

Faculty of Graduate Studies

Guidelines for the Appointment of External Examiners of Doctoral Candidates

The UVic Graduate Calendar, approved by the Senate, governs all academic activities at the University of Victoria. In the section “Composition of Final Oral Examining Committees: Doctoral degrees” it defines an examining committee as “The supervisory committee plus a Chair and at least one other examiner from outside the University. Such external examiners are appointed by the Dean of Graduate Studies in consultation with the academic unit(s), and must be arm’s-length authorities in the field of research being examined.”

These guidelines are intended to assist in choosing an expert authority to recommend for the role of external examiner. The main purpose is to guide you in choosing a well-qualified external examiner to recommend for appointment and to alert you to some of the most common reasons why a recommendation might be turned back by the dean.

The role of the external examiner in a final oral examination is to provide an expert evaluation of the merits of a student’s work and to do so as freely as possible of the appearance of any kind of bias which might predispose any particular outcome. Normally an external examiner of a doctoral degree will have achieved a doctorate or equivalent relevant credential and have significant research and graduate supervisory experience. It is also important that, although those who know the individuals involved may be entirely certain that bias is not an issue, those who do not know the individuals should also be fully confident that present or past relationships will not create a propensity to either favour or disfavour a student. Evaluations by expert external examiners which meets these standards do the greatest service to the reputations of our students and our university. Below are a number of questions that you may find useful to keep in mind when you are nominating an external examiner. Exceptional circumstances should be brought to the attention of the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies in a memo accompanying your recommendation.

The most frequent sources of concern are when a proposed external examiner’s area of expertise may not be closely aligned with the student’s research, when a proposed external examiner may lack significant depth in either research or graduate student supervision experience, and when there is some kind of pre-existing relationship between either the student or the supervisor and the proposed external examiner which could result in a reasonable *apprehension* of a conflict of interest.¹ While it is important to guard against any reasonable *apprehension of bias* it is also important to bear in mind that a reasonable apprehension of bias does not mean that a person is, in fact, biased. However, due diligence requires that *apprehensions of bias* be avoided whenever possible.

1. Does the proposed external examiner have a doctorate or equivalent relevant credential?
2. If not, has the proposed external examiner achieved a record of accomplishment which can be seen to be equivalent to a doctoral degree?
3. Is the proposed external examiner a recognized expert in an area of study relevant to the dissertation being examined?
4. Is there a current or recent family or close personal relationship between the proposed external examiner and the student or any of the committee members?
5. Has the proposed external examiner recently been, or expect to soon become, employed by the department?
6. Has the proposed external examiner ever been in a supervisory relationship with the student or the supervisor?
7. Is there a current or recent active close collaborative research relationship between the proposed external examiner and the student or the supervisor?
8. Have the student or supervisor recently been in, or expect to soon enter into, an business, employment, or research relationship with the proposed external examiner?

¹ Conflict of Interest guidelines from NSERC & SSHRC are attached for your information.

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Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council Guidelines

http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Politiques-Politiques/MOURoles-ProtocolRoles/14-Conflict-Conflits_eng.asp

Schedule 14: Conflicts of Interest in Research

1. Objective

Agencies and Institutions have an interest in ensuring that the conduct of research is not compromised by real or perceived Conflicts of Interest (COI)....

1.1 Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest (COI) may arise when activities or situations place a person or Institution in a real, perceived or potential conflict between their duties or responsibilities related to research and their personal, Institutional or other interests. Conflict of Interest may occur when individuals' or Institutions' judgments and actions in relation to research are, or could be, affected by personal, Institutional or other interests, including, but not limited to, business, commercial or financial interests, whether of individuals, their family members, their friends, or their former, current or prospective professional associations – or of the Institution itself.

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council Guidelines

http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/peer_review-evaluation_paires/peer-pairs/conflicts-conflits-eng.aspx

Managing Conflicts of Interest

SSHRC recognizes that real or perceived conflicts of interest can and do arise in the adjudication of grant and fellowship applications. SSHRC's position is that these situations must be managed in an open and transparent manner. Committee members are responsible for identifying and addressing real or apparent conflicts of interest in order to maintain the community's confidence and trust.

Except in the case of SSHRC's programs of support for scholarly journals, a committee member is considered to be in a conflict of interest *vis-à-vis* an application if it is from a team that includes:

- a close friend;
- a relative;
- a research collaborator;
- an institutional colleague;
- a former thesis supervisor or mentor;
- a student previously under the member's supervision;
- a person with whom the member is involved in a dispute; and
- a person with whom the member is involved in a partnership.

In the Major Collaborative Research Initiatives program, a committee member is also considered to be in a conflict of interest situation regarding an application if the project director is from the same university as the committee member.

In the Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada program, a committee member is considered to be in a conflict of interest situation if she or he has been invited to participate in the conference or workshop as a speaker.

In the Doctoral Awards and Postdoctoral Fellowships programs, a committee member is also considered to be in a conflict of interest situation *vis-à-vis* an application if it is from:

- a student whom he or she is supervising or has supervised; or
- a student for whom he or she has written a letter of appraisal.