

Exam/Defense Moderator Guidelines (edited by C. Harris on December 16, 2016)

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 summarizes the moderator's role during each portion of the Qualifying Exam. Guidelines for the Qualifying Exam can be found <here>.

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.

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. While the student is excused from the room, 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 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 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. 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 Dean of Graduate Students of the outcome as soon as possible following the termination of the exam.

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 can sign them digitally or give the moderator the authority to sign these forms.

Thesis/Dissertation Defense Guidelines

This summarizes the moderator's role during each portion of the M.S. Thesis or Ph.D. Dissertation Defense. Guidelines for the Thesis / Dissertation Defense can be found <here>.

Prior to the exam.

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.

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 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.

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 exam to the student and committee. While the student is excused from the room, 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.

Following this, the moderator will call the student back into the room.

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: Following questioning the candidate is excused from the room. The moderator will oversee evaluation of student performance on the exam during this closed-door committee meeting.

The moderator then 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 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 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. The committee may also wish to sign the "Thesis or Dissertation Final Acceptance Form" at this time, however, all committee members must sign the paper copy of this form. In the event that a committee member is unable to sign the paper copy, they can grant the ADAS (Associate Dean of Academic Studies) authority to sign for them.

—adopted unanimously by the Academic Council, 10/18/99; Revised December, 2016.

Qualifying Exam Guidelines from Catalog:

http://catalog.wm.edu/content.php?catoid=11&navoid=2003#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. It is expected that the committee members will attend in person. Should a committee member need to participate remotely, the advisor should alert the moderator and confirm that the availability of adequate means of communications, both at VIMS and at the remote location. Students must file appropriate paperwork for the scheduling and announcement of the qualifying examination with the Office of Academic Studies. The approval of the ADAS is required in the event that more than one committee member needs to participate remotely. Consistent with SMS procedures, the examination will be advertised and open to all faculty members. 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 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". Committee members participating remotely can sign it digitally or give the qualifying exam moderator the authority to sign this form.

Thesis Defense Guidelines from Catalog:

<http://catalog.wm.edu/content.php?catoid=11&navoid=2003#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.

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. It is expected that committee members will attend in person. Should a committee member need to participate remotely, however, the advisor should alert the moderator and confirm the availability of adequate means of communications, both at VIMS and at the remote location. The approval of the ADAS is required in the event that more than one committee member participates remotely. Any interested faculty members of the College are invited to attend. 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. 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. The "Thesis or Dissertation Final Acceptance Form" form must be signed by all committee members. Digital signatures are not accepted for this form. In the event that a committee member is unable to sign the paper copy, they can grant the ADAS (Associate Dean of Academic Studies) authority to sign for them.