

Information to the opponent and members of the examining committee regarding the public defence of doctoral thesis at the University of Skövde

This document gives information about the public defence of doctoral theses, the persons involved, and the actual public defence at the University of Skövde (University).

1 Introduction

The public defence of a doctoral thesis for the award of the doctoral degree is an academic event and it takes the form of a public discussion between the opponent and the author of the thesis.

The thesis, which is the object of the examination, is the result of a four-year doctoral programme consisting of supervised research and advanced course-based studies. It may be a monograph or a compilation thesis consisting of several constituent studies.

As the defence is a public event, the audience is normally made up of a mixture of colleagues, researchers, students, friends and family of the author.

The thesis is sent to the opponent, examining committee, and the defence chairperson no later than three weeks prior to the day of the defence. The opponent and the author of the thesis should not discuss its content nor possible points for discussion beforehand. The opponent may, if he or she so wishes, contact the author in order to obtain the thesis (e.g. as proof copy) in advance.

2 Participants

Opponent – (Sw. opponent) the person appointed to review and publicly discuss the doctoral thesis. The task of the opponent is to scrutinize the scholarly work presented in the thesis and the publications included therein, not to examine or test the author's knowledge. The respondent has already been examined on his/her knowledge of the subject in connection with compulsory courses during the research studies.

PhD candidate/author of the thesis – (Sw. forskarstuderande/respondent) the PhD student defending the thesis.

Defence chairperson – (Sw. disputationensordförande) is responsible for the public defence being carried through and is charged with opening and closing the event

Supervisor (Principal supervisor) – (Sw. handledare [huvudhandledare])

Examining committee – (Sw. betygsnämnd) consists of three persons appointed by the University (faculty board) and is charged with determining whether the oral presentation and the defence, in addition to the written thesis, are of a satisfactory scholarly standard. The examining committee determines the grade, either pass or fail, by voting.

Examination committee deputy member – (Sw. suppleant i betygsnämnden) In addition to the regular three members, one deputy member is also appointed that can replace any member of the committee in case of impediment. The deputy member is included on equal terms with the regular members in the preparation process as well as the actual defence (but not in the decision of the examination committee).

Chair of the examining committee – (Sw. betygsnämndens ordförande) one of the members of the examining committee is appointed as chair.

3 The public defence procedure

The public defence of a doctoral thesis at the University should be carried out in accordance with the following procedure.

- The defence chairperson opens the event and welcomes those present. The author of the thesis, as well as the thesis title, the opponent and the members of the examining committee are introduced. The chair accounts for the sequence of events during the defence.
- The author of the thesis is given the opportunity to account for and comment on any corrections to and misprints in the thesis.
- The content of the thesis is presented. This part usually takes 15-45 minutes and can be done according to two alternatives:

Alternative I: The defence chairperson gives the floor to the opponent, who offers a summary and his/her own interpretation of the content of the thesis and also places it in relation to other research in the field. The author then gives the opportunity to comment on the summary.

Alternative II: The chair of the defence gives the floor to the author who presents the thesis and its scientific contributions.

- A discussion then opens between the opponent and the author in which the opponent presents any queries and comments concerning method and findings. The author of the thesis is expected to offer clear answers to the opponent's questions and gives him/her the opportunity to show his/her expected knowledge and ability to discuss the results. This is the key part of the public defence as the author's ability to answer the questions is part of the examining. During this part of the defence no listeners are allowed to take part in the discussion.
- The debate is then opened to the members of the examining committee who may ask questions following the order determined by the chair.
- Then the debate is opened to the audience. The author of the thesis shall be given the opportunity to respond to every contribution to the discussion.
- The chair thanks all those taking part and declares the public defence closed.

Following the public defence, the examining committee convenes and determines the grade.

4 The task of the opponent

Before the public defence, the opponent

- shall critically review the entire thesis and prepare his/her public discussion contributions,
- is obliged to report any suspicion of scholarly misconduct to the Registrar's Office (*Sw. registrator*) at the University, and
- is obliged to report any circumstances constituting disqualification as opponent. See information on disqualification in Enclosure 1.

During the public defence, the opponent

- shall, in addition to the tasks mentioned in the information above, carry out the public discussion which entails emphasizing core findings, critically discussing the thesis, and discussing its content with the author.

5 The task of the examining committee

Before the public defence, the members of the examining committee

- are obliged to report any suspicion on scholarly misconduct to the Registrar's Office at the University, and
- are obliged to report any circumstances constituting disqualification as member of the examining committee. See information on disqualification in Enclosure 1.

After the public defence, the examining committee

- convenes and appoints, from among themselves, a chair (please note that this should be one of the three members). The opponent is entitled to attend the meeting and take part in the discussions, but he or she is not allowed to take part in determining the grade. This also applies to the principal supervisor and the primary supervisor and one of them is obliged to attend. Assistant supervisors may attend. No other persons are permitted to attend the examining committee meeting.
- shall determine the grade of the thesis. The opinion shared by the majority of the committee members shall constitute the decision. When determining the grade, the content of the thesis, as well as the author's defence of the thesis, shall be considered. Either of the grades pass or fail shall be determined.

The reasons for the decision to pass should not be stated in the minutes of the meeting, neither if a single member enters a reservation against the decision. If the thesis is rejected the reasons for the decision should be explained and also if a single member enters a reservation against this decision. If the thesis is rejected it is possible for the main supervisor to submit a separate opinion.

- fills in and signs the minutes form of the examining committee meeting. The grade is normally announced directly following the committee meeting.

6 The task of the defence chairperson

During the public defence the defence chairperson

- conducts the public defence
- is responsible for the public defence being carried through properly. He or she should also check that everything is in place when the public defence begins. If the opponent or an examining committee member is delayed the defence chairperson should determine if the public defence can be carried through later on the same day or ensure that the deputy member replaces any member of the committee.
- gives the examination committee members the opportunity to ask questions.
- gives the audiences the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the thesis.
- thanks the participants and concludes the public defence.

After the public defence the defence chairperson should

- deliver the minutes form to the examining committee.
- ensure that the examining committee assembles and designate a chairman.
- ensure that the minutes form of the examining committee meeting is fully completed and signed.
- receive the signed minutes form of the examining committee meeting and submit it to the Registrar's Office for dispatching and archiving.

7 General information

Questions concerning the procedure of or the venue for the defence should be addressed to the defence chairperson or to the principal supervisor.

Please notify your contact at the University of any requirements of a practical nature or regarding technical equipment well in advance.

No formal dress is required. Should your university use academic dress you are welcome to wear that, otherwise it is common for the opponent to wear a suit or a dress/suit.

Please do not hesitate to contact the defence chairperson with queries regarding the procedures for or the arrangements surrounding the event.

Partiality

The issue of partiality applies to relationships with the respondent and the supervisors.

The opponent and the members of the examining committee shall themselves decide whether they are partial or not. Each of the persons involved, as mentioned above, is to decide whether he or she is partial in kind of relation to the respondent or the supervisors of the respondent.

The regulations regarding partiality are laid down in the Swedish Code of Statutes (1986:223, sections 11 and 12).

Circumstances that may lead to partiality are:

- Personal or economic interests in the outcome of the matter
- Family or other relationships
- Connection with private companies, associations or similar organisations that have a special interest in the outcome of the matter
- Other relationships that may cause doubt as to whether impartiality can be ensured, for example, in relation to:
 - co-authorship,
 - other close scientific or working collaboration, or
 - friendship/enmity.

Co-authorship need not automatically imply partiality. The following determine whether a person can be considered partial or not:

- the extent of co-authorship,
- the point in time, or
- the importance of the work in question in the present assessment.

If there is any doubt, the examining committee may decide to obtain a testimonial in order to evaluate the importance of co-authorship in the question of partiality.

Other close scientific or working collaboration. This does not in itself result in partiality in the evaluation of a person with whom the opponent/committee member has had professional collaboration (e.g. in the role of supervisor).

Friendship/enmity. To constitute partiality, it must be proven that there is a close friendship or a substantial degree of enmity between the parties. General work-related friendship or general scientific disagreement between the parties is not in itself grounds for partiality. This is, however, based on the requirement that the opponent/committee member takes a professional, neutral and impartial approach in regard to the respondent.

As is evident from the above, concrete steps must be taken to ensure that there is no doubt regarding the impartiality of the partners concerned.