



Student Advising Guidelines

Objective

The main objective is to guide each graduate student, starting from their admission into the program, until they narrow down and focus on a research topic, and till the eventual conclusion of their research.

The Academic Advisor

- 1- Academic advisors are full time AUC faculty members responsible for assisting graduate students after admission into the program with regards to preliminary course planning.
- 2- The relevant director of the graduate program is typically the academic advisor.

The Thesis Supervisor/ Research Advisory Committee

- 1- Once the student narrows down a desired research area, the student requests from a full-time faculty member in the program of study to serve as their thesis supervisor.
- 2- The thesis supervisor will typically be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member.
- 3- The thesis supervisor will seek to form, in consultation with the student, the “Research Advisory Committee” for this specific student.
- 4- The research advisory committee is chaired by the thesis supervisor, and includes two other full time AUC faculty members related to the area of the research domain.
- 5- The director of the graduate program will acknowledge the selection of the thesis supervisor, and the formation of the research advisory committee.
- 6- The selection of the thesis supervisor and the formation of the research advisory committee will typically take place within the first year of admission.
- 7- The research advisory committee will play a major role in shaping whatever remains of the student coursework, as well as their research direction.
- 8- The research advisory committee will oversee the progress of the student’s thesis and is expected to meet on a regular basis to discuss the student’s research progress and challenges.



Qualifying Examination Guidelines (Ph.D. only)

The following guidelines must be used to ensure consistency in activities related to the provisioning of doctoral qualifying examinations.

Objective

The main objective of the Qualifying Examination is to determine the readiness of Ph.D. students as relates to their problem analysis and solution synthesis abilities, relevant to fundamental concepts and ideas around the field of study. It will act as a prerequisite (along with the completion of coursework) for the transfer of status from “Ph.D. Student” to “Ph.D. Candidate”.

Format and Timing

- 1- The exam is written, in-class, and of a six-hour duration.
- 2- The exam will be offered twice a year: once during the Fall, and once during the Spring. At the beginning of each academic year, the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research will announce the dates of the Fall and Spring examinations to the directors of the graduate programs.
- 3- The student should sit for the exam the semester immediately following the completion of the coursework credit hours, but no later than during the fourth semester since admission.
- 4- Students may take the exam a maximum of two times. A student failing twice will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program.

Examination Knowledge Areas

- 1- The directors of the graduate programs will spearhead the identification of the knowledge areas (topics, courses, or subjects) to be covered in the examination in their relevant specializations. This information will be made public to students of the relevant specializations.
- 2- The knowledge areas can be revised each academic year by the specializations, and the updates communicated by the relevant director of the graduate program to both the students and the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research.

The Qualifying Examination Committee

The directors of the graduate programs will each form a committee from within the faculty of their programs (The Qualifying Examination Committee) composed of three members to prepare the exam. The three members need not necessarily belong to the same department in the case of interdisciplinary programs. At the beginning of each academic year (no later than the end of the first month), the formation of this committee is communicated to the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research.



This committee will:

- a. Seek questions from faculty to eventually form a written examination.
- b. Form the examination from the received questions.
- c. Hand the exam to the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research. The office will administer the exam at one common time and location and will then send back the exam to be graded by the respective programs. Each faculty member will grade the problem(s) that he/she contributed with.

Announcing Results of the Written Examination

- 1- The written examination grades should be communicated to students no later than three weeks after the date of the written examination.
- 2- Only students who receive grades in the range [50%-70%] will be asked to go through an oral examination.
- 3- All students receiving a grade below the lower threshold will have failed this specific attempt of the qualifying examination, and will be immediately notified of their fail status by the director of the relevant graduate program.
- 4- All students receiving a grade above the upper threshold will have passed the qualifying examination, and will also be immediately notified of their pass status by the director of the relevant graduate program.

Conducting the Oral Examination

- 1- The oral examination is primarily intended to re-evaluate with more scrutiny students who fall in in the aforementioned range of grades.
- 2- An oral examination committee composed of three program faculty members will be formed by the qualifying examination committee of each graduate program to orally examine students, as needed.
- 3- The oral examination will include analytical questions about the questions covered in the written exam, and may cover related topics.
- 4- Based on the student performance in the oral examination, those students may pass or fail the qualifying examination.
- 5- After the completion of each oral examination, the oral examination committee will decide in writing whether the student will be granted a pass or fail grade, and the reasons behind this decision.
- 6- Immediately after completing all oral examinations required for students of a given program, and receiving the relevant reports from the oral examination committee, the director of the relevant graduate program will communicate to the involved students their pass/fail status in this attempt of the qualifying examination.
- 7- In case of a second failure in the qualifying examination, no oral exam component is obviously needed.



Beyond the Examination

- 1- The pass/fail status of all students will be sent by the relevant director of each graduate program to the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research no later than five weeks after the date of the written examination.
- 2- Students who failed the qualifying examination will sit for the exam the semester immediately after.
- 3- Students who passed the qualifying examination will be granted a “Ph.D. candidate” status.
- 4- The director of the relevant graduate program may provide failed students a short high-level feedback indicating the areas of deficiency normally within two weeks after a written request by the student. Such requests must be made within the semester in which the qualifying examination was attempted.



The Proposal Defense Guidelines

Objective

The main objective of the Proposal Defense is to act as a milestone through which the research advisory committee can make sure that the student has a well formulated research plan. An approved research proposal is a prerequisite for receiving a student research grant.

Timing and Format

- 1- Once the student has narrowed down a research topic, a sound scientific methodology has been adopted, and a research plan formulated as a minimum, the thesis supervisor will invite the student to conduct a proposal defense.
- 2- The thesis supervisor will invite the other members of the research advisory committee to attend and evaluate the proposal.
- 3- The student will submit to the research advisory committee at least two weeks before the defense his/her research proposal.
- 4- Other graduate students are welcomed to attend proposal defenses as audience.
- 5- For a Ph.D. candidate, the proposal defense is expected to take place at the latest, the semester immediately after the student became a Ph.D. candidate. MSc students typically defend their proposals in the semester following the completion of the seminar (ENGR 5940/SCI 5940) course.

Outcome

- 1- After the proposal defense is completed, the research advisory committee will deliberate, in absence of the candidate and audience, about the outcome of the defense, which is determined by majority.
- 2- In the event of a pass outcome, the candidate can proceed towards completing their research and eventually the thesis defense.
- 3- In the event of a fail outcome, the process of this defense starts from the beginning. The student is expected to re-defend their research proposal, at the latest, in the semester after the date of the previous failed proposal defense.
- 4- A student has a maximum of three opportunities to successfully pass the proposal defense; otherwise the candidate is dismissed from the program.
- 5- In both pass and fail outcomes, the research committee has to provide the candidate with written comments within a maximum of one week after the date of the proposal defense.



Thesis Defense Guidelines

Objective

The main objective of the Thesis Defense is to guarantee the originality and significance of the scientific research contribution made by the student. Its successful completion acts as a partial completion of the degree requirements, and acts as a prerequisite for the conferral of the degree, after completion of all remaining requirements.

Timing and Format

After the student has successfully passed a proposal defense, and completed their research activity to the satisfaction of the research advisory committee, the thesis supervisor can initiate, based on the candidate's request, the process of conducting the thesis defense.

PhD candidates

- 1- A Ph.D. candidate is expected to have as a minimum two accepted peer-reviewed international research publications before the thesis defense, one of which must be a journal publication.
- 2- The approval of the research advisory committee is made by conducting an informal full draft review of the candidate's written thesis document to primarily verify the originality, significance of the contribution, and adherence to the committee's recommendations after the proposal defense.
- 3- The two research advisory committee members will constitute the candidate's two internal examiners. In addition, two external examiners at the rank of full professor will be appointed. The program director will moderate the defense.
- 4- The supervisor is expected to nominate three potential external examiners who satisfy the eligibility criteria detailed on the external examiner nomination form.
- 5- The final selection of the external examiners is made in consultation with the thesis supervisor. The responsibility of the director of the graduate program is to ensure the neutrality and technical relevance of the external examiners.
- 6- The external examiners will be contacted by the graduate program director two months before the final oral defense. Upon receiving their approval to join the defense examination committee, the dissertation will be sent to the external examiners for evaluation.
- 7- The external examiners will be asked to provide a detailed written evaluation of the dissertation. The examiners analysis and recommendation will inform the decision of the program director on whether the student proceeds to final oral defense or whether major revisions - including additional work - are needed. Copies of the external examiners reports will be shared with the student before the defense in order to have them addressed.
- 8- The student will defend the thesis in an open examination before the committee.



- 9- Each member of the Thesis Defense Committee will submit a written evaluation of the dissertation after the oral defense.

MSc candidates

- 1- It is recommended that an MSc candidate has one accepted peer-reviewed international research publication before the thesis defense.
- 2- The approval of the research advisory committee is made by conducting an informal full draft review of the candidate's written thesis document to primarily verify the originality, significance of the contribution, and adherence to the committee's recommendations after the proposal defense.
- 3- The Thesis Defense Committee will consist of one internal examiner (preferably a member of the student's research advisory committee) and an external examiner at the rank of associate professor or higher. The program director will moderate the defense.
- 4- The supervisor is expected to nominate three potential external examiners who satisfy the eligibility criteria detailed on the external examiner nomination form.
- 5- The final selection of the external examiner is made in consultation with the thesis supervisor. The responsibility of the director of the graduate program is to ensure the neutrality and technical relevance of the external examiner.
- 6- The external examiner will be contacted by the graduate program director one month before the final oral defense. Upon receiving their approval to join the defense examination committee, the dissertation will be sent to the external examiner for evaluation.
- 7- The external examiner will be asked to provide a detailed written evaluation of the dissertation. The examiner analysis and recommendation will inform the decision of the program director on whether the student proceeds to final oral defense or whether major revisions - including additional work - are needed. A copy of the external examiner report will be shared with the student before the defense in order to have them addressed.
- 8- The student will defend the thesis in an open examination before the committee.
- 9- Each member of the Thesis Defense Committee will submit a written evaluation of the dissertation after the oral defense.



Outcome

- 1- There are five possible outcomes of a thesis defense:
 - Pass with no revisions
 - Pass with minor revisions
 - Pass with major revisions
 - Fail (with recommendation to repeat defense)
 - Fail
- 2- In case of a pass outcome, written comments will be handed by the examining committee to the thesis supervisor. The candidate must take the comments into consideration. Subsequently, either the thesis supervisor or at least one of the external examiners must approve the satisfaction of addressing such comments by the student before the degree can be awarded.
- 3- In case of a fail outcome, the thesis supervisor is also handed a written justification as to why the student is considered to have failed the defense. In such case and depending on the committee's recommendations, the student can either be given the opportunity to re-defend, or is dismissed from the program.