

Until further notice, the following interim guidelines for Moderators 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)

Exam/Defense Moderator Guidelines

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 attends and 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.

Each department should select at least two of their Associate Professors or Full Professors to serve as moderators, for three – year terms. Additionally, the ADAS (Associate Dean of Academic Sciences) and the Chair of the AC (Academic Council) will serve as substitute moderators.

Qualifying Exam Guidelines

This interim guidance document summarizes the moderator’s role during each portion of the Qualifying Exam. Interim Guidelines for the exam are attached.

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)¹. ADAS approval for remote participation is not required at this time.

Prior to the exam.

About one week prior to the exam, the moderator is advised to email the committee and confirm that there are no reservations with going forward with the exam.

As early as possible, but at least one week before the exam, the moderator will schedule Zoom for the exam, send the information to participants and check to make sure that advisor, student, committee members and moderator have the link and know how to connect. The moderator will copy Jen Hay on the email with the Zoom meeting information they send to the participants. To minimize connection issues that might disrupt the continuity of the exam, moderators will strongly encourage all participants to install the Zoom app. It is important to test connectivity in advance of the exam as some desktops do not have cameras and microphones and speaker settings can mute sound transmission. For those who have not used Zoom before, the first step is to download a small software interface. Once the app is downloaded, the meeting link provided in the invitation should work, or the participant can paste the Meeting ID number in the “join a meeting” box on the screen, and select “computer” for the audio

¹ 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. We urge you to keep copies of all forms for your own records.

option. The option to use a phone for the audio connection may be used if it is the only way to keep a committee member connected. Additional instructions for using Zoom are provided here: <https://www.wm.edu/offices/it/services/videoconferencing/zoom/index.php>

The student should conduct a Zoom practice session with the advisor in advance of the exam. As a backup, the student should send the moderator a copy of the presentation in advance.

Introduction and closed-door committee meeting.

The major advisor usually introduces each committee member and the moderator. After introductions by the major advisor, the moderator explains the structure (ground rules) of the exam to the student and committee. After the student is excused from the room using a mechanism determined by the moderator², 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 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.

The Moderator will attempt to identify any issues and facilitate committee resolution in advance of the exam.

Student Presentation. The student provides a twenty-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 twenty minutes and does not let the presentation exceed thirty minutes. Additionally, the committee may need to be reminded that they should refrain from asking questions during the presentation, except for points of clarification.

Questioning. It is the moderator's responsibility to maintain an exam atmosphere and lead rounds of questioning. 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 specialty. 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 conducts a straw poll of the student's performance on the exam. The advisor and committee members may use the Zoom chat box or e-mail to send a vote directly to the moderator.

² The preferred way to accomplish this is through the use of a Zoom breakout room. The breakout room functionality is activated within the Zoom app, under Settings>Meetings. You can preassign the student to the breakout room, or manually move them during the meeting. When the feature is enabled, a breakout room control option appears at the bottom of the active screen that allows you to move the student in and out of the breakout room during the meeting.

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. In the event that the committee does not unanimously pass the student, the moderator should refer the committee to the Qualifying Exam Guidelines so that they can determine whether the exam warrants a "conditional pass" or a "no-pass".

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 Associate Dean of Academic Studies of the outcome as soon as possible following the termination of the exam.

The student is reconnected to the meeting.

The moderator should record the outcome of the deliberation on the "Qualifying Examination Grade Form", and have the advisor(s) and committee sign the form. The committee may also choose to sign the "Prospectus Acceptance Form" at this time. Committee members participating remotely will sign the forms digitally or give the moderator the authority to sign the forms.

Thesis/Dissertation Defense Guidelines

This interim guidance document summarizes the moderator's role during each portion of the M.S. Thesis or Ph.D. Dissertation Defense. Interim guidelines for the Thesis / Dissertation Defense (approved March 18, 2020) are attached.

Until further notice, the student, advisor, all 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 seminar presentation and defense 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)³. ADAS approval for remote participation is not required at this time.

Prior to the defense.

About one week prior to the defense, the moderator is advised to email the committee and confirm that there are no reservations with going forward with the defense.

As early as possible, the moderator will schedule Zoom for the defense only, send the information to all participants and then check to make sure that advisor, student, committee members and moderator

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have the link and know how to connect. The moderator will also copy Jen Hay on the email with the instructions that are being sent to the participants. To minimize connection issues that might disrupt the continuity of the exam, moderators will strongly encourage all participants to install the Zoom app. It is important to test connectivity in advance of the exam because some desktops do not have cameras and microphones and speaker settings can mute sound transmission. For those who have not used Zoom before, the first step is to download a small software interface. Once the app is downloaded, the meeting link provided in the invitation should work, or the participant can paste the Meeting ID number in the “join a meeting” box on the screen, and select “computer” for the audio option. The option to use a phone for the audio connection may be used if it is the only way to keep a committee member connected. Additional instructions for using Zoom are provided here: <https://www.wm.edu/offices/it/services/videoconferencing/zoom/index.php>. Jen Hay provide the link to other faculty who wish to attend the defense.

Bob Polley has created a single Zoom link for all students to use for the public seminar. The instructions for using the seminar link are in the interim defense guidelines document.

Public presentation: 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 attend and preside over all other aspects of the oral presentation and defense. This includes oversight of questions from seminar participants following the oral presentation and the defense itself. Bob Polley will be running the seminar using Zoom and will facilitate the connectivity of those who want to ask questions. 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.

Seminar – students will use the public seminar link provided by Bob Polley as explained in the thesis and defense guidelines for students.

Defense: Following the public presentation, the Moderator and Committee reconvene for a closed-door thesis or dissertation defense, which includes a closed-door committee meeting, two rounds of questioning, and deliberations. The Moderator presides over these, as outlined below.

Introduction and closed-door committee meeting. Upon reconvening, the moderator explains the structure (ground rules) of the defense to the student and committee. While the student is excused from the room (using a Zoom breakout room⁴ or other option), the moderator facilitates a brief discussion among committee members regarding the student’s thesis or dissertation. 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.

The moderator will then ensure that the student is connected for the defense.

⁴ The preferred way to accomplish this is through the use of a Zoom breakout room. The breakout room functionality is activated within the Zoom app, under Settings>Meetings. You can preassign the student to the breakout room, or manually move them during the meeting. When the feature is enabled, a breakout room control option appears at the bottom of the active screen that allows you to move the student in and out of the breakout room during the meeting.

Defense Questioning: It is the moderator's responsibility to maintain an exam atmosphere and lead the two rounds of questioning. The moderator should ensure that the student (and not a committee member) answers each question. 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. It is recommended that the student be moved to a breakout room.

The advisor and committee members may use the Zoom chat box or e-mail to send a vote directly to the moderator. This pass/not-pass vote is non-binding and simply provides a starting point for discussions of the student'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 the committee has reached a decision, it is the major advisor's prerogative to recall the candidate and explain the outcome of the exam.

The student is reconnected to the meeting.

The moderator should record the outcome of the deliberation on the "Defense Acceptance Form", and have the advisor(s) and committee sign the form. Committee members participating remotely can give the moderator the authority to sign this form, or sign it digitally.

At the defense, the moderator should also determine the proper routing order for the "Thesis or Dissertation Final Acceptance Form". The SMS Registrar will initiate this form after the defense 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.

—adopted unanimously by the Academic Council, 10/18/99; Revised December, 2016; interim guidelines adopted by Academic Council and approved by Associate Dean of Academic Studies on March 18, 2020