

# OISE Final Oral Exam (FOE) Guidelines

Updated by: S. Qureshi, September 2025  
Prepared by: A. Frey & V. Krishnan, January 2016

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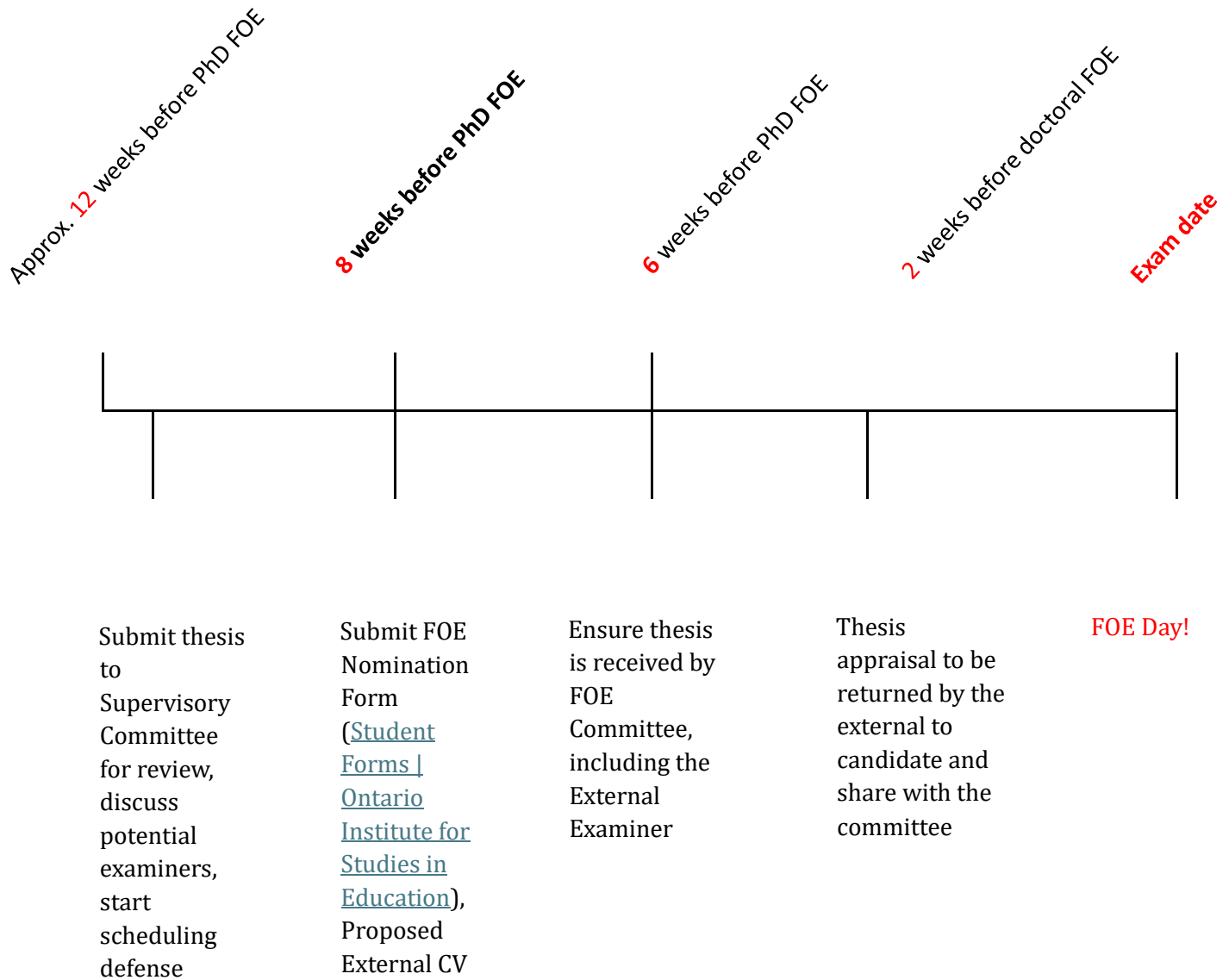
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## Timeline

### PhD/EdD FOE Timeline



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The above is a suggested timeline for a doctoral Final Oral Exam (FOE).

The two firm deadlines are:

1) The **eight-week timeframe** for departments/students/supervisors to submit the FOE nomination form and supporting documents to the Registrar's Office (which does not include university closures and holidays). The form is located under the Graduation tab here: [Student Forms | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#)

2) The **six-week deadline** for the thesis to be received by the FOE committee (the external examiner, in particular, must receive the thesis no less than 6 weeks prior to the defense).

\* It is possible to request pre-approval of an external examiner prior to the submission of the FOE form. In most cases, your department Chair must approve any nomination you and your supervisor put forward for pre-approval. Consult your Graduate Liaison/ Program Officer for departmental procedures.

Note that the FOE timeline continues after the Final Oral Exam and is contingent upon the result. The timeline ends when the candidate uploads the post-defense approved thesis onto the online thesis repository (**ProQuest**).

**IMPORTANT** - When settling on a defense date and time, read the **scheduling limitations** (found in the *Scheduling the Final Oral Examination* section of this document). As well, consult the graduation and fees deadlines to plan accordingly and avoid disappointment.

## Terms & Acronyms

The following terms are used interchangeably:

Supervisory Committee, Thesis Committee

Doctoral student, student, candidate

Thesis, Dissertation

External examiner, External appraiser

Alternate internal external, backup internal examiner

FOE, Final Oral Exam, thesis defense, thesis defence, exam, examination

ROSE, Registrar's Office and Student Experience, Registrar's Office

SGS, School of Graduate Studies

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## Eligibility to Defend

To be eligible to defend, candidates are required to have:

- Completed all course work, comprehensive examination and all other degree requirements. This includes the successful completion of any collaborative programs in which the candidate might be enrolled.  
  
(**EXCEPTION:** students in the School and Clinical Child Psychology Program and in the Counselling Psychology Program may undertake their internship after their FOE).
- Completed their thesis to the full satisfaction of the members of their Supervisory Committee. Submission of the FOE Nomination form to the Registrar's Office, signed by the Chair of the student's department, serves as the departmental 'sign off' required for an FOE to proceed.
- Successfully registered and paid fees for the term in which they defend. See the *Registration, Extensions and Reinstatements* and *Final Year Fees* sections of this guide for more information.
- An up-to-date ROSI record. Speak with your department to ensure that your thesis title and Supervisory Committee is recorded, and that all of your Committee members have an active U of T appointment and SGS graduate membership. This is especially important for those who have committee members that are not from their department and/or from U of T (see *Rules on FOE Committee Members*).
- An active UTOR email address and UTORid (list this email address on the FOE nomination form)

## Registration, Extensions and Reinstatements

All students must be registered in the term in which they defend up until they upload their post defense thesis onto the digital library repository.

Students on program extensions must ensure that they defend and upload their post-defense thesis within their extended time limit. Otherwise, an additional extension may be required. Candidates are encouraged to contact the Doctoral Registration Advisor in the Registrar's Office ([oise.doctoral.examination@utoronto.ca](mailto:oise.doctoral.examination@utoronto.ca)) to inquire about their current registration status and upcoming time limit deadlines.

Lapsed students are required to apply for reinstatement into their program prior to their defense. Once approved, reinstated students are required to pay fees and register before administrative work can begin on their requested Final Oral Exams. Lapsed students are thus encouraged to contact the Doctoral Registration Advisor to begin the process before the submission of the FOE nomination form.

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## Final Year Fees

Academic fees for full-time doctoral students in the final year of their program, and who are before their time limit, are pro-rated based on the 12-month academic year plus sessional incidentals.

Academic fees for doctoral students in the final extension year, and who are beyond their time limit, are prorated based on 50% of the annual domestic fee for the 12-month academic year plus sessional incidentals.

### **Doctoral students will be billed for the whole year but may choose to pay:**

1. The full fee;
2. The minimum first payment (50% of the full fee);
3. The fee based on the expected date of completion

If you choose to pay less than the full-year fee, a monthly service charge (starting October 15) will be applied to any outstanding balance. If you have made a fee arrangement that exempts you from paying service fees until the end of April, the arrangement may not be applicable if you submit your thesis prior to the end of April.

When a final corrected thesis is submitted, fees and service charges are adjusted accordingly. For more information, please review the monthly academic and incidental fees schedule at the [Student Accounts](#) website. The pro-rated fee applies to students who have been continuously registered in their program, or who have obtained an authorized leave of absence. Please note that international students may be entitled to a partial refund of their UHIP fee; these students are advised to contact the [Centre for International Experience](#) for more information.

Academic fees for the final extension year are prorated, based on 50% of the annual domestic fee for the 12-month academic year plus sessional incidentals.

The prorated fee schedule does not apply to students who have been reinstated, part-time students in a flex PhD program, or EdD students whose final year is also their first year of full-time study. APHD students who are enrolled in a clinical internship are subject to continued registration and applicable fees until the internship is complete.

Please note that international students may be entitled to a partial refund of their UHIP fee; these students are advised to contact the [Centre for International Experience](#) for more information.

The final date to submit doctoral theses without registering for the Fall session is normally September 15, and January 15 to avoid registration for the Winter session.

For information of the Doctoral Completion Award, graduate bursaries and financial aid, students should consult with their departmental Program/ Graduate Liaison Officers or the Office of Student Financial Support at OISE ([OISE's Office of Student Financial Support | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#)).

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## Outstanding Fees

Students who have outstanding fees will be permitted to attend convocation but will not receive a diploma in their envelope. A financial hold will be placed on the student's account. Transcripts, confirmation of degree letters and the diploma will not be released until fees have been paid.

## Name, Name Change & Email Address

Check your name as registered in ROSI (ACORN). This is the name that will appear on your diploma and transcript, and is the name that must be listed on your thesis title page and abstract. Please speak with the Doctoral Registration Advisor for additional information on name change deadlines and the documentation required to request a name change. Note the deadlines are quite early; typically midSeptember for November Convocation and early February for March (in absentia) and June Convocation.

All U of T students are required to use a U of T e-mail account. Ensure that your institutional email address is correctly listed on ROSI, and that you check it on a regular basis.

## The Thesis

Before writing your thesis, consult with your supervisor and your department to make sure that you adhere to any department-specific thesis guidelines. All academic questions relating to the thesis writing process at OISE should be directed to the student's supervisor, supervisory committee members, departmental program coordinator and/or chair.

You may also wish to check out other OISE theses available on T-Space or at the OISE Library for inspiration and comparison. Your supervisor and/or department may keep bound copies of theses as well.

## Formatting

While theses certainly differ amongst the four divisions at the University, all theses produced at U of T must conform to the minimum SGS technical and production requirements. It is thus strongly recommended that candidates use the SGS thesis template from the start of writing.

Tools for creating styles, footnotes, a table of contents, and other features, including the recommended order of the sections of a thesis, have been formatted into templates available in Word and LaTeX formats. While these templates are meant to assist students with the formatting and production of their thesis, students must ensure that their thesis meets SGS formatting requirements. Please see this link for the formatting guidelines: [Formatting – School of Graduate Studies](#)

Theses that do not conform to the guidelines (available on the SGS website) will not be accepted. While SGS will usually honor the original submission date, the student's graduation may be deferred as a result. The top ten most common reasons for the rejection of theses by SGS and the National Library are:

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1. Improper file naming convention
2. Wrong date in the file name – the date must be your graduation year and month
3. Wrong year on the thesis title page and abstract – the year must be the year of graduation and thesis publication, not the year in which you defended
4. There should be NO page number on the title page
5. The abstract must be the first numbered page and must be page ii
6. The preliminary section must be number in Roman numerals
7. The main body must be numbered in Arabic numerals beginning with page 1
8. Every page except the title page must be numbered – no blank pages please!
9. Appendices, if any, must, be numbered consecutively with the main body of the thesis
10. Presence of substantial copyrighted material that is not accompanied by a letter or authorization from a copyright owner

**Remember to list your OISE department name as it is currently called– not as it was called at the time of admission.**

## **Electronic Theses & Dissertations (ETDs)**

Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) are dissertations prepared as text-based PDF files. ETDs can contain non-text elements such as sound, video, and hypertext links. ETDs are released to the world-wide web with priority in many search engines, enabling scholars worldwide to locate, search, and download U of T's ETDs.

Electronic theses have many advantages. As well as the capacity to include various non-text modalities, they offer vastly improved accessibility and ease of use, which increases your readership and benefits those interested in your work. Electronic publication has proven to considerably increase citation rates. According to Library & Archives Canada, authors receive 50 to 250% more citations when they make their articles publicly available!

For more information on the ETD submission process, refer to the School of Graduate Studies website.

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## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the academic offense of representing another person's work as one's own. Evidence of plagiarism is the inclusion of another's original ideas in one's own work without properly identifying the material as derived from another's work and providing appropriate citation.

It is critical that the ideas and arguments of others be correctly attributed and simply paraphrasing these as your own does not suffice.

It may seem surprising, but reproducing your own published work without proper acknowledgement can be considered self-plagiarism. If you include such materials in your thesis, cite the published work and submit a letter of permission from the copyright holder, or a statement from the publisher (often available on journal websites) authorizing use of the material, when you submit your thesis after the defense.

Penalties for plagiarism are severe. If the person is a current student, the penalties may include dismissal from the University. If the person convicted of plagiarism is a graduate of the University and the plagiarism was contained in the academic work required for a degree, the University may take legal action against the graduate which may include revoking the degree.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, follow the rules concerning the use of quoted materials/copyright as outlined on the SGS website.

## Copyright

When is Copyright Permission Required? Please see this link: [Copyright – School of Graduate Studies](#)

- Does your thesis contain someone else's work (third party materials)? For example, text, figures, maps, images, questionnaires, photos, etc.
- Does your thesis contain your own previously published materials (e.g. journal article)?
- Does your thesis include material (e.g. a chapter, an article) that was co-written with another author(s)?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you must obtain written permission to reproduce the material from the copyright owner (e.g. journal publisher and/or co-authors).

For comprehensive information on copyright, including how to secure permission from copyright holders and where to locate copyright resources, visit the SGS website for the most up-to-date information.

## Thesis Sign-Off & Defense Recommendation

When a student has completed the final draft of the thesis to the satisfaction of the members of his/her Supervisory Committee, the Chair of the student's department can sign off on the thesis by nominating the student for Final Oral Exam. It is understood that at this stage all three supervisory committee

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members have read and approved the thesis to go forward to defense and that they have ascertained the candidate's readiness to defend.

The submission of the FOE Nomination Form (see Appendix 1) to the Registrar's Office thus serves as the departmental confirmation of completion of all program requirements, and the recommendation required for an FOE to proceed.

## The Final Oral Examination

Prior to finalizing the date and time of the FOE, note the following scheduling limitations:

- Defenses are generally scheduled for 10am or 2pm
- Defenses take place during business hours when the University and the Registrar's Office are open
- There is a SGS blackout period where FOE cannot be scheduled - typically it is the week before the University holiday break and a week after. Details please confirm with your department and ROSIE.
- January and February defenses require a minimum of 10 weeks' advance notice due to holiday closure.

Students and their committees are strongly encouraged to plan defenses strategically with respect to upcoming graduation and fees deadlines.

## The Nomination Form

To schedule an FOE, the following documents must be submitted to the Registrar's Office in a minimum of 8 working weeks prior to the FOE:

1. *A fully complete FOE nomination form signed by the Chair of the candidate's department*
2. *The proposed External Examiner's CV (electronic copy required)*
3. *The candidate's abstract as it appears in the final draft of the thesis (electronic copy required)*

## Thesis Title

When submitting the form, ensure that the thesis title listed is the most current thesis title. Candidates will have an opportunity to change the title only after the defense. While a thesis title may go through several iterations before the final post-defense version is submitted, for the purpose of the examination any documentation we prepare will use the title as submitted on the final oral examination nomination form.

## Quorum

FOE Committees are comprised of a minimum of four voting members up to a maximum of six. A minimum of two voting members must be at arm's length from the thesis (one of these two is usually the external examiner).

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The typical OISE committee is comprised thus:

- 1 Supervisor
- 2 Supervisory Committee Members
- 1 Internal Examiner (1 of 2 arm's length examiners)
- 1 External Examiner (writes appraisal and attends exam as the second arm's length examiner)
- 1 Alternate Internal Examiner (can step in for any of the above, if required)

Although only four voting members are required to meet the minimum quorum requirements, we strongly recommend that at least five voting members are nominated, including three arm's length members. This is to ensure that quorum will be met, even if someone cancels on the day of the exam due to an unforeseen emergency.

The External Examiner is not required to attend the FOE, however the exam cannot proceed without an external appraisal. In cases where the External Examiner will not be participating, additional arm's length members are nominated.

## Rules on FOE Voting Members

All FOE committee members except for the External Examiner must have active SGS graduate faculty memberships. If you are unsure about the status of any of your Committee members, please check with your Program/ Graduate Liaison Officer prior to submitting your FOE Nomination Form.

All FOE committee members, including the External Examiner are subject to review by the Vice-Dean, Programs at SGS.

The following rules apply to examiners:

### Internal Examiners (including the alternate) must be:

- At arm's length from the thesis
- SGS graduate faculty member (full, associate, or emeritus)
- U of T faculty member from any graduate department whose expertise is relevant to the thesis

### External Examiner must be:

- A recognized expert in the field
- Pre-approved by the Chair of the Candidate's department
- At arm's length from both the student and the supervisor
- An Associate or Full Professor at their home institution with graduate (usually doctoral-level) supervision experience
- Approved by the Vice-Dean, Programs at SGS

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## - **External Examiner must not have:**

- Previously been the Supervisor's supervisor or the Supervisor's student
- Collaborated/published with the Supervisor and/or student in the last 6 years
- Been a departmental colleague of the candidate or supervisor in the last 6 years
- Any UofT appointment or affiliation with the teaching hospitals/institutes whatsoever in the last 6 years.
- Been used more frequently than once every 2 years by a single supervisor.
- Been used more frequently than once every 2 years by committees with substantive overlap of members

From time to time, External Examiners without affiliation to a university are appointed, however, they must have the academic background and qualifications such that they would be able to supervise doctoral students at a university. Supervisors may be required to provide additional justification to the School of Graduate Studies to support such requests.

## **Non-Voting Members & Qualified Observers**

The Examination Committee may also include up to two non-voting members and (albeit rarely) qualified observers. These members must also be listed on the nomination form and are subject to approval by the Vice-Dean, Programs.

Non-voting members are generally a fourth Supervisory Committee member. Non-voting members may participate in the questioning of the Candidate and may remain in the room during the committee's deliberations, but do not vote.

Occasionally the graduate unit, with permission of the Candidate and the Supervisor, may request in writing to the Vice-Dean, Programs (via OISE Registrar's Office) that someone associated with the research who is not a member of the graduate faculty attend the examination as an observer. Qualified Observers are experts in the field who do not hold an SGS appointment. For example, if the student had to collaborate with a Professor at another institution for some aspect of their research, s/he could then invite this person to act as a Qualified Observer at the defense. Qualified Observers may enter the room when the Candidate enters, and must leave the room once the Candidate has completed his/her defense and before discussion about the examination begins.

## **Official Notification of Approved External Examiner**

The Supervisor and Chair will be notified by email when the Vice-Dean, Programs approves the nomination of an External Examiner.

## **Distribution of the thesis**

The thesis should be sent to the External Examiner no less than six weeks prior to the FOE date. Although the SGS Guidelines require that the remaining members receive the thesis no less than four weeks prior to the FOE, it is recommended that all FOE voting members receive the thesis six weeks prior.

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The SGS Guidelines prohibit the Candidate from communicating with the External Examiner prior to the defense. Therefore, supervisors are strongly encouraged to send the thesis to the External Examiner on behalf of the Candidate. If a hard copy is requested, the Candidate/Department is required to assume the responsibility and cost of producing and mailing the thesis.

The Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the External Examiner receives the thesis in enough time to review it and write the appraisal.

## Official Notification of Approved Examination

The Registrar's Office processes the FOE Nomination Form and submits a request to SGS to approve the Examining Committee and proposed exam date. When approval is granted, an official notification is emailed to the candidate and all members of the FOE committee, confirming the examination.

## External Appraisal

Two weeks prior to the defense, the Registrar's Office will distribute the external appraisal to the candidate and the committee. The candidate will thus have two weeks to prepare a defense of the thesis in the form of a 20-minute presentation. While it is expected that candidates prepare their own defense, they are allowed to discuss the appraisal with their supervisor and/or supervisory committee members, but not with the external examiner.

Thesis appraisals are typically 1-3 pages in length, and usually consist of an analytical and constructively critical commentary on the thesis. Hence, appraisals are – by nature – critical. Sometimes, appraisers will also include a list of minor errors. All appraisals will include an explicit recommendation that the thesis either be accepted or not be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy/Doctor of Education.

Examinations are not postponed due to negative external appraisals.

## Late Appraisal & Waiver

Sometimes appraisals arrive late. This is not an uncommon occurrence and often has little to do with the candidate's work but rather is a reflection of the external examiner's competing priorities. The Registrar's Office will liaise with the External Examiner until the appraisal is submitted.

Every candidate has a right to see the appraisal two weeks prior to the exam. If the external appraisal does not arrive on time, the candidate will be advised in writing and asked to sign the *External Appraisal Waiver* form to proceed with the exam as scheduled. Alternatively, the exam could be rescheduled. Usually candidates choose to sign the waiver, which simply means they waive their right to see the appraisal two weeks before the exam. An Exam cannot take place without an appraisal.

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## On the Day of the Defense

### Exam Room & Technology

Most final oral exams at OISE take place in room 8-278, which is part of the Registrar's Office. Candidates are required to bring their own laptops. If you do not have a laptop, one can be booked through Education Commons.

If room 8-278 is booked for another defense, another room will be booked for you by the Registrar's Office, usually in your department. Check your exam program to confirm the location of your exam.

### Conferencing & Remote Participation

The Registrar's Office will make the arrangements for audio and video conferencing. At OISE Zoom is the platform used for any remote FOE participants.

SGS prohibits the use of Skype for final oral exams.

Presentation slides/materials should be sent to remote participants in advance of the exam.

Supervisors are asked to send slides to External Examiner on behalf of the Candidate.

### Catering

The Registrar's Office provides a pitcher of water, cookies and granola bars for all exams. Students are not required to cater their exams, but may bring additional food or drink for the examiners if they wish.

### Family & Friends

All Final Oral Exams at OISE are closed exams. Family and friends are not allowed in the examination room once the Chair has convened the exam.

### Examination Procedures

Once everyone has arrived, the Chair will ask the candidate to leave the room for a few minutes, during which time they discuss exam rules, order of questioning, etc. The candidate is then invited back into the room. After the presentation and Q & A session, the candidate is asked to leave the room a second time while the examiners deliberate.

### Presentation and Q & A Period

After the candidate's 20-minute presentation, examiners will take turns asking questions. The order of questioning is determined prior to start of the exam.

While there are no rules as to how many rounds of questions there are, nor how long each question can be, it is the role of Chair to ensure that the examination is conducted in accordance with the rules, and that examiners take turns of approximately equal duration.

A common understanding amongst faculty is that the examination lasts approximately 2 hours. Officially, however, there is no predetermined end time and exams are to take as much time as required.

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## Voting & Results

After the deliberation period, members must vote yes or no on the question whether or not the thesis and its defense are acceptable. More than one negative vote (or abstention) causes the thesis examination to be adjourned. Those committee members who find the thesis acceptable must also indicate whether the thesis is acceptable as is or requires editorial corrections or minor revisions. Following the voting, the candidate is invited back into the examination room and the results are shared with the candidate.

## After the Defense

Immediately after the defense, the Chair either brings the examination documents to the Registrar's Office or emails the Chair Summary Form to the Registrar's Office (email address is provided in all the pre-examination communication). The Chair may choose to upload the Chair Summary Form to the link provided by SGS one day prior to the FOE. The Doctoral Registration Advisor emails the student with the results, next steps, and upcoming deadlines. The candidate must respond to the post-examination email by responding back with a confirmation that includes the requested convocation ceremony.

## Uploading the Final Post-Defense Thesis onto Digital Library Repository

Depending on the exam result, the candidate will have 7, 30 or 90 days to upload the final post-defense thesis onto the digital library repository. Detailed instructions on the upload process can be found on the SGS website.

## Distribution of Thesis

ETD submissions are available on the ProQuest website approximately five to six weeks following your convocation, and at [T-Space](#) a few weeks after that. Your thesis will be part of the T-Space collection at the library and part of the National Library of Canada's collection. More information on the distribution and publication of theses can be found on the SGS website, [Electronic Theses & Dissertations: FAQs – School of Graduate Studies](#).

## Embargo

Publication of your thesis by the University of Toronto is a requirement of your degree; it is U of T's intention that there be no restriction on the distribution and publication of theses. Accordingly, theses will be released after each convocation and will be freely available to the public online. However, in exceptional cases, you may wish to consider delaying thesis publication. Typical reasons for embargo include:

- currently seeking publication of part of your thesis in a journal, or publication of the thesis as a book
- content of a sensitive nature in the thesis, the publication of which might endanger the wellbeing of the author or of persons associated with the work □ a patent in process

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Discuss restriction with your supervisor and the Chair of your graduate unit if you think restriction might be appropriate.

If you intend to restrict the release date of your ETD, submit a completed and signed *Restrict Thesis Release Date* form to the Registrar's Office, found here [Student Forms | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#) under the graduation tab.

## Graduation

Doctoral degrees are conferred at the Fall Convocation in October, by action of the March Meeting of the Governing Council (in absentia), or at the Spring Convocation in June. The last possible dates for the FOEs are as follows:

1. Fall Ceremony – mid-September
2. March Meeting of the Governing Council – mid-January
3. Spring Convocation ceremony – mid-April

Deadlines are posted on the Registrar's Office website at the start of every academic year.

Students must graduate at the ceremony following completion of their degree requirements. Delay of graduation is not permitted, except in cases where a student completes by the March deadline but wishes to delay to June in order to attend a ceremony. In order to meet degree requirements, your thesis must be submitted to ProQuest by the deadlines indicated above.

Information on time, location, and tickets for convocation ceremonies are emailed to the student's UTOR email account by the Office of Convocation. Ensure that your email and mailing addresses are correct on ROSI. Further details can be obtained from the Office of Convocation website.

## Beyond Graduation

You have access to many benefits and services, such as career advice, the Graduate Dossier Service, continuing education, and many more alumni benefits and privileges. Remember to read the graduation edition of *gradschool e-news*!

## Resources & Useful Websites

OISE Registrar's Office: [Registrar's Office & Student Experience](#)

[| Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#)

OISE Education Commons: [Education Commons | Ontario](#)

[Institute for Studies in Education](#)

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SGS Final-Year Fees Information: <http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Final-Year->

[Fees.aspx](#)

SGS Thesis Guidelines & Formatting Instructions:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Producing-Your-Thesis.aspx>

Student Accounts: [www.fees.utoronto.ca](http://www.fees.utoronto.ca)

Office of Convocation: <http://www.convocation.utoronto.ca/>

Centre for International Experience: <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/cie>

UofT Alumni: <http://alumni.utoronto.ca/>

## Contacts

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