



School of Nursing  
University of Victoria  
PhD Program

## DISSERTATION PROPOSAL AND ORAL DEFENCE: ADVANCING TO CANDIDACY

The requirements for a doctoral student to move to candidacy are:

1. Successful completion of all required course work
2. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination
3. **Successful dissertation proposal and dissertation proposal defence**

The third and final step, the dissertation proposal and oral defence, must be successfully completed within 36 months of admission.

### Purpose

The purpose of the dissertation proposal and oral defence is to ensure that the student has selected an appropriate research topic/question/problem and developed a sound research plan.

The student is expected to demonstrate:

- Familiarity with the literature in the research area
- Familiarity with fields related to the research area
- Ability to justify the need for the proposed research
- Ability to defend the research design
- Ability to defend the methods for data collection and data analysis
- Ability to reason and integrate during the questioning

### Format

Written component: The dissertation proposal must be circulated to the examining committee **at least two weeks** before the proposal defence. The proposal can be submitted based on the following formats:

- a. Option A: Research topic/question/problem, Review of the Literature, Methodology, References, Appendices (20-30 pages)
- b. Option B: Three first chapters of the dissertation

Oral component: The student will present a synopsis of the dissertation proposal and respond to questions posed by supervisory committee members. The student may speak from notes, and use audiovisual equipment, but must not read the synopsis. Questioning will focus on the research project, and any peripheral areas that are considered relevant (see details below).

### **Process for the written component**

The student and supervisor work together to develop the dissertation proposal using one of the two formats listed above. Sufficient time should be allowed for the student to draft/revise the document(s) and for the supervisor to provide feedback. When the supervisor and student agree that the dissertation proposal is ready:

1. Send the proposal to the supervisory committee and allow at least 2 weeks to review. The supervisor and committee members must agree the proposal is ready for the oral defence. If the written component is not satisfactory, feedback should be provided to the student in order for the proposal to be revised and meet the requirements.
2. When the proposal is ready, the student will determine a date and time for the examination that works for the supervisor and committee members. Examinations can expect to last between 1.5 and 3 hours.
3. The supervisor will inform the PhD Coordinator, the Graduate Program Advisor, and the Administrative Assistant (Graduate Programs) of the date and time for the defence.
4. The dissertation supervisor is responsible for booking a room or, working with the Administrative Assistant (Graduate Programs), to organize videoconferencing.
5. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that all necessary documentation and paperwork are completed prior to the examination.

### **Process of oral component**

1. The student presents the proposal during a presentation (20 minutes maximum).
2. There are typically two rounds of questioning that begin with the committee member outside of the School (the dissertation supervisor should be the last to question the student).
3. After the questioning period, the dissertation supervisor will request that the student leave the room or videoconference.
4. The dissertation supervisor will call for an in-camera discussion for the committee to make recommendations with respect to the proposal itself and to defence (pass or fail).
5. The dissertation supervisor will recall the student to the room and inform them of the outcome of the defence.
6. At the end of the proceedings the Supervisor will complete and submit the [PhD Candidacy Examination Report](#). This report must be signed by the Supervisor, all committee members, the Associate Director Graduate Education, and the Director of the School of Nursing. The PhD Candidacy Examination Report must be submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies no later than 10 working days after the defence. It is the responsibility of the Supervisor to ensure that the report is signed and submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

*Note: The proposal defence is closed and not open to other faculty, students or the public.*

### **Examination committee**

The examination committee is comprised of the dissertation Supervisor and committee members. The dissertation supervisor will chair the candidacy exam, which includes:

- Opening and closing the examination proceedings
- Intervening if questioning becomes inappropriate
- Moderating the *in camera* discussion on the merit of the student's performance (see below Assessment of Student's Performance).

In addition, the role of the supervisor and committee members is to:

- Ask substantive questions of the student
- Seek clarification of points not adequately covered

### **Assessment**

Assessment of the dissertation defence is made based on a Pass or Fail basis, according to a majority decision by the committee. The student must demonstrate competence in meeting the criteria outlined above (see purpose). If a student fails, the committee reserves the option to offer the student an opportunity to repeat the oral exam within three months. A second failure would result in the student's withdrawal from the doctoral program.