

**Until further notice, the following interim guidelines will be in effect for student exams and thesis or dissertation defenses. (approved by Academic Council and Linda C. Schaffner, Associate Dean of Academic Studies on March 18, 2020; updated on April 7, 2020)**

**Qualifying Exam Guidelines from Catalog (for reference; use interim guidelines, below, until further notice):** [http://catalog.wm.edu/content.php?catoid=20&navoid=3424#qualifying\\_exam](http://catalog.wm.edu/content.php?catoid=20&navoid=3424#qualifying_exam)

**Qualifying Examination and Prospectus Defense:** The qualifying examination and prospectus defense gauge a student's progress early in his/her research program. The qualifying examination milestone is 18 months for a M.S. student and 30 months for a Ph.D. student. The exam must be completed within 6 or 12 months of the milestone date for M.S. and Ph.D. students, respectively. A student who fails to meet the milestone in the timeframe specified will be placed on academic probation. A student on academic probation will have one calendar year to satisfy any outstanding deficiencies. Failure to do so will result in automatic termination of the student's degree program.

The qualifying examination is an oral exam designed to test a student's scientific competence and ability to pursue the research project. The exam consists of two components: (1) questions that address knowledge specific to the proposed research project and (2) questions concerning the general knowledge in the student's field of study. The qualifying examination will be administered by the student's advisory committee and chaired by a Moderator, who is not a member of the student's advisory committee. The moderator must be identified at least three weeks prior to the examination. Until further notice, the student, advisor, members of the committee and the moderator will participate remotely via Zoom web conferencing. Students must electronically file appropriate paperwork for the scheduling and announcement of the qualifying examination with the Office of Academic Studies following the guidelines distributed in the email sent to students on March 16, 2020 by Associate Dean of Academic Studies (ADAS)<sup>1</sup>. ADAS approval for remote participation is not required at this time.

Consistent with SMS procedures, the examination will be advertised and open to all faculty members via Zoom. Faculty members who are not on the student's committee are not allowed to ask questions during the exam. Faculty will be notified that they must contact Jen Hay for the link to the meeting should they wish to attend. The examination allows a student's advisory committee to identify any deficiencies in a student's preparation to successfully conduct and complete the degree program. The minimum elapsed time between successful completion of the qualifying examination and the final defense must be no less than six months for M.S. students and no less than one year for Ph.D. students. SMS policy prohibits audio or video recording of exams, although exceptions may be made for students with documented disabilities.

The prospectus is a formal written presentation of the proposed research. Its purpose is to present the rationale for selection of the hypotheses and methodology to be used in testing the hypotheses. It must include a problem statement, review of current literature in the area of study, and a detailed plan of study, as well as a summary of preliminary research conducted by the student. The prospectus must

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<sup>1</sup> Virtually all of the School of Marine Science forms can be digitally signed and submitted electronically. Please remember that Adobe is the preferred platform and digital (e-signatures) are preferred when forms can be routed electronically to committee members. If you cannot e-sign the form, scanned forms with handwritten signatures will also be accepted. If you do not have immediate access to a scanner, you may initially submit a photo of your signed form via email but a scan or hard copy of the original form should be submitted as a follow up action. Please submit all forms directly to [registrar@vims.edu](mailto:registrar@vims.edu). We urge you to keep copies of all forms for your own records.

also provide a detailed rationale for the proposed work, clearly stated objectives, and testable hypothesis(es) when appropriate, consistent with the problem statement, and a description of research design, field and laboratory studies, methods and data analysis intended to test the hypothesis. The prospectus must be formally approved by the committee via signing the "Prospectus Acceptance Form". Form submission is by the Moderator and follows the guidelines given above. The Advisor and Committee members will be participating remotely and will sign digitally or give the qualifying exam moderator the authority to sign the form.

**Thesis Defense Guidelines from Catalog (for reference; use interim guidelines, below, until further notice):** <http://catalog.wm.edu/content.php?catoid=20&navoid=3424#defense>

**Seminar Presentation and Defense of Thesis or Dissertation:** The defense of a thesis or dissertation will consist of two parts. First, all students are required to present a seminar to the marine science faculty, staff and students on their thesis or dissertation research. The seminar will be advertised and open to any interested individuals. Bob Polley (VIMS ITNS) created a single Zoom link for online delivery of public seminars. The link will be distributed to the VIMS community by Academic Studies via the Academic Digest and via VIMS-Business. See attachment for connection and other information from Bob Polley regarding preparation for the public seminar.

Second, immediately following the seminar, the student will undergo an oral examination, the defense of his or her thesis or dissertation, by the student's Advisory Committee. The defense will be chaired and administered by a Moderator, who is not a member of the student's committee. Until further notice, the student, advisor, members of the committee and the moderator will participate remotely via Zoom web conferencing. ADAS approval for remote participation is not required at this time. SMS policy prohibits audio or video recording of exams and defenses, although exceptions may be made for students with documented disabilities.

At the conclusion of the defense, the student's Advisory Committee will vote on a pass/fail decision, and indicate this on the "Thesis/Dissertation Defense Acceptance Form." Form submission is by the Moderator and follows the guidelines given above. The Advisor and Committee members will be participating remotely and will sign digitally or give the defense moderator the authority to sign the form.

Unanimous committee approval is necessary for satisfactory completion of both a student's thesis or dissertation defense and the final version of the thesis or dissertation. Following the student's defense, the SMS Registrar will initiate the "Thesis or Dissertation Final Acceptance Form" and send it electronically via DocuSign to the committee in the routing order established by the moderator at the student's defense. Typical routing is as follows: #1-3) individual committee members, #4) co-advisor, if applicable, #5) major advisor, #6) student, and #7) SMS Registrar. After each person signs the form, DocuSign will send the form automatically to the next person in the routing order. After all signatures have been received and the form is complete, all signers will receive a final PDF copy of the form via email. If you have questions about the form or routing, please contact the SMS Registrar.

## **Interim Guidance for Public Seminars for Thesis and Dissertation Defenses**

Bob Polley will use the Zoom platform to run the public seminar. Contact him via email to confirm the date and time of your seminar and to let him know if you need auxiliary equipment. He has a camera/microphone combo or a headset with a microphone available if you need them.

All seminars will be conducted using the same Zoom link/invitation given below. Academic Studies will include the link in the seminar and defense announcement and the seminar will be open to all who have the link, including family and friends. The seminar will be recorded at the student's request.

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: This is a recurring webinar

Topic: VIMS Defense Seminar

**Please click the link below to join the webinar:**

<https://cwm.zoom.us/j/219220498>

**Password: 5990**

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +13126266799,,219220498# or  
+16465588656,,219220498# Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 558 8656 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 253 215  
8782 or +1 301 715 8592

Webinar ID: 219 220 498

International numbers available: <https://cwm.zoom.us/j/219220498>