

Procedures for Examination of the Master's Thesis

University of Maryland
Baltimore

The examination of the master's thesis is undertaken by the master's examination committee. Described here are the required composition of this committee, the process for nominating members to the committee and the procedures for conducting the master's examination.

1. Master's Examination Committee

Examination of the master's thesis is conducted by the candidate's master's examination committee. This committee comprises a minimum of three and a maximum of five voting members, all of whom must hold the doctoral degree or the highest degree for the discipline. The committee must include the candidate's thesis advisor. One or two members may be from programs separate from that of the candidate. At least three of the members of the committee must be members of the graduate faculty. One member of the committee is designated by the dean of the Graduate School as his or her representative. A curriculum vitae must accompany the nominations of any members who are not members of the graduate faculty of the University of Maryland Graduate School, Baltimore or the University of Maryland, College Park.

- **Committee Chair:** The committee chair must be a member of the graduate faculty and is normally the candidate's advisor. The chair is responsible for nominating the members of the committee to the dean of the Graduate School. In the event that a candidate's advisor is not a member of the graduate faculty, the candidate's program director is responsible for appointing a graduate faculty member from within the program to serve as the chair.

- **Graduate School Representative:** One member of the committee is designated by the dean of the Graduate School as his or her representative. The Graduate School representative must be a member of the graduate faculty who is not the committee chair. In addition to the normal responsibilities as a member of the committee, the Graduate School representative has the responsibility of ensuring that the examination is conducted according to established procedures. Any questions or disagreement over the examination procedure is referred to the Graduate School representative for a decision. Upon designation, the Graduate School representative will receive a copy of the *Rules and Procedures for Examination of the Master's Thesis*; a signed acknowledgment of receiving and understanding these rules must be returned to the dean's office.

2. Documentation Required Prior to the Master's Examination

- **Nomination of the Master's Examination Committee:** Nomination of the members of the committee must be made by the chair a minimum of two months before the proposed date of the final oral examination. Nomination is made on the *Nomination of Members for the Final Master's Examination Committee* form. The names, department affiliation and graduate faculty status of all the proposed committee members must be provided on this form. The professional affiliation, credentials and an accompanying curriculum vitae must be provided for all proposed members who are not members of the graduate faculty. The proposed date of the examination must be stated on the form. The committee must be approved and the form signed by the candidate's program director. After receiving the completed nomination form, the dean of the Graduate School appoints the committee and designates the Graduate School representative.

- **Certification of Completion of the Master's Thesis:** The chair must sign the *Certification of Completion of Master's Thesis* form and return it to the Graduate School at least two weeks (or a minimum of 10 working days) before the proposed examination date. The signature of the chair certifies that the thesis is ready to be defended. The signature of the candidate's program director is also required on this form. In the event that the chair does not consider the thesis ready to be defended, the time for the master's defense will be delayed until the necessary modifications have been made.

- **Submission of the Master's Thesis:** All members of the committee must receive a final version of the

Procedures for Examination of the Master's Thesis—Page 2

thesis two weeks (or a minimum of 10 working days) prior to the proposed examination date. This version of the thesis is the same as that which has been certified by the chair as ready to be defended.

3. Conduct of the Master's Examination

The master's examination normally comprises two components: an optional open presentation by the master's candidate and a formal examination by members of the committee.

• **Open Presentation by the Master's Thesis Candidate (Optional):** A master's examination candidate may be expected to give a presentation of his or her thesis work in an open seminar forum. The open presentation should be as close as possible to the time scheduled for the master's examination. In many cases the open presentation will immediately precede the master's examination; however, the exact timing and advertising of the presentation will be in keeping with the usual policy of the candidate's program. All members of the committee must be present at the open presentation preceding the examination. Unless otherwise specified by the committee and/or the policy of the candidate's program, this presentation is open to anyone. If a discussion period is included, any one attending the open presentation may have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate, but a reasonable time limit must be set in keeping with the usual policy of the candidate's program.

• **Formal Master's Examination Procedures:** The master's examination is open only to members of the committee and other members of the graduate faculty who wish to be present. In the examination, only committee members may ask questions of the candidate; other members of the graduate faculty present during the examination are not permitted, verbally or otherwise, to enter into the proceedings of the examination. If the open presentation serves as the examination presentation, then at its conclusion, all attending people other than members of the committee are asked to leave. The chair convenes the examination process. There are three components:

(i) An initial private discussion is held among only the members of the committee (the candidate and other graduate faculty members are asked to leave). This discussion should determine whether the document is presentable as a master's thesis and hence is defensible. If a majority of the committee agrees that the thesis is not defensible, the examination is canceled. Otherwise, the master's examination proceeds. The committee must agree on procedures for the examination, including whether a presentation may be interrupted by questions or should be complete prior to questioning. It is usual that the chair will have had prior discussion with the candidate regarding these choices in the procedures for the presentation.

(ii) The presentation by the candidate (if required) is followed by questions from the committee members (other graduate faculty members may be present but are not permitted to ask questions). If the open presentation serves as the master's examination presentation, no formal presentation from the candidate may be required and committee members may enter directly into questions of the candidate. No time limit is set for this period, but it is unreasonable that the period exceed two hours.

(iii) At the end of the examination, the candidate withdraws and the committee deliberates in private on the acceptability of the thesis and performance of the candidate. The chair asks each member for opinions and following these deliberations, the members vote on whether the candidate has passed or failed. The members sign the *Report of the Examination Committee* form and register their vote. A majority of affirmative votes constitutes a successful defense of the thesis. The signed *Report of the Examination Committee* form is returned by the Graduate School representative to the Graduate School office no later than one working day following the examination. The candidate's program director must also be provided with a copy of the report.

4. Outcome of the Examination

If the candidate fails to receive the required affirmative votes, the committee must agree on the necessary action at the time of the examination. The candidate may be failed on the acceptability of the written thesis, on the presentation, or on both. The committee may find that, in spite of the decision that the thesis document was defensible, it has defects that prevent it from being accepted. If these defects are minor in nature, the committee may vote to accept the thesis pending remedial modifications. If the defects are more serious, the committee may decide to fail the thesis and require a new examination. Alternatively, the thesis may be determined to be sound but the candidate's defense inadequate. In this case the committee must decide on a time for a new examination.

The candidate should be informed of the decision immediately. In the event that the candidate fails the

Procedures for Examination of the Master's Thesis—Page 3

examination, the Graduate School representative must report in writing, within two working days to the dean of the Graduate School that the candidate has failed, the reasons for the failure, the decisions concerning necessary remedial action and approximately when a new examination is to be held. The Graduate School representative must return the signed *Report of the Examination Committee* form with the letter. Copies of the letter must be provided to the candidate and the chair. The new examination must be within one year from the date of the first examination. The chair must notify the Graduate School of the date of the second examination so that the necessary paperwork may be sent to the Graduate School representative. The candidate's program director must be informed of all decisions and arrangements regarding the outcome of the examination. The candidate may present himself or herself for the master's examination a total of two times.