “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form. It is the chair's responsibility to ensure that FGS procedures relating to the dissertation oral examination are followed. If the external examiner is unable to attend the oral examination, the questions from the external examiner will also be given to the chair to ask at the oral examination. At the completion of the discussion with the candidate about the adjudication results, the chair must complete the “*Report of the Neutral Chair*” for submission to the FGS. The proctor must submit the “*Report of the Proctor*” directly to the FGS after the oral examination.

## 8.1 Adjudication of the Doctoral Dissertation Examination

The decision of the examination committee will be based both on the quality of the dissertation and on the candidate’s ability to defend it. The decision shall be that of the majority. The external examiner shall have a vote equal to that of the other committee members.

The dissertation will be rated as a **pass** or **fail**. In the case of a pass where revisions are required, the supervisor and/or the committee can withhold their signature(s) until the revisions are made. The withholding of a signature may results in a delay of graduation if the student does not complete the revisions in a timely manner. This will result in a delay in obtaining final approval from the supervisor and the FGS. Such a delay may result in a **fail**. It is in the best interests of the candidate that they complete the required revisions in a timely manner. If the candidate receives a fail on their final dissertation they will receive a fail on their transcript.

In the case, where the examination committee recommends ‘**Adjourned, Repeat Oral**’ to the FGS, the student will be given a second opportunity to conduct another oral examination.  At the **second attempt**, the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories – **pass** or **fail**. If the committee recommends a fail, the student will receive a fail on their transcript. Under extraordinary circumstances, the student may obtain an adjournment on the second attempt.

If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor’s report should record the recommendation of each committee member on the “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form. The chair shall also include in their report the recommendations, the distribution of the votes, a summary of the committee’s comments, and any remarks that the chair may wish to make, that may help the Dean, FGS, in reaching a decision.

## 8.2 Adjudication Categories and Procedures of Final Dissertation

(at the time of the final oral examination)

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/oral_exam.php#pass)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/oral_exam.php#fail)

### Pass

The dissertation is deemed to be of sufficient quality to represent doctoral research; there may be some required revisions. After the revisions are approved, the candidate can proceed to graduate if they received a pass on their oral examination.

#### Procedure:

* The candidate is provided with clear written instructions on the necessary revisions, and is given a timeline within which to complete them.
* It is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure the candidate has completed the required revisions. The supervisor or committee members may withhold their signature(s) until the revisions are complete. This must be indicated on the form.
* Once the supervisor has approved the final dissertation with the revisions, the “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form may be submitted to the FGS.
* The chair completes the “*Report of the Neutral Chair*” form indicating the results of the deliberations, and submits the form to the FGS immediately after the oral examination.

### Fail

The concerns with the dissertation must be serious enough to warrant a fail. A fail will appear on the transcript.

#### Procedure:

* The candidate must be informed of the recommendation and the reasons immediately after the deliberations.
* The supervisor shall provide the reasons for the fail to the student immediately after deliberations, and within (2) two business days in writing. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible.
* The “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form is completed by the supervisor, and submitted to the FGS, as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The chair indicates the fail grade in their “*Report of the Neutral Chair*,” form and submits this to the FGS after the deliberations. The report should include the recommendations, the distribution of the votes, a summary of the committee’s comments, and any remarks that the chair may wish that may help the Dean, FGS, in reaching a decision.
* The FGS may arrange to meet with the candidate and the examination committee before acting upon the committee’s recommendations.

## 8.3 Adjudication Categories and Procedures of Oral Examination

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/oral_exam.php#pass2)
* [Adjourned](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/oral_exam.php#adjourned)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/doctoral/oral_exam.php#fail2)

### Pass

The presentation accurately described the research, and the candidate was able to accurately and articulately answer the questions.

#### Procedure:

* The candidate can proceed to graduate if they received a pass on their dissertation.
* The proctor completes the “Report of the Proctor” form confirming compliance with FGS regulations and noting any unusual circumstances.

### Adjourned

The examination should be adjourned in compelling, extraordinary circumstances.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor confers with the student, the examination committee members, and the FGS, to determine an appropriate course of action and timeline.
* The FGS is advised in writing of the adjournment and the conditions, using the “*Report of the Neutral Chair*” form.
* The proctor completes the “*Report of the Proctor*” form confirming compliance with FGS regulations and noting any unusual circumstances.
* Advise the supervisor to submit the “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form to the FGS, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the adjournment, and recommendations for further action.

### Fail

The presentation of the research was poor, with inadequate description of the study; the candidate answered the questions poorly, indicating a lack of knowledge in the research they conducted.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor, in the presence of the examination committee, must inform the candidate of this recommendation, with the reasons, immediately after their deliberations.
* The supervisor shall provide the candidate with the reasons for the fail in writing within two business days of the oral examination. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible.
* The proctor completes the “*Report of the Proctor*” form confirming compliance with FGS regulations and noting any unusual circumstances. The form is submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the oral examination.
* The “*Dissertation & Oral Examination Final Report*” form is completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members, the reasons for the fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The chair shall submit their “*Report of the Neutral Chair*” form to the FGS immediately after the deliberations. The report should include the recommendations, the distribution of the votes, a summary of the committee’s comments, and any remarks that the chair may wish that may help the Dean, FGS,  in determining his/her actions as a result of the committee recommendations.
* The FGS may arrange to meet withthe candidate and/or the examination committee representatives, before acting upon the committee’s recommendation.

# 9. Submission of Dissertation

Upon approval by the supervisor that the required revisions have been completed (which must occur within three month of the oral examination), that the necessary copyright permission has been obtained, and that the dissertation has met the format requirements, there are a number of steps the student must conduct to fulfill the requirements of their degree. Refer to the Timelines for Forms for Doctoral Program, the Electronic Submission of Theses and Dissertations, and the Formats for Theses and Dissertations in the Graduate Handbook.

If the dissertation and the necessary forms are not submitted to the FGS and the AU DTheses repository within the identified approved time limits (maximum three months after the oral examination), the student may not be considered for graduation, since they have not completed all the requirements for the degree.

# 10. Signatures

Following completion of the final examination at which the dissertation is passed, the student shall make any required revisions. Upon approval by the supervisor that the required revisions have been completed, the student shall submit the dissertation in pdf format to the FGS.  Original signatures, which are considered personal information, cannot be submitted with the dissertation. Therefore, the FGS will complete the form “*Final Approval of Dissertation*” and insert it into the dissertation immediately following the title page.  This document contains a typewritten list of the names of the examination committee members, and signifies to readers of the dissertation that it had received formal approval. The FGS will then return the dissertation to the student in pdf format.

An overview of the timelines for the completion of the forms can be found at [Timelines for Forms for Doctoral Program](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/docs/Timelines_forForms_forDoctoral_Program.pdf) (PDF - 148KB)

# Appendix A

## Figure 1. Overview of Doctoral Program



## Figure 2. Overview of Doctoral Candidacy Process



## Figure 3. Overview of Doctoral Dissertation Final Oral Examination

