



Department of Cell and Systems Biology

Guidelines for setting up a Ph.D. Final Oral Examination

1. When you and your supervisor agree that your program is nearing completion and all course work requirements are complete* (four CSB graduate modules or equivalent 1.0 FCE), you should visit the SGS website for information in the “Program Completion” section at:
<https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/academic-progress/program-completion/>
Consult the Graduate Office for deadline dates for convocation or check the SGS website for important sessional dates at: <https://sgs.calendar.utoronto.ca/sessional-dates>
* Collaborative programs will have additional course requirements.
2. The Cell & Systems Biology PhD program requires that all PhD candidates present their thesis for evaluation to a Thesis Approval Committee before proceeding to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) PhD Final Oral Examination. The Thesis Approval Meeting must be held six to eight weeks prior to the SGS PhD Final Oral Examination. Members of the Thesis Approval Committee who evaluate the thesis are expected to advise the student and supervisor as to whether or not changes are necessary before the Final Oral Examination (FOE) is formally requested, and the thesis is distributed to the FOE committee members. The student and supervisor must evaluate the recommendations and act accordingly. Before the Thesis Approval Meeting can be scheduled, the Graduate Office will need the “Approval of Ph.D. Thesis” form from your supervisor (and co-supervisor) with his/her signature. Full details on the Thesis Approval Meeting can be found on the CSB website at:
<http://csb.utoronto.ca/graduate-studies/current-students/forms/>
3. The Graduate Office requires a **minimum of 6 weeks notice**, prior to the Final Oral Examination. The School of Graduate Studies requires the paper work to arrive in their office 6 weeks prior to the examination date, making this a very strict deadline.
4. Before the examination process can begin, the Graduate Office will ask for a one-page double-spaced abstract (350 word maximum). The signed “Thesis Approval Meeting” form advises the Graduate Office that the thesis is ready for examination.
5. Discuss with your supervisor and advisory committee the faculty members who would best serve on the examination committee. (See the required members of a Ph.D. defense committee listed below).
6. The School of Graduate Studies must approve the examination committee you are considering. Email (ian.buglass@utoronto.ca) the names of the potential committee, along with the tentative thesis title.
7. The School of Graduate Studies allows examinations to be held at sites other than SGS, 63 St. George Street. Please advise the Graduate Office at the time of booking the examination, if any special equipment or venue is required for your examination. Examinations may be held in the Ramsay Wright Building or the Earth Sciences Centre at the University of Toronto St. George campus, plus UTM or UTSC campuses. **The student will book the room(s) for his/her exit seminar and *in camera* examination and inform the CSB Graduate Office of the location, or will provide secured Zoom links for remotely held or hybrid examinations.**

Please note: CSB PhD exams are held at St. George, UTM, and UTSC campuses, or held remotely via secured Zoom links.

NOTE: It is the supervisor’s responsibility to contact potential examiners to arrange the examination date and the supervisor and student’s responsibility to distribute the thesis to examiners.

REQUIRED MEMBERS OF A Ph.D. DEFENSE COMMITTEE

External Examiner: (1 required)

Attends the examination. An external examiner reads and evaluates your thesis and provides SGS with his/her written appraisal of the thesis. It will be brought to the examination and discussed among the other committee members at the examination. The written appraisal must be received at the CSB Graduate Office no later than two weeks prior to the examination date. (Note: Allow extra time for holidays: e.g. Christmas and Hanukkah require 2 additional weeks.) A copy of the appraisal will be sent to the Ph.D. Orals Office at SGS, to the candidate, and all members of the examination committee. The external examiner will be receiving an honorarium for their service. Travel expenses will **NOT** be reimbursed by SGS, travel and other expenses are the responsibility of the supervisor (the department covers **\$500** of the expenses). The examiner should be advised to keep all receipts for accommodation, travel costs and other expenses, which the supervisor will then reimburse. The Graduate Office will provide the External Examiner with this information after the examination committee has been approved by SGS.

Thesis copy required. The Graduate Office will send information about the external thesis appraisal directly to the external examiner.

Supervisor (and Co-supervisor if applicable): 1 (or 2) required

Your supervisor

Thesis copy (or copies) required.

Department (Ph.D. Advisory Committee) Representatives: 2 required

Normally the 2 members of your supervisory committee. (*Note: If candidate has a Co-supervisor only **one (1)** Department Representative is required.* There is a maximum of three supervisory committee members allowed on the final examination committee).

Thesis copies required.

CSB Faculty Member or Faculty Member from Another Department: 1 or 2 required

One or two CSB faculty members, who are within your discipline but not directly involved with your thesis or research.

(or)

A faculty member with an SGS appointment from another cognate department within the University of Toronto. This examiner cannot be directly involved with your thesis or research.

Thesis copy required.

Chair: 1 required)

Assigned by the Ph.D. Orals Office at the School of Graduate Studies. Reads the abstract only. The Chairman is not an examiner or voting member.

No thesis required.

TOTAL = 6 or 7 members in all. All attend the examination.

(A quorum is 4 voting members; maximum of 6 voting members allowed by SGS)

***A minimum of two non-supervisory committee members must be present (in person or by Zoom) to achieve quorum of four members in total.**

Quorum not achieved means the FOE must be postponed and rescheduled to a later date.

Last updated July 2026