

Dept of Pathology & Molecular Medicine - Procedures for Remote Graduate Exams

This document provides instructions from the DPMM Graduate Program Committee (GPC) for conducting remote MSc or PhD theses, PhD comprehensive and mini-MSc exams. It is provided as a supplement to the [instructions provided by the School of Graduate Studies and Research](#). If you wish to hold an examination remotely, please consult with the GPC Coordinator (Peter Greer greerp@queensu.ca). The Supervisor will first require the **consent from all participants**, including the candidate, examiners and the Chair. Email correspondence documenting this consent will be provided to the GPC secretary (Mark Andrews mark.andrews@queensu.ca).

DPMM has chosen to use Zoom™ for all remote exams due to the wide availability of the platform and growing familiarity with many students and faculty. The Supervisor will coordinate with Peter Greer and Mark Andrews in setting up a test Zoom meeting with the candidate and supervisor to ensure they are familiar with the platform. The responsibilities of the host and co-host will be established and practised at that test meeting. The Supervisor will be designated as co-host and either Peter Greer, another member of the GPC or Mark Andrews will also co-host during the thesis exam - this will be to ensure that technical glitches are promptly addressed. Mark Andrews or Peter Greer will confirm with each examiner and the chair ahead of the exam date that they are familiar with the Zoom platform; and if not, he will connect with them through Zoom to familiarize them.

When using Zoom™:

- Make sure you have the current version of Zoom™ software installed with the most recent security patches.
- Position the camera as close to eye level as possible. For best picture quality, do not have a bright light source or window as your background.
- Use a wired internet connection if possible. If you use a wireless connection, make sure you are close to your router to maximize signal strength; and encourage other household users of your router to give you priority during the exam.
- If your computer or device has been on for a long time, please restart it.
- Connect any necessary peripherals (e.g. headset or headphones) to your computer before joining any meetings.
- If you experience freezing video or audio dropouts try turning your camera off.
- Make sure your name is associated with your video box on the screen.
- Do not use a Personal Meeting ID to set up a Zoom™ event.
- **Do not post the Zoom™ meeting ID to social media platforms**

1. Equipment/software: All participants engaging remotely will need to have computers and/or mobile phones with video capability. These should be charged and charging cords should be on hand. DPMM will provide a Zoom account (contact Peter Greer greerp@queensu.ca or Kevin Kell kevin.kell@queensu.ca) that is set up with a “Waiting Room” function to allow confidential discussion between the examiners at the beginning and conclusion of the exam.

Peter Greer, Mark Andrews or the Supervisor will host the Zoom™ session and the other two will be assigned as co-hosts. This would allow the exam to continue if appropriate in the event that the

host loses connection, while they attempt to reconnect or initiate a workaround. In order to maintain confidentiality, you should not use your PMI (Personal Meeting ID) if using your own account. Also, the host of the Zoom™ session must use a paid Zoom™ account in order to host more than 1 other person and hold meetings longer than 40 minutes in length.

2. Set up procedures: In order to have an alternate means of connection should problems arise, Chairs, Supervisors, and Zoom™ host/co-hosts should have email, phone, Skype, Teams, or other relevant contacts for all participants collected before the convening of the graduate exam. Using a cell phone on speaker mode is an easy way to reconnect with an individual if something happens, but alternatives should be identified if Zoom™ is not working. When using Zoom™ video can be suspended in order to conserve bandwidth if connections are unstable. Only the candidate and the examiner who is asking questions need to have cameras on.

EXAM-SPECIFIC PROCEDURES:

PhD and MSc Oral Thesis Exams

All remote thesis exams will be held as closed events (no visitors). Recording of the oral thesis examination is NOT permitted by any participant.

General procedure for all remote exams:

Peter Greer or Mark Andrews will email the remote examination Zoom link to all participants prior to the exam. The host will start the meeting approximately 15 minutes prior to the exam start time; and all participants will connect no later than the exam start time. Once all participants have connected and the host and co-hosts have confirmed they have the alternative email/cell phone numbers of all participants, the host will invite the candidate to move to the waiting room and the Chair, Supervisor and examiners will complete all preliminary business of reading reports, discussing any issues arising, determining the order of questioning, and confirming who will co-host in the event the host loses connection. The candidate will then be invited to join, will be introduced to everyone in attendance, and will establish screen sharing to begin their presentation. The chair will then conduct the examination in the usual format. At the conclusion of the exam, the candidate will be asked to move to the waiting room and the committee will deliberate. Upon completion of the deliberations and documentation of the committee's decision and any required revisions, the candidate will be invited to rejoin the meeting. The chair will then inform the candidate of the committee's decision.

If the Zoom meeting is compromised. The host will immediately ask all participants to leave the meeting. In this event, all participants should look for an email from the host with a new Zoom link.

Written exchange:

To schedule a PhD thesis exam the "Ph.D. Oral Thesis Examination Form", which lists all the exam details (student, date, time, location, examiners, etc.) should be filled out and sent to Mark Andrews *at least 28 working days prior to the thesis exam date* along with an e-copy of the thesis. Mark Andrews will submit the completed form to SGS. The student is sent the "Permission of Co-authors" form; if applicable, the student should submit this form to Mark Andrews on or before the day of the exam.

As per usual SGS Oral Thesis Examination Protocol, reports of the assessment of the thesis need to be emailed to the SGS Thesis Coordinator (thesis@queensu.ca) 7 days before the defense date for PhD thesis exams. It is imperative in the case of remote examinations that the full written reports be available to be circulated to the Chair 3 days in advance of the defense meeting.

It is highly recommended that the written reports have a final section that includes several key questions to be posed to the candidate in the event that communication is disrupted and cannot be restored. The Supervisor should advise examiners to prepare their reports in this fashion. External examiners or non-Queen's Co-Supervisors in particular will need some instruction. In the event of a major disruption of communications with an examiner, the Chair or an examiner can pose these questions to the candidate.

To schedule an MSc thesis exam the M.Sc. Oral Thesis Examination form, which lists all the exam details (student, date, time, location, examiners, etc.), should be filled out and sent to Mark Andrews *at least 13 working days prior to the thesis exam date* along with an e-copy of the thesis. Mark Andrews will submit the completed form to SGS. The student is sent the "Permission of Co-authors" form; if applicable, the student should submit this form to Mark Andrews on or before the day of the exam .

As per usual protocol, examiners will receive a copy of the MSc Examiner's Confidential Report which is completed ONLY if the assessment of the written thesis is NEGATIVE. If any examiner determines that the exam should not proceed, the report must be submitted to the Chair of the Examining Committee *no later than 3 working days prior* to the scheduled dates of the exam.

It is highly recommended that each examiner prepares a list of questions for the candidate that can be emailed to the Chair in the event that Zoom™ communications are disrupted and cannot be restored.

Activities for the Chair: The final suggestions for revisions can be compiled by the Chair and agreed upon by the examiners via discussion prior to informing the student of the outcome of the exam. The Chair can solicit the final decisions on the outcome of the exam from the examiners and sign on behalf of the committee members.

For a PhD exam, the final forms can be submitted electronically (a scan or photo taken with cell phone and uploaded as a pdf and sent directly to the SGS Thesis Coordinator, thesis@queensu.ca). The usual procedures apply for the Chair's Report, however if the Chair feels that, because of technical reasons, the student was disadvantaged at the remote-based Oral Thesis Exam, please immediately contact the Associate Dean at SGS at sgsadable@queensu.ca.

For a MSc exam, the final forms (Outcome, Conduct, and Permission of Co-authors forms) can be submitted electronically (a scan or photo taken with cell phone and uploaded as a pdf) to Mark Andrews who will submit them to SGS. If the Chair feels that because of technical reasons the student was disadvantaged at the remote-based Oral Thesis Exam, please immediately contact the GPC Coordinator, Peter Greer (greerp@queensu.ca)

PhD Comprehensive Exams

Recording of the oral examination is NOT permitted by any participant.

Written exchange: Scheduling of the PhD Comprehensive exam will occur as per normal protocols and all forms should be submitted to Mark Andrews. At least two days prior to the scheduled oral examination, the Chair will confirm with all members of the examination committee that the written performance on the proposal is satisfactory such that the oral component of the comprehensive should proceed. Please consult the [Graduate Studies Program Manual](#) for instructions on how to proceed if the oral component is deemed unsatisfactory. It is highly recommended that each examiner prepares a list of questions for the candidate that can be emailed to the Chair in the event that Zoom™ communications are disrupted and cannot be restored. In the event of a major disruption of communications with an examiner, the Chair or an examiner can pose these questions to the candidate.

Activities for the Chair: At the conclusion of the oral portion of the exam the Chair will complete the Final Report form; and a scan or photo taken with cell phone and uploaded as a pdf should be sent to Mark Andrews (mark.andrews@queensu.ca). The Chair will solicit the final decisions on the outcome of the exam from the examiners and sign on behalf of the committee members. The Chair will notify the candidate of the outcome when they are invited back into the meeting. The Chair should remind all participants to complete a Confidential Report and email it to Mark Andrews (mark.andrews@queensu.ca) who will forward them to SGS. If the Chair feels that, because of technical reasons, the student was disadvantaged at the remote-based Oral Comprehensive Exam, please immediately contact the GPC Coordinator, Peter Greer (greerp@queensu.ca).

Mini-MSc Exams

Recording of the oral examination is NOT permitted by any participant.

Written exchange: Scheduling of the mini-MSc exam will occur as per normal protocols (see DPMM Graduate Handbook) and all forms should be submitted to Mark Andrews (mark.andrews@queensu.ca). It is highly recommended that each examiner prepare a list of questions for the candidate that can be emailed to the Chair in the event that Zoom™ communications are disrupted and cannot be restored. In the event of a major disruption of communications with an examiner, the Chair or an examiner can pose these questions to the candidate.

Activities for the Chair: At the conclusion of the mini-MSc oral exam, the Chair will complete the Final Report form (a scan or photo taken with cell phone and uploaded as a pdf) and should return this form to Mark Andrews. If the Chair feels that because of technical reasons the student was disadvantaged at the remote-based Oral mini-MSc Exam, please immediately contact the GPC Coordinator, Peter Greer (greerp@queensu.ca).