



Special Instructions for the Conduct of Master's Thesis and Ph.D. Dissertation Defenses

During the UMBC COVID-19 Status of UMBC is open, with employees working remotely and facilities remain closed.

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This document is a REVISED version of the draft document distributed to campus on March 16, 2020.

While UMBC is the status of mandatory remote operations due to the COVID-19 virus, which may last for two or more weeks, **the Graduate School authorizes that all final examination defenses for Master's Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations may take place remotely, using synchronous, electronic access technology.** In other words, "fully virtual" defenses for all Committee members and the student, will be allowed, without express approval of the Associate Dean.

The Graduate School's Policy on Remote Participation of Committee Members requires that participation of all committee members, and the student, must take place using a *synchronous* form of communication – meaning that the student and committee members can see and hear each other. The student must also ensure that each remote participant has access to the thesis or dissertation and the presentation.

UMBC's DoIT is recommending that all Examination Committees use the Webex platform, which is now accessible through Google Calendar, and supported by UMBC. Detailed instructions for accessing, downloading and operating Webex can be found at <https://wiki.umbc.edu/display/faq/Webex>. The Graduate School recommends that the Committee Chair be responsible for setting up and leading the Webex meeting. For the purposes of ensuring connectivity for all participants, the Chair (as Host) may wish to conduct a short dry run prior to the defense (i.e. a brief check-in of all participants). The student may wish to make sure he/she can take desktop control (as Presenter), in order to present the slides. Note that Webex provides a "record" feature if would be helpful to have for future uses and sharing with others.

The public portion of the defense should still be held, to meet the requirement that the public should be given an opportunity to ask questions. Public participants may opt to use the "dial in" option. When the public portion ends, the meeting leader can dismiss anyone who will not be part of the closed portion of the defense.

The Graduate School is making available **DocuSign forms for the Certification of Readiness to Defend forms for Master's and Ph.D. students.** These forms *must* be submitted no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. *It is important to note that the student must initiate the form by filling out the needed information, including the names of all committee members.* Once this is done, the form will be sent to the committee signatories. After the last committee member signs the form, the form will be automatically routed to the Graduate School for processing. The DocuSign forms are available [here](#).

Following receipt of the completed DocuSign forms, the Graduate School will send a signable electronic (.pdf) version of the Dean's Representative packet to the Dean's Representative and the GPC. We are using Adobe Sign that does not require any special software or setup by the committee members. At the end of the examination, the Dean's Representative will complete the outcome section of the Exam Report and electronically sign the document. The Exam Report will automatically be sent by email to each committee member listed on the document. After all committee members have signed the Exam Report, it will automatically be routed to Patricia Windborn or Nicole Mooney. All committee members will receive a copy of the signed Exam Report as well. *There is no need to email the report nor to send a paper copy to the Graduate School.*

While UMBC is closed, **the Graduate School will NOT accept any late Committee Nomination Forms, or Readiness to Defend Forms, for the Spring 2020 term. No exceptions will be considered.**

As a reminder, in order for a Final Examination to be legal, all Committee members as listed on the Nomination Form, must be present. Dean's Representatives are expected to enforce this rule. Dean's Representatives should regularly monitor remote participant connectivity throughout the defense.

Committees may choose to exercise this fully virtual option even while campus is open AND facilities are open, but classes remain online. However, the PREFERRED method is an in-person defense. Department Chairs, GPDs and Committee Chairs should exercise their best judgment in terms of the size of the allowed public gathering – given expected attendance and room size. The ROOM DENSITY of participants is a key factor, and it is critical that everyone be able to maintain recommended social distancing.

Questions regarding defenses can be directed to the Associate Dean, Jeffrey Halverson (jeffhalv@umbc.edu).