

Policy Name:	Examiner Policy		
Policy No:	NU-RES-20...	Approval Authority:	Senate
Volume:		Responsible Executive:	Graduate Studies Committee
Chapter:		Responsible Office:	School of Graduate Studies
Issue date:	May 15, 2020	Revision dates:	May 15, 2025

Policy Statement

Review of Major Research Papers (MRPs), theses, and dissertations serves as a means of quality control and peer review of important research works at the graduate level prior to the oral examination. As such, integrity in the Internal/External review process must be upheld. This policy applies to graduate level programs that require Internal/External review of MRPs, theses, and dissertations.

Reason for Policy

Nipissing University is committed to maintaining the integrity of the Internal/External review process of graduate research. As such, this policy will describe the role of the Internal/External Examiner, the minimum qualifications required of the Internal/External, and what constitutes a conflict of interest to ensure an arm's length review.

Policy Applies to

This policy applies to all units of the university with a graduate level program that requires Internal/External review of Major Research Papers, theses, and dissertations.

Who Should Read this Policy

- Deans
- Directors/Chairs
- Graduate Program Coordinators/Chair
- Faculty Members
- Staff in the Office of Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies
- Graduate students

Contacts

School of Graduate Studies: sgs@nipissingu.ca

Office of Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies: officegr@nipissingu.ca

Definitions

External Examiner: Refers to an arm's length reviewer, outside of Nipissing University, who is an expert in the graduate student's research area of the MRP/thesis/dissertation and who can render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work.

University Examiner: Refers to an arm's length reviewer, within Nipissing University but outside of the program's graduate faculty complement, who is an expert in the graduate student's research area of the MRP/thesis and who can render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work.

Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Elder, Language Speaker or Content Expert: Refers to an Indigenous person with the knowledge, lived experience, or expertise in the graduate student's research area of the MRP/thesis/dissertation and is in a position to render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work.

Internal Examiner: In PhD Dissertation Committees, the Internal Examiner refers to a Nipissing University Graduate Faculty Member who has not been involved with the supervision or direction of the dissertation and is in a position to render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work.

(Co-)Supervisor(s): Refers to the graduate student's primary MRP/thesis/dissertation advisor(s). The Supervisor (or Co-Supervisors) guides the graduate student throughout the course of the research project from conceptualization to completion, including advising on courses, assisting with research design, filing Research Ethics Board applications, etc.

Committee Member(s): Refers to faculty members that, in addition to supervisor(s), form the supervisory committee. Also called upon as examiners for thesis/dissertation oral examination. See [Supervisory Committee Policy](#).

Supervisory Committee: Refers to the Supervisor(s) and Committee Member(s) as a whole.

Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair: The Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair is an elected faculty member (as per the Nipissing University Faculty Association Collective Agreement) who assists graduate students in their programs and works with the academic administrator of Graduate Studies and the relevant Deans to ensure that graduate regulations, policies, and procedures as approved by Senate are followed.

The Policy

1. Types of External Reviewers

1.2 The External Examiner

The External Examiner is a reviewer with a full-time appointment outside of Nipissing University and with expertise in the graduate student's research area. The external examiner provides an impartial, arm's length review of Major Research Paper, theses, and dissertations.

1.3 The University Examiner (Master's level only)

The University Examiner is an arm's length reviewer, within Nipissing University but outside of the graduate program's faculty complement, who is an expert in the graduate student's research area of the MRP/thesis and is in a position to render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work. For master's level graduate programs that allow, a University Examiner can be appointed in lieu of an External Examiner. PhD dissertation reviews must be conducted by an External Examiner.

1.4 Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Elder, Language Speaker or Content Expert

For appropriate research projects, an Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Elder, Language Speaker or Content Expert can be appointed as an Examiner. They will provide review and guidance on Indigenous research, teaching, knowledge, scholarship, and practice. Such a person will be external to the University, may or may not be an academic, and will be at arm's length from the student and supervisor as defined in 4.1.

1.5 Internal Examiner (PhD level only)

In PhD Dissertation Committees, the Internal Examiner refers to a Nipissing University Graduate Faculty Member who has not been involved with the supervision or direction of the dissertation and is in a position to render an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the work. In PhD dissertation committees, there is both an Internal and an External Examiner (see [Supervisory Committee Policy](#)).

2. The Role of the Examiner

The Examiner will

- evaluate the MRP/thesis/dissertation and determine if it meets the criteria for successful work within the field of research and based on the categories outlined in the External Examiner Report form,
- complete the External Examiner Report form in full and attach further written assessments as necessary to justify their recommendations,
- recommend revisions to the work, as required,
- recommend whether the work should proceed to the Oral Examination,
- participate in the Oral Examination (virtually or in-person), ask questions of the candidate, and contribute to the discussion,
- participate in a re-review or re-examination, if required, and,
- sign the oral examination documents detailing the committee's decision for the examination outcome.

3. Qualifications of the Examiner

3.1 The Examiner must

- Hold a doctorate degree related to the candidate's field of study, or have equivalent field/work/cultural experience in the candidate's field of study. Hold a position of full, associate, assistant, or emeritus professor (or equivalent) at an academic institution, or hold a comparable position of expertise if not at an academic institution,
- In the case of an Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Elder, Language Speaker or Content Expert, hold the knowledge, lived experience, or expertise in the candidate's field of study.
- May have previous experience in the supervision and examination of graduate students.

4. Arm's Length Review

All Examiners must be at arm's length from the candidate's MRP/thesis/dissertation, the candidate, and the Supervisor(s) and must not be in potential conflict of interest with regards to the outcome of the thesis examination. There is a conflict of interest if:

- There is an administrative or familial link between the proposed Examiner and the Supervisor(s) or candidate;
- A proposed Examiner is currently directly involved in collaborative activities with the Supervisor(s) or candidate (i.e. co-investigators on a research grant);

- A proposed Examiner is a former research supervisor, postdoctoral fellow, or graduate student of the Supervisor(s) or candidate in the last three years; or
- A proposed Examiner has collaborated or published with the Supervisor(s), or candidate within the past three years; or
- A proposed Examiner is a confirmed future research supervisor or employer of the candidate; or
- The proposed Examiner is uncomfortable with reviewing the MRP/thesis/dissertation due to previous conflicts or any other reason; or
- The Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair, the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, or the Associate Vice President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies has reason to believe that a specific proposed Examiner should not be involved in the review.

4.2 Internal Examiners (PhD committees only)

The Internal Examiner serving on a PhD dissertation committee must be at arm's length from the candidate and the dissertation and must not be in potential conflict of interest with regards to the outcome of the dissertation examination. There is a conflict of interest if:

- There is a familial link between the proposed Examiner and the Supervisor(s) or candidate;
- A proposed Examiner is currently directly involved in collaborative activities with the candidate;
- A proposed Examiner is a former research supervisor or graduate student of the Supervisor(s) or candidate in the last three years; or
- A proposed Examiner has collaborated or published with the candidate within the past three years;
- A proposed Examiner is a confirmed future research supervisor or employer of the candidate; or
- The proposed Examiner is uncomfortable with reviewing the MRP/thesis/dissertation due to previous conflicts or any other reason; or
- The Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair, the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, or the Associate Vice President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies has reason to believe that a specific proposed Examiner should not be involved in the review.

4.3 If a Supervisory Committee wishes to appoint an Examiner who presents any of these conflicts or does not meet the minimum requirements noted above, the Supervisor(s) must provide a written rationale to the Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair and the School of Graduate Studies explaining:

- Why a different Examiner cannot be appointed
- That the conflict of interest will not impact the Examiner's ability to provide an impartial review of the MRP/thesis/dissertation

Based on the rationale provided, the Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair, the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, or the Associate Vice President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies will make a final decision.

Related Polices

- Supervisory Committee Policy: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/academics/school-graduate-studies/forms-procedures/supervisory-examination-committees>
- Oral Defence Examination Regulation: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/academics/school-graduate-studies/forms-procedures/defence-process>
- School of Graduate Studies Governance: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/academics/school-graduate-studies/governance>

Related Forms

- External Examiner Recommendation Form: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/sites/default/files/2025-03/Form%2010%20-%20External%20Examiner%20Recommendation%202025.pdf>
- Internal Examiner Recommendation Form: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/sites/default/files/2025-03/Form%2020%20-%20PhD%20Internal%20Examiner%20Recommendation%202025.pdf>
- External/Internal Examiner Report Form: Contact sgs@nipissingu.ca
- Oral Defence Examination Request Form: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/sites/default/files/2025-03/Form%2012%20-%20Oral%20Defence%20Examination%20Request%20Form%202025.pdf>

Procedure:	External Examination Recommendation Process		
Related Policies:	External Reviewer Policy, Oral Defence Examination Regulation, Supervisory Committee Policy	Responsible Office:	School of Graduate Studies
Effective date:		Revisions:	

Examiner Recommendation Process

1. Supervisor Contacts Potential Examiner(s)

It is the responsibility of the Supervisor(s) to contact prospective Examiners to determine if they would be willing and available during the proposed oral examination timeframe (see [Oral Defence Examination Regulation](#)) to review and evaluate the MRP/thesis/dissertation.

2. Supervisor Completes Form

Once the Supervisor(s) confirms the willingness and availability of an Examiner, the Supervisory Committee will complete the [External Examiner Recommendation form](#) and send it, along with the recommended Examiner's CV, or in the case of the Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Elder, Language Speaker or Content Expert, a statement from the Supervisory Committee supporting the choice and reasoning for selection of a particular Examiner, to the School of Graduate Studies via sgs@nipissingu.ca

3. School of Graduate Studies Obtains Remaining Approvals

The School of Graduate Studies will review the External Examiner Recommendation form and CV to verify that it meets the policy requirements. Once verified, the School of Graduate Studies will send the form and CV/statement to the Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair for approval, followed by the and Associate Vice President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies.

4. Student and Supervisory Committee Complete Oral Examination Request

Once the Supervisory Committee agrees that the MRP/thesis/dissertation is ready to proceed to the External review stage, they will complete the [Oral Examination Request form](#) and send it, along with the committee-approved MRP/thesis/dissertation to the School of Graduate Studies. SGS will obtain the remaining approvals from the Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair, followed by the and Associate Vice President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies.

5. School of Graduate Studies Sends Examiner Package

The School of Graduate Studies will send the Examiner the MRP/thesis/dissertation, the External Examiner Report form, and instructions for completing the review. The School of Graduate Studies will then work on scheduling the Oral Examination. See [Oral Defence Examination Regulation](#).

6. Other Considerations

- 6.1 If an Examiner is not approved by the Graduate Program Coordinator/Chair and/or the Associate Vice-President, Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies, then the Supervisor(s) will need to reach out to

a new Examiner and the process begins again.

- 6.2** In order to maintain the integrity of the External review process, the candidate, Supervisor(s), or Committee Members should not contact the Examiner during the review period.

7 Reports

Once the School of Graduate Studies receives the report(s) from the Examiner(s), the School of Graduate Studies will extract the “Comments for the Candidate” section and send that directly to the student candidate along with the Examiner(s) recommendation. The full report is shared with the Supervisory Committee.

8 The Oral Examination

The Examiner(s) participate in the Oral Examination either in person (if local or at their own expense) or via Zoom and will ask questions to the candidate in each round of questioning.

9 Post Oral Examination

Following the Oral Examination, the Examiner(s) will sign any documentation required (sent by the School of Graduate Studies).

10 Honorarium

Once the process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies sends the Examiner (for those External to Nipissing University only) an honorarium as a note of appreciation.