

URC 3 2022: August/2022

Guidelines for the Oral Defence of PhD Thesis

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.
- o 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:

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

- o The University of Sydney
- o James Cook University
- o The University of Western Australia
- o <u>University of Bergen</u>
- University of Otago
- o The University of Waikato

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Annexure I **PhD Thesis Examination Flowchart** Final Draft Thesis is sent to Draft thesis is submitted Supervisor nominates Principal Supervisor who to Moodle without potential examiners to the will endorse that the bibliography for Turnitin HoS and AURC appoints thesis is ready for check by the student. examiners. examination. Final thesis including bibliography is submitted with Turnitin results for examination. Thesis is sent for Examiners assess the If the similarity is more than 20% examination to 3 thesis and provide a students writes a letter to AURC chair and uploads on to Moodle approved examiners who report with their have accepted a formal stating the reasons of similarity recommendations within 3 and certifying that there is no months. plagiarism and takes the responsibility of any plagiarism, if found. After the oral defence, Reports are sent to the Chair the Chief Examiner will of the Academic Unit Examination reports are notify the chair of AURC Research Committee and the released to the candidate of their recommendation. oral defence is scheduled, if and supervisor well before major revisions are not The AURC will then the oral defence is required, within a month of inform the candidate and scheduled to be held. receiving of all examination supervisor(s) of the result reports of the defence. A memo from Chair of the If the outcome of the AURC along with other If the PhD is awarded defense is favourable documents (examiners after any necessary favorably, the final copy of reports and response of the corrections, then the the thesis is submitted student) is then submitted thesis is submitted to the with any necessary to the Research Office for USP Library for format the approval of the DVC corrections for the AURC's checking and binding. RI&I/Director of Research to approval. graduate. After the approval by the Research Office, the completion team at the **Graduation! Student Academic Services** will process the completion letter.

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