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# 1. Supervisors and Committee Members

## 1.1 Eligibility Criteria

The academic unit shall ensure that the members of a supervisory committee are sufficiently competent and experienced to serve at the required level. In forming a supervisory committee, the academic unit should consider the rank and experience of the supervisor and prospective members, their publications and other demonstrations of competence in the field of specialization, and the prospective members’ experience in graduate supervision.

As minimum criteria, supervisors and supervisory, candidacy, and examination committee members must normally:

* be full-time, continuing Athabasca University (AU) faculty;
* be active in the general area of the student’s research;
* have a tenured (or tenure track) faculty appointment;
* hold a degree equivalent to or higher than that for which the student is a candidate; and,
* demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity of an original nature as defined in item 3.7.3.b. of the [*AUFA Collective Agreement*](http://www1.athabascau.ca/hr/labour_relations/0910_aufa_agreement.pdf).

Because of diverse interpretations of the term “scholarly or creative activity,” the FGS will always find it necessary to rely on sound and informed judgment of the academic unit to ensure adherence to minimum faculty criteria.

## 1.2 Other Categories

Individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria, above, may be recommended to serve as co-supervisors and as members of the supervisory, candidacy, and examining committees. For approval of the following categories, the academic unit graduate program designate shall formally apply to the FGS:

* retired professors or professors emeriti;
* professors from academic units not offering a graduate program;
* Adjunct professors (an adjunct professor is an honorary appointment at AU; see [*AU Policy 025 003*](http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/humanresources/025_003.htm));
* faculty members who do not hold a degree equivalent to or higher than that for which the student is a candidate, but are exceptional in their scholarly work and well-recognized as experts in their field;
* faculty in non-continuing positions teaching in an AU program; and,
* other experts (e.g., First Nations’ Elders, or a well-known expert in industry).

The request from the academic unit graduate program designate to the FGS for committee membership approval of someone from the ‘Other Category’ should include the individual’s CV and a memo indicating the reasons for, and the benefits of, having such a colleague as co-supervisor or on the proposed supervisory, candidacy, or examining committee. If approved, the colleague will remain eligible for appointment to other supervisory committees for a three-year period after the initial decanal approval. Additional approvals will be dependent on a favourable recommendation from supervisors working with the colleague. Appointments will only be made of those individuals expected to be able to remain on the committee until completion of the student’s degree program. The FGS may waive the approval mechanism where circumstances warrant.

Requests for continuing supervision by supervisors who have taken retirement will be dealt with by the FGS on a case-by-case basis. The guiding principle will be that faculty who take retirement can continue to supervise their graduate student(s) upon recommendation by the academic unit graduate program designate to the FGS.

In all cases, colleagues from the above groups should demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity as demonstrated by satisfying the criteria set out in item 3.7.3.b of the [*AUFA Collective Agreement*](http://www1.athabascau.ca/hr/labour_relations/0910_aufa_agreement.pdf).

## 1.3 Selection, Composition, and Approval of the Supervisor and Supervisory Committee

Graduate students who write a thesis or dissertation are required to have a supervisor.

* In the master’s program, the selection of a supervisor should occur once the student has been approved to the thesis route.
* In the doctoral program, the supervisor should be identified as soon as feasible after admission to the program, subject to the graduate regulations of the academic unit. In some academic units, an interim supervisor is assigned when the student is accepted to the program. In this case, the interim supervisor will provide advisement to the student until the supervisor is selected and approved.

Students normally identify their supervisor, who is usually a faculty member from the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. In cases where the supervisor is from an academic unit at AU other than the student’s academic unit, the supervisor must agree to follow the policies and regulations of the student’s academic unit in all matters related to the supervisory responsibilities. If the faculty member agrees to become the supervisor, the supervisor completes the appropriate form and provides it to the academic unit graduate program designate for approval “*Master’s Thesis Supervisor Approval”* form. Rationale outlining the suitability of the supervisor for the student’s research focus is attached to the form. Upon approval by the academic unit’s graduate program designate, the designate then submits the material to the FGS for approval.

### Master’s Degree Supervisory Committee

The supervisor works with the student on selecting the supervisory committee. The supervisory committee consists of a minimum of two people, one being the supervisor, plus a maximum of two other members:

* The chair of the committee shall be the supervisor, normally from the student’s academic unit;
* At least one of the committee members shall be from the student’s academic unit.

The committee must meet the eligibility criteria requirements, and must not be in a position of conflict of interest ([*AU Policy 150 002*](http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/humanresources/150_002.htm)). This committee will advise the student on the thesis proposal, evaluate the thesis proposal, and form part of the thesis oral examination committee. Once the committee is selected, the supervisor completes the “*Master’s Thesis Supervisory Committee Approval”* form for approval by the graduate program designate. Rationale for the selection of the committee members must be included in the form. The academic unit graduate program designate shall recommend and submit the names of the committee members to the FGS. The final authority for the approval of the supervisor and supervisory committee rests with the FGS.

## 1.4 Co-Supervision

In some cases, co-supervision of a student may be recommended to the FGS. Co-supervisors must meet the eligibility criteria outlined for members of supervisory committees, which includes the criteria under “Other Categories.”  There should normally be no more than one co-supervisor. When a supervisor and co-supervisor are assigned, together they shall fulfil the role of the supervisor (that is, neither shall fulfil any other supervisory or examining role on that committee). The signatures of both the supervisor and the co-supervisor are required on all documents where the supervisor’s signature is required.

## 1.5 Guidelines, Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors and Students

The parameters set out in this document, and the FGS guidelines for supervisors, interim supervisors, committee members, and students, shall be followed (*Guidelines for Graduate Student Supervision; Roles and Responsibilities of the Supervisor; Roles and Responsibilities of the Interim Supervisor and Responsibilities of the Graduate Student*). The guidelines include the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and graduate students. More specific guidelines, pertinent to the specific discipline or program, may be developed by the academic unit, and should be posted in the academic unit’s regulations.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor or designate to keep committee members of the student’s progress and meetings of the committee. The supervisor and the supervisory committee (if formed at that time) shall meet with the student at least once per year. At this time, the “*Annual Progress Report”* form is completed, in which the student discusses the achievement of goals during the past year, expresses goals for the subsequent year, and provides dates for significant milestones in the program, such as thesis proposal completion date or commencement of data collection. The supervisor, in collaboration with the supervisory committee, must rate the student’s progress as satisfactory or unsatisfactory, accompanied by pertinent comments. If the supervisory committee has been formulated, then signatures from each of the committee members and the student are required on the form. The form is submitted to the academic unit graduate program designate, and the FGS, for approval.

## 1.6 Changing a Supervisor or Supervisory Committee

The academic unit graduate program designate may recommend changes of a supervisor and/or revisions to the supervisory committee by formally seeking approval from the FGS “*Change to Supervisor or Supervisory Committee”* form. In cases of sudden or unexpected interruption of supervision, such as resignation, illness, or death, the academic unit’s graduate program designate must, without delay, make arrangements to provide continuity of supervision, pending the appointment of a new supervisor or supervisory committee member.

## 1.7 Supervisor on Leave

It is the responsibility of supervisors to make adequate provision for supervision of their graduate students during a leave. Supervisors who intend to take leave (exceeding two consecutive months) during a period in which they have graduate students under their supervision shall discuss alternative arrangements with their student(s). The supervisor shall submit a written statement to the student’s academic unit graduate program designate for approval, describing the arrangements which have been made to provide satisfactory supervision during the period of leave. Once approved, the finalized arrangement will be communicated in writing to the student(s) involved.

# 2. Thesis Route

All candidates in a thesis route shall present a document embodying the results of their research. The thesis should reveal that the student is able to work in a scholarly manner, and is acquainted with the principal works published on the subject of the thesis. The thesis research should make a contribution to knowledge in the field, or a significant contribution to a problem in a particular area.

The thesis proposal and the final thesis must be written according to a standard style acknowledged by a particular field of study and recommended by the academic unit. Refer to *Thesis Guidelines* for instructions to be followed by the student.

## 2.1 Thesis Proposal

Each student is required to develop a written thesis proposal in their chosen field of study. The thesis proposal is developed under the mentorship of the supervisor and the supervisory committee. The supervisor and the supervisory committee must formally approve the thesis proposal. The student conducts a formal presentation of the proposal to the committee within a closed session (no one besides the student, the supervisory committee, and the FGS are allowed to be present). The presentation is followed by an oral examination, in which the committee will ask questions related to the proposal, raise questions or issues the student may anticipate in conducting the research, and determine whether the student is adequately knowledgeable in the proposed research area to proceed with the thesis research. The conduct of the oral examination component must follow the guidelines of the FGS *G*.

## 2.2 Adjudication of the Proposal and Oral Examination

The decision shall be that of the majority. If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor’s report should record the recommendation of each committee member on the “*Master’s Thesis Proposal Final Report”* form, which is submitted to the FGS, who will determine an appropriate course of action. Normally, one of the following outcomes of the written examination must be recorded on the form: **Pass**; **Resubmit** **with** **Revisions**; **Fail**; **Adjournment**.

In the case where the examination committee recommends an adjournment or resubmission, the student is given a second opportunity for the oral examination or review of the revisions. At the second attempt, the oral examination and proposal must be rated as a **Pass** or **Fail**. Under extraordinary circumstances, the student may obtain an **Adjournment** on the second attempt.

If the recommendation is a **Fail**, consultation with the FGS will be required. Depending upon the reason for the **Fail**, the committee may recommend to FGS that the student be allowed a second attempt at the oral examination or proposal. If the FGS agrees with this recommendation, at the second attempt the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories, **Pass** or **Fail**. Any student who receives a Fail at the second attempt is required to withdraw from the program with a **Fail** appearing on the transcript. Under extraordinary circumstances, the student may obtain an **Adjournment** on the second attempt of an oral examination.

## 2.3 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for the Proposal and Oral Examination

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/thesis_route.php#pass)
* [Resubmit with Revisions](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/thesis_route.php#resubmit)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/thesis_route.php#fail)
* [Adjourned, Repeat Oral](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/thesis_route.php#repeat)

### Pass

The oral examination and proposal are approved. The proposal may or may not require minor revisions or modifications.

#### Procedure:

All committee members indicate their decision on the *“Master’s Thesis Proposal Final Report”* form. The supervisor may decide to withhold their signature until the revisions/modifications have been made, and should indicate that on the form.

### Resubmit with Revisions

The revisions to the proposal are sufficiently substantial; e.g., major revisions of sections are required.

#### Procedure:

* Specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and the extent of the revisions required. It must be clear to the student what will be required to obtain a Pass.
* Decide upon a date by which resubmission of the proposal to the committee must occur. The final date set for resubmission shall be no later than six months from the date of the initial examination.
* Specify the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members while performing the required revisions.
* The *“Master’s Thesis Proposal Final Report”* form should be submitted to the FGS, with the results of the adjudication, reasons for the resubmission, and recommendations for further action.

### Fail

The student did not demonstrate an adequate knowledge in their proposed research area during the presentation and/or oral examination. The proposal itself is unacceptable; e.g., poorly written, does not adequately address the literature in the research area, or contains other significant omissions.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor verbally provides the student with the reasons for the Fail immediately after deliberations.
* The supervisor shall provide written reasons for the Fail to the student within two working days. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible in the written report.
* Depending upon the reason for the Fail, the supervisor and committee may recommend to FGS that the student be allowed a second attempt on the oral presentation, or a final resubmission of the proposal. It must be made clear to the student what will be required to achieve a Pass, and the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in performing the required revisions.
* The “*Master’s Thesis Proposal Final Report*” form should be submitted to the FGS as soon as possible after the deliberations, containing the signatures of the members, the distribution of the votes, the reasons for the Fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The Dean, FGS, may arrange to meet with the student and the committee before acting upon the committee’s recommendation.

### Adjourned, Repeat Oral

The presentation and examination should be adjourned in compelling, extraordinary circumstances.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor will confer with the student, the supervisory committee members, and FGS to determine an appropriate course of action.
* The “*Master’s Thesis Proposal Final Report”* form should be submitted to the FGS, outlining the outcome of the oral examination and tentative plans for a second attempt.

# 3. Ethics/Access Approval

Upon successful completion of the proposal examination process and acknowledgement from the supervisor and supervisory committee that the student is ready to proceed with data collection for their research, a submission must be made to the [AU Research Ethics Board](http://www.athabascau.ca/research/ethics/board.php) (in the case of research involving human subjects), and any other approval bodies. When such approvals are obtained, a copy of the approvals must be provided to the supervisor and the Academic Unit. A copy is retained in the student’s file held by the supervisor, and in the student’s file within the academic unit. The student must also retain a copy of the approvals for inclusion as an Appendix in the thesis.

# 4. Final Thesis Examination Procedures

## 4.1 Composition of the Final Thesis Examination Committee

A master’s oral thesis examination committee will be composed of the supervisory committee, plus one member from outside the student’s academic unit (external) who has not participated in the development of the proposal or thesis.

The supervisor, after consultation with the academic unit graduate program designate, submits the “*Master’s Thesis Examination Committee Approval”* form to the FGS for approval. Documentation regarding rationale for the selection of the examiner may be requested by the FGS.

## 4.2 Distribution and Preparation for the Final Thesis Examination

At least four weeks prior to the oral thesis examination, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to:

* obtain preliminary acceptance, in writing, from the supervisory committee members that the thesis is ready to be reviewed by the examination committee, and the student is ready to proceed to the final oral examination “*Preliminary Acceptance of Thesis Prior to Final Examination*” form);
* notify the examination committee and student of the examination date, time, and other arrangements necessary for the examination;
* supply the examination committee with a copy of the thesis, so that they may have adequate time to appraise the document. The committee is normally given up to 4 weeks to review the thesis and provide comments to the FGS on the thesis.

In the absence of the supervisor, the above responsibilities shall be carried out by a designate of the supervisor. The student is not required to make the arrangements for the examination.

## 4.3 Changing an Examination Committee

In rare circumstances, the supervisor may recommend revisions to the examination committee. The FGS must be notified in writing and approve the change in

# 5. The Oral Thesis Final Examination

## 5.1 Focus of the Master’s Oral Thesis Examination

The examination committee will review the thesis and conduct an oral examination designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the thesis subject and of related fields.

The supervisor shall chair the thesis oral examination. The chair is responsible for ensuring that the examination proceeds according to the FGS *Guidelines & Procedures for Oral Examinations*.

## 5.2 Attendance of Examination Committee Members at the Oral Thesis Examination

It is essential that all members of the examination committee participate in the examination for which the committee is charged. If the FGS has advance warning that the supervisor or an examiner cannot attend the examination, the following can occur:

* the examination may be postponed and re-scheduled;
* the missing committee member may submit questions to the chair, who will read the questions at the examination; or,
* the committee member may be replaced.

In cases of emergency, where there is little or no notice of the absence of a committee member (i.e., sudden illness), the situation will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the supervisor and/or FGS.

## 5.3 Attendance of Visitors at Examination

Normally, the oral thesis examination will be considered an “open” session, at which faculty members and students from the student's academic unit may attend. It is the responsibility of the supervisor, who is also the chair, to notify the students and faculty of the student’s academic unit of the oral examination and the necessary teleconferencing arrangements. This is normally done approximately two weeks in advance of the oral examination.

The oral examination may be closed, for example, when the results of the thesis must be kept confidential for a period of time. In such cases, the examination committee and academic unit graduate program designate shall recommend such action to the FGS, who shall then approve that the final examination be closed to all but the examination committee, the chair, and the Dean of FGS.

At the oral examination, persons who are not members of the examination committee: (a) may participate in the questioning only by permission of the chair; (b) are not permitted to participate in the discussion of the student’s performance, and (c) must withdraw before the committee deliberates on the outcome of the student’s thesis and oral examination. At the completion of the questioning period, the committee will deliberate in private. The supervisor, with all the committee members present, will inform the student of the adjudication results immediately after the deliberations.

## 5.4 Adjudication of Final Thesis by Examination Committee

The decision of the examination committee will be based both on the a) written thesis and b) candidate's ability to defend it. The examiners will consider the merits of the oral examination and the written thesis. They will also determine the nature of and procedures for approval of any revisions that will be required prior to submission to FGS. All examination committee members must sign the “*Master’s Thesis & Oral Examination Final Report*” form, indicating their decision.

The decision shall be that of the majority, with the external committee member having decision-making authority equal to the rest of the examination committee. If a decision cannot be reached, the supervisor shall record the recommendation of each committee member on the “*Master’s Thesis & Oral Examination Final Report”* form*.* This is submitted to the FGS who will determine an appropriate course of action.

Depending upon the reason for the **Fail** in the oral examination or the thesis, the committee may recommend to FGS that the student be allowed a second attempt on the oral examination or the final written thesis. If the FGS agrees with this recommendation, at the **second attempt** the examination committee must select one of two adjudication categories, **Pass** or **Fail**. Students will not be allowed to resubmit their thesis at the second attempt. Any student who is granted permission for a second attempt and receives a **Fail** on either the final thesis or the oral examination must withdraw from the program, and will receive a **Fail** on their transcript. Under extraordinary circumstances, the student may obtain an **Adjournment** on the second attempt.

The supervisor, who is the chair, is responsible for making arrangements to procure signatures from all examination committee members at the time of the examination, or as soon as possible after the examination.  All committee members must sign the “*Master’s Thesis & Oral Examination Final Report”* form, indicating their decision regarding the thesis and oral examination.

## 5.5 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for Thesis

It is the duty of all the examiners to read the thesis and report on its merits according to the following categories when completing the “*Master’s Thesis & Oral Examination Final Report”* form.

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#pass55)
* [Resubmit with Major Revisions](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#resubmit55)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#fail55)

### Pass

Examination committee members approve the thesis. It may or may not require minor revisions.

#### Procedure:

Since these are minor revisions/modifications, the supervisor may decide to withhold only their signature until the revisions/modifications have been made. The nature of the changes and the withholding of the signature to ensure that the changes have been made should be indicated in the report.

### Resubmit with major revisions

The revisions to the thesis are sufficiently substantial (e.g., further research or experimentation, or major reworking of sections, are required, or the committee is not satisfied with the general presentation of the thesis), requiring a reconvening of the full examination committee.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor (chair) must specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and, in the case of revisions, the extent of the revisions required. It must be made clear to the student what will be required to obtain a Pass.
* The nature of the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in making the necessary revisions should be specified.
* It is expected that the student will make the changes in time to submit the thesis to the FGS on or before a deadline set by the examination committee during the oral examination deliberations.
* It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure the necessary revisions/changes have occurred before the student receives a Pass.
* The “*Master’s Thesis and Oral Examination Final* *Report”* form should be submitted to the FGS, indicating the Resubmit with major revisions, reasons for this adjudication, and recommendations regarding further action.

### Fail

The thesis is unacceptable.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor provides the student with the reasons for the Fail immediately after deliberations.
* The supervisor shall provide written reasons for the Fail to the student immediately after deliberations and within two business days. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much as precision as possible in the written report.
* The “*Master’s Thesis and Oral Examination Final Report”* form is to be completed by the supervisor and submitted to the FGS as soon as possible, containing the signatures of the members, the distribution of the votes, the reasons for the Fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The FGS may arrange to meet with the student and the examination committee before acting upon the committee's recommendation.
* A Fail will appear on the transcript if FGS agrees with the decision of the committee.

## 5.6 Adjudication Categories and Procedures for Oral Examination

Students must pass an oral examination on the subject of the thesis and matters relating thereto.

* [Pass](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#pass56)
* [Fail](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#fail56)
* [Adjourned, Repeat Oral](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/oral_exam.php#repeat56)

### Pass

The presentation accurately described the research, and the student was able to accurately and articulately answer the questions.

#### Procedure:

The student can proceed to graduate if they received a Pass on their thesis.

### Fail

The presentation of the research was poor with inadequate description of the study; the student answered the questions poorly, indicating a lack of knowledge in the research they conducted.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor, in the presence of the examination committee, must inform the student of this recommendation, with reasons, immediately after their deliberations.
* The supervisor must provide the student with the reasons for the Fail in writing within two business days. The nature of the deficiencies must be specified with as much precision as possible.
* Depending upon the reason for the Fail, the supervisor and committee may recommend to FGS that the student be allowed a second attempt on the oral presentation and examination. It must be made clear to the student what will be required to achieve a Pass before the oral examination is reconvened. Specify the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in performing the required revisions.
* The “*Master’s Thesis and Oral Examination Final Report”* form must be submitted to the FGS as soon as possible, containing the signatures of the members, the distribution of the votes, the reasons for the Fail, and recommendations for further action.
* The FGS may arrange to meet with the student and the examining committee before acting upon the committee’s recommendation.
* A Fail will appear on the transcript, if FGS agrees with the committee’s decision regarding the Fail.

### Adjourned, repeat Oral

The final oral examination should be adjourned in compelling, extraordinary circumstances.

#### Procedure:

* The supervisor will confer with the student, the examination committee members, and FGS to determine an appropriate course of action*.*
* The “*Master’s Thesis and Oral Examination Final Report”* form should be submitted to the FGS, outlining the reasons for the outcome of the oral examination and tentative plans for a second attempt.

# 6. Submission of Thesis

Upon approval by the supervisor that the required revisions have been completed (which must occur within three month of the oral examination), that the necessary copyright permission has been obtained, and that the thesis has met the format requirements, there are a number of steps the student must conduct to fulfill the requirements of their degree. Refer to the Timelines for Forms for Master's Thesis Route Program, the Electronic Submission of Theses and Dissertations, and the Formats for Theses and Dissertations in the Graduate Handbook.

If the thesis and the necessary forms are not submitted to the FGS and the AU DTheses repository within the identified approved time limits (maximum three months after the oral examination), the student may not be considered for graduation, since they have not completed all the requirements for the degree.

For a diagrammatic overview of the Master’s program and of the Final Thesis and Oral Examination, see [Figure 1](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/appendixA.php#figure1) and [Figure 2](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/guidelines/masters/appendixA.php#figure2).

An overview of the timelines for the completion of the forms can be found at [Timelines for Forms for Master’s Thesis Route Program](http://fgs.athabascau.ca/docs/Timelines_forForms_forMasters_Thesis_Route_Program.pdf) (PDF - 104KB).

# Appendix A

## Figure 1. Overview of Master’s Program



## Figure 2. Overview of Master’s Final Thesis and Oral Examination

