



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

**MARK JARVIS**

MA (Carleton University, 2002)  
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**“Modernizing Public Service Accountability: Theory and Practice”**

School of Public Administration

Thursday, April 13, 2017  
11:00AM  
David Turpin Building  
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Herman Bakvis, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Cosmo Howard, School of Public Administration, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Evert Lindquist, School of Public Administration, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Michael Prince, Department of Political Science, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Lorne Sossin, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Erin Kelly, Department of English, UVic

## **Abstract**

The manner in which public servants are held to account and the purposes of accountability at the bureaucratic level is a relatively unexplored field. This dissertation is comprised of three separate studies investigating hierarchical accountability, the accounting officer system in Canada, and accountability among public servants. Together, they address critical questions: i) how can existing theory on accountability be reconciled with hierarchy and the delegation of authority; ii) the principles and practices of the accounting officer system; and iii) internal public service accountability mechanisms. This dissertation explores whether we can develop — and implement — an systematic approach to empirically investigating how accountability is practiced, as a means of advancing our theoretical and practical understanding of accountability. The three studies draw on evidence collected over a four-year period, including interviews with public servants conducted in Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands. Some of the key theoretical perspectives evaluated include an adapted version of Aucoin and Heintzman's (2000) framework on accountability and performance management and, Bovens, Schillemans and 't Hart's (2008) practices and purposes of accountability framework. The conclusions of the dissertation are threefold: first, that while overall the normative purposes of accountability as described in the frameworks (democratic control, assurance, learning and results) are, to a substantial degree, observed in practice, there are nonetheless some serious deficiencies in our understanding of the purposes of accountability; second, there is considerable variation in practices from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and, within each specific jurisdiction, specific practices are shaped to a considerable degree by the institutionalized context in which these practices are carried out; and third, an empirical approach to studying accountability practices offers a promising way to address the lack of empirical knowledge, and a way to bolster both our theoretical and practical understanding of actual accountability practices.