

URC 3 2022: August/2022

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## Guidelines for the Oral Defence of PhD Thesis

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### Background

A Ph.D. candidate is also required to make an oral defence as part of the thesis examination to the relevant school/section, examiners, members of the Academic Unit Research Committee (AURC) and members of the public (decided by the Chair AURC). The oral defence intends to ensure that the candidate's research (as expressed in the thesis) is thoroughly examined and that it meets the criteria set by the USP post-graduate outcomes. The oral defence also provides an opportunity for the candidate to present their research to a wider audience rigorously and thoughtfully.

The PG Outcomes for candidates completing their study at the Doctoral level that can be examined as part of the oral defence include:

- **PG Outcome 3 Communication:** articulate complex ideas convincingly in an oral mode to demonstrate their scholarly capability.
- **PG Outcome 4: Creativity:** extend the boundaries of current knowledge, theories of and practices at the forefront of a discipline.
- **PG Outcome 5: Critical Thinking:** engage critically with scholarly issues demonstrating the capacity to formulate and/or solve complex problems and manage uncertainty.
- **PG Outcome 9: Research & Scholarship:** demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of a field and the associated skills and methods of research for the advancement of scholarship and/or professional practice.

### Guidelines for the Oral Defence of Ph.D. Thesis:

The date for the oral defence should tentatively be set within 4 months of the thesis being sent out for examination (3 months for the thesis examination process and 1 month for the oral defence to be organisation).

1. The oral defence will be held after the written reports have been received from each thesis examiner and the reports have been reviewed by the Chair of the respective AURC. The defence will be held within 1 month (approximately) of all the examination reports being received.

If the examiners' reports indicate that the thesis must ~~go~~ undergo major revisions or when there is a significant variance in the examiners' recommendations about the standard of work, the oral defence may be deferred or not take place, as determined by the Chair of

AURC. Revision of the thesis should be undertaken by the candidate (as guided by the supervisory panel) and the thesis should be re-examined. If the revised thesis is of an acceptable standard or minor revisions are recommended by the examiners, the oral defence can be scheduled.

- Who is present?
  - The Chair of oral defence (moderator) is the Chair of the Academic Unit Research Committee (AURC) or their nominee
  - The Candidate
  - The Principal Supervisor – The supervisor can participate in the examination only to the extent permitted by the Chair – s/he is not to act as an advocate for the candidate or to answer questions on behalf of the candidate.
  - Thesis Examiners – at least one of the examiners should participate, with one of the three examiners nominated as the Chief Examiner.
  - Observers
    - All members of the candidate’s supervisory team are invited to attend as observers,
    - Members of the AURC,
    - Members of the public (School/Section) and the further public at the discretion of the Chair.
- The format of the oral defence will vary from case to case, but will normally include the following:
  - Candidate to make a formal presentation of about 45 minutes summarizing the research and outcomes. This will be followed by questions from anyone present at the defence.
  - A closed session with just the examiners and the candidate where the Chief Examiner will clarify details in the thesis; assess the contribution made by the candidate to the content and presentation of the thesis; and provide advice to the candidate, especially about publishing their research.
- Once the formal part of the oral defence has concluded, there will be a period of deliberation without the candidate and the supervisor in which the Chief Examiner and the Chair will reach a recommendation on the award of the degree (yes/no) or suggest if any additional work is to be completed by the candidate. This will be communicated to the AURC in written form by the Chief Examiner within two weeks of the oral defence. The AURC will then inform the candidate and the supervisors of the outcome. If further revision of the thesis is required, the revised thesis will then only be reviewed by the Chair of the AURC.
- In exceptional circumstances, where the examiners participating in the oral examination are unable to agree on a recommendation, the Chief Examiner shall report the circumstances fully to the Chair of the University Research Committee (URC), who will decide whether the degree should be awarded or what other action is necessary. The URC will have the discretion to appoint an external reviewer who will be asked to consider the

thesis and the written reports of the examiners and the Chief Examiner and will be invited to recommend one of the following:

- pass
- changes to the thesis and re-submission to the external reviewer as sole judge
- fail

For the thesis examination flowchart and USP Postgraduate Outcomes for the Ph.D., see Annexures I and II.

## **References**

This guideline was created using expertise within USP and the existing policies on Oral Defence from the following universities:

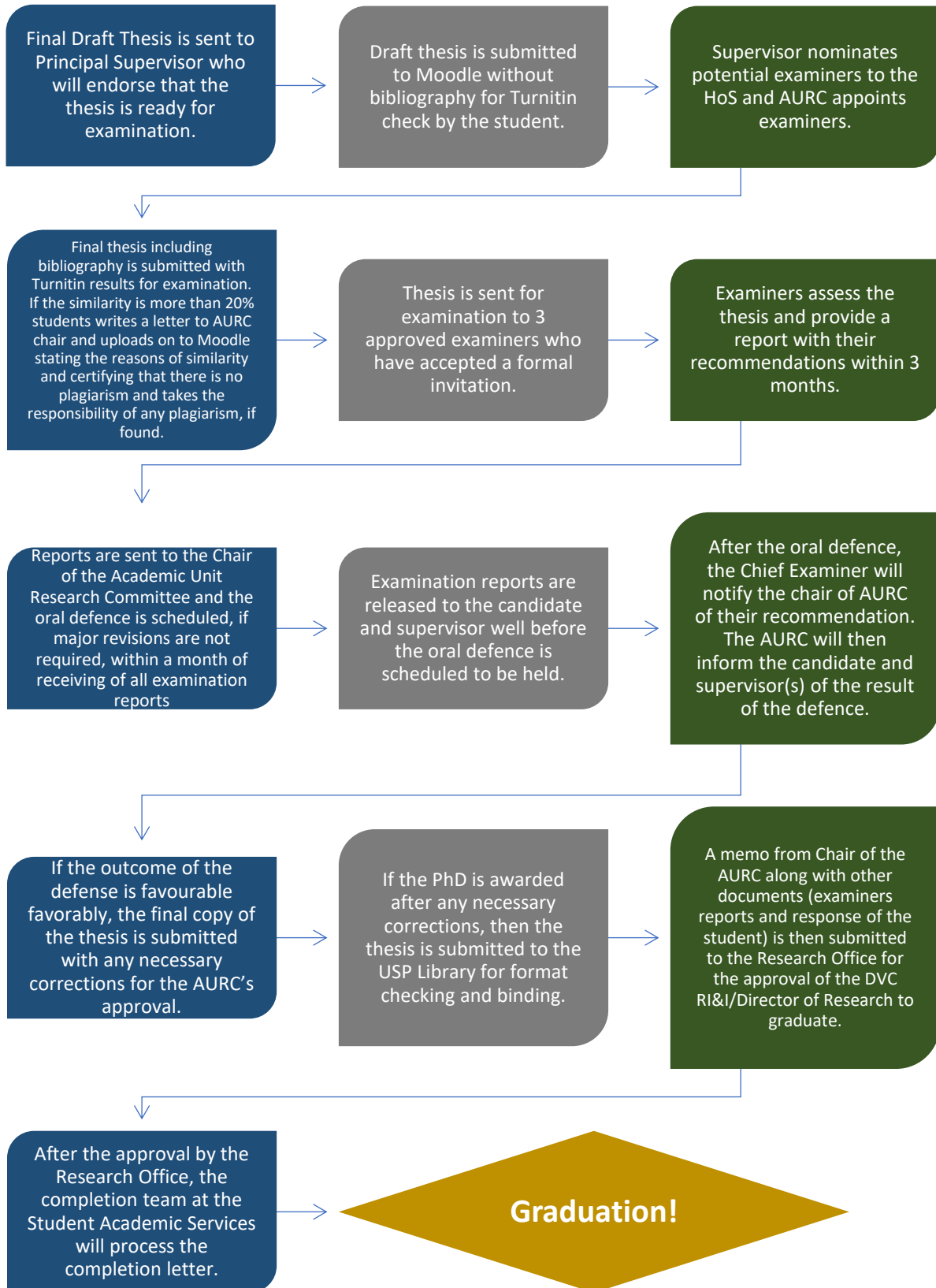
- [The University of Sydney](#)
- [James Cook University](#)
- [The University of Western Australia](#)
- [University of Bergen](#)
- [University of Otago](#)
- [The University of Waikato](#)

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## Annexure I

### PhD Thesis Examination Flowchart



## Annexure II

### University Postgraduate Outcomes (UPOs)

The USP Postgraduate Outcomes for candidates at the PhD level are as follows:

1. **Autonomy:** Demonstrate substantial autonomy, initiative, responsibility and critical questioning in scholarly, professional, social and personal decision-making
2. **Collaboration:** Demonstrate leadership in consultative and collaborative approaches to scholarly enquiry and/or professional practice
3. **Communication & ICT Literacy:** Articulate complex ideas convincingly in written and oral modes across a range of contexts, especially the professional and scholarly, using ICT tools where suitable
4. **Creativity:** Extend the boundaries of current knowledge, theories and practices at the forefront of a discipline
5. **Critical Thinking:** Engage critically with scholarly and professional issues, demonstrating the capacity to formulate and/or solve complex problems and manage uncertainty
6. **Ethics:** Apply critically the ethical standards of the professional code of practice in their discipline, recognising the complexities of their decisions and implications
7. **Pacific Consciousness:** Generate innovative ways of engaging the diverse cultural heritages of Pacific communities to support sustainable development in a global environment
8. **Professionalism:** Apply the knowledge, skills and standards expected of a professional in the discipline, demonstrating the capacity for leadership and continual improvement
9. **Research & Scholarship:** Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of a field and the associated skills and methods of research for the advancement of scholarship and/or professional practice