

Exam/Defense Moderators

The function of the moderator is to ensure that qualifying exams and thesis/dissertation defenses are administered in accordance with the policies and procedures of the School of Marine Science.

The moderator presides over exams and defenses, ensuring that legitimate questions are asked of the student, that the exam/defense is not simply pro forma, and that there is fairness and evenness in the exams.

Qualifying Exam Guidelines

Introduction. The major advisor usually introduces each committee member and the moderator. After introductions, the moderator explains the structure (ground rules) of the exam to the student and committee. The student is then excused from the room and the moderator facilitates a brief discussion among committee members regarding the student's prospectus. It is expected that if a committee member has severe reservations about the prospectus that they will have contacted the student and major advisor well in advance of the exam. However, if major differences exist among committee members regarding the proposed research, the moderator will attempt to facilitate a consensus decision prior to the student's presentation.

Student Presentation. The student provides a 20 minute discussion of the proposed research. During the presentation the committee should refrain from asking questions except for points of clarification. The moderator notifies the student of the time at 20 minutes and does not let the presentation exceed 30 minutes.

Questioning. It is the moderator's responsibility to maintain an exam atmosphere. Usually there are two rounds of questioning, with each committee member having the floor for 5 to 10 minutes during each round. Questions in the first round are typically related directly to the proposed research while those of the second round are broader in scope, including general knowledge of marine science, particularly as it relates to the student's area of speciality. Questioning often starts with a committee member from the School of Marine Science, with the outside committee member and major advisor ending the questioning in each round. It is permissible for a committee member to build on another's line of questioning during that individual's turn providing it is acceptable to the committee. The moderator should ensure that the student (and not a committee member) answers each question. Committee members will have an opportunity for discussion after the exam. If necessary, the moderator may call for an intermission during the course of questioning to provide the student or committee an opportunity to regroup.

Deliberation. Once the questioning has been completed, the moderator asks the student to leave the room and requests the committee members to refrain from speaking. The moderator then passes out a ballot to each committee member for a straw poll of the student's performance on the exam. This pass/not-pass vote is non-binding and simply provides a starting point for discussions of the student's performance. The moderator facilitates discussions towards a consensus decision. Once a decision has been reached, it is the major advisor's prerogative to recall the student and explain the outcome of the exam.

One negative vote is sufficient for a conditional pass. Two negative votes constitute a no-pass. A conditional pass generally means that the student is required to do additional reading, perhaps take a course, followed by a discussion or oral exam with one or more committee members. If the student does not pass the qualifying exam they must retake the exam within six months. A no-pass on the second exam is grounds for dismissal from the program. In cases of conditional passes or no-passes, it is the moderator's responsibility to notify the Dean of Graduate Students of the outcome as soon as possible following the termination of the exam.

Thesis/Dissertation Defense Guidelines

The thesis/dissertation defense begins with a public seminar presented by the candidate. It is the major advisor's prerogative to introduce the candidate at the public presentation, but the moderator is expected to preside over all other aspects of the oral presentation and defense. This includes oversight of questions from the floor following the oral presentation and the defense itself. Committee members should be encouraged not to monopolize the public questioning session following the seminar as they will have opportunities for detailed questioning of the candidate during the defense.

In general the thesis or dissertation defense is similar in structure to the prospectus defense with the obvious difference that the candidate has already presented a seminar. Prior to questioning the moderator should confer with the committee in the candidate's absence to determine if there are any major reservations concerning the thesis or dissertation. It is expected that if a committee member has severe reservations regarding the thesis or dissertation they will have contacted the student and major advisor well in advance of the defense. If differences exist among committee members regarding a specific criticism, the moderator should attempt to facilitate a consensus decision prior to questioning.

Questioning of the candidate typically proceeds in two rounds with the first round of questions directed at specific comments on the thesis or dissertation and the second round being more general in nature. Following questioning the candidate is excused from the room and the moderator passes out a ballot to each committee member for a straw poll of the candidate's performance on the defense. This pass/not pass vote is non-binding and provides a starting point for a discussion of the candidate's performance. The moderator facilitates a consensus decision of the committee. Corrective actions may include significant revisions to the thesis/dissertation with subsequent committee review, or in some cases, further research. Once a decision has been reached by the committee it is the major advisor's prerogative to recall the candidate and explain the outcome of the exam.

—adopted unanimously by the Academic Council, 10/18/99.