

Protocol for Virtual Defences of MSc and MA Theses Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability

Due to social distancing requirements in response to the COVID-19 virus, we are providing the following departmental guidelines for virtual MSc and MA defences. These guidelines have been adapted from the G+PS guidelines for PhD defences.

This remote protocol applies to defences held on or after March 23, 2020 and until further notice.

Virtual Defence

- Virtual defences should be arranged through the supervisor's Zoom account. **It will be the responsibility of the supervisor to set up the meeting.** If a supervisor is unfamiliar with Zoom, they will be required to familiarize themselves with the software prior to setting up and running the exam. In no circumstances should the Zoom meeting be created by the candidate.
- The defence can be opened to public attendance if the student and supervisor so wish, however, the supervisor will be required to undertake the added responsibility of ensuring all audience members are removed from the connection for all in camera discussions. IRES administration will be unable to provide technical assistance.
- An announcement of the virtual defence will be sent to the IRES community by email. Kelsey Robertson will be in touch with those with upcoming defences in order to arrange these notices.
- One week before the defence, the supervisor should send an exam reminder to the examining committee and student with the Zoom contact information.

Participants

Virtual defences require **quorum (+1)**:

- The MSc/MA Candidate
- The Supervisor
- One or two Supervisory Committee Members (including co-supervisors and other committee members)
- External (non-committee) member

It is important to note that while Zoom is normally easily capable of supporting a virtual defence, the quality of both the audio and visual components will depend greatly on the quality of each participant's internet connection. We recommend connecting from a location with a reliable internet connection (hard-wired if possible). Zoom does allow testing the connection prior to the defence, and all participants should take the opportunity to do so at least 15 min prior to the scheduled defence time. Ideally, testing of audio and video connectivity should be performed a day prior to the defence to avoid postponement of the defence due to a lack of quorum as a result of technical difficulties.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to relay these testing recommendations to the exam committee. As it is not possible to control the quality of each participant's internet connection, participants should be prepared for technical issues (e.g. poor audio or visual quality, dropped connections). The supervisor, in their role as examination chair, should be prepared to uphold the responsibilities as outlined below.

Responsibilities of the Supervisor in their role as Examination Chair

1. Moderate the defence proceedings; ensure fairness. At the beginning of the defence, outline the potential technical issues that may occur, encourage patience and kindness towards each other, and describe the Supervisor's responsibility to suspend the defence if there are technical difficulties that compromise the defence. As with in-person defences, there can be two rounds of questioning.
2. Chair the *in camera* discussion of the Examining Committee. Ensure the Candidate and audience members are removed from the connection for the entirety of the *in camera* discussion.
3. Contact the Candidate to reconnect and convey the outcome to the Candidate.
4. Collect electronic signatures from the examining committee members, as appropriate, following normal guidelines for MSc/MA defences.

Important note: In their role as examination chair, the Supervisor has the authority to discontinue a remote connection at any time if they judge that it is interfering with the proper conduct of the examination. If one or more participants drop from the connection or lose audio, the defence must be halted until the participant's connection or audio is restored. If the connection or audio cannot be restored after 30 minutes or if the total amount of time lost exceeds 60 minutes, the supervisor **must** suspend the defence and notify Kelsey Robertson and Jiaying Zhao immediately. It will be the responsibility of the supervisor in coordination with the graduate student to reschedule the defence, which will still have to follow the format outlined above.

Responsibilities of the Graduate Student

Download the appropriate form prior to the defence and provide the form electronically to the supervisor. The necessary form can be downloaded from the G+PS website (<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/forms/masters-thesis-approval>) and can be partially completed prior to the defence (student name, student, ID, thesis title, etc). This can be coordinated with the supervisor, as appropriate.

All other procedures after the defence will follow normal departmental guidelines for the completion of MSc/MA theses. Any questions can be directed to Kelsey Robertson.