Doctoral students must defend a thesis proposal before the Proposed Supervisory Committee before entering candidacy. After a successful defence of the thesis proposal, and after all other pre-candidacy requirements are met, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) will be informed, the Supervisory Committee will be formally constituted, and the student will enter candidacy.

The Proposal and its Purpose

The Faculty of Information encourages and supports the wide range of thesis topics and methodologies appropriate to the study of information. The thesis proposal represents a formal understanding between the Proposed Supervisory Committee and the doctoral student. This agreement outlines the work to be done and the intellectual rigor the Committee expects from the student. The proposal functions as a map guiding the student towards the effective completion of the thesis project.

Constituting the Proposed Supervisory Committee

The doctoral student works closely with her or his Research Advisor in determining the composition of the Proposed Supervisory Committee and in writing the proposal.

The Elements of the Proposal

The proposal should contain detail sufficient to describe the significance, background and rationale for the thesis and the work the student will perform for the thesis.

The following list of elements is typical for a thesis proposal in Information. However, the Faculty recognizes that this list may not fit all thesis proposals and thus should be considered as illustrative only.

1) Statement of the Problem: includes the background, context in the information field and in the broader scheme of academic pursuits, key research questions, significance of the problem, and description of chosen methodology.

2) Grounding and Rationale: provides a discussion of need in the area of study which may include a comprehensive review of theoretical, conceptual, technological or methodological precedents which directly relate to the thesis topic. This section may also include a detailed analysis of the precedents that justify the need for the research, or it may review the literature that relates to the research.
3) **Research Plan:** details the methods that will be used or the processes that will be followed during the course of investigation. This section describes how the research questions posed by the thesis will be addressed and justifies the methodological approach.

The Length of the Thesis Proposal Document

The student shall consult with the Research Advisor for guidance on determining the expected length of the thesis proposal. Typically, the length of the proposal is between 5,000 and 10,000 words (not including bibliography or any appendixes, tables, and figures).

**The Defence of the Thesis Proposal**

Once the Research Advisor has determined that the proposal is ready to go forward for defence, the student, assisted by the Research Advisor schedules a date, a time, and a room for the defence of the thesis proposal. The Research Advisor submits details regarding the defence to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program.

No later than three weeks prior to the scheduled defence date, the student must submit the thesis proposal to all members of the Proposed Supervisory Committee; the Proposed Supervisory Committee shall be constituted as the voting members of a Thesis Proposal Defence Committee. The PhD Director appoints a non-voting chair of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee.

**The Process**

The thesis proposal defence proceeds as outlined below. All members of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee must be present at the exam (either in person or remotely via teleconference or skype), and a majority must be present in person. Normally, the defence will not exceed two (2) hours.

1. The Thesis Proposal Defence Committee meets initially *in camera*, without the student present.
2. The Chair invites the student to join the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee for the defence.
3. The student makes a brief (maximum 20 minutes; with visual aids, if desired) oral presentation of the key elements of the thesis proposal to the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee.
4. The voting members of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee question the student.
5. Once all questions have been asked, the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee reconvenes *in camera* for deliberations. The voting members vote for one of the following:
a. *Accept as is*: The proposal as defended is considered the final version and requires no corrections or revisions. A paper copy and PDF version of the proposal must be submitted to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program within two days.

b. *Accept with minor corrections*: Minor corrections involve typographical errors, errors in punctuation, or problems in style; they must be correctable within two weeks and approved by the Research Advisor (*see below for process to be followed*).

c. *Accept with minor revisions*: Minor revisions are more than changes in style and less than major changes in the thesis proposal. A typical example of a minor revision is clarification of the methods to be used. Minor revisions must be feasibly completed within one month (*see below for process to be followed*)

d. *Reject*: If, in the estimation of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee, the student has failed, in both the thesis proposal and oral defence, to demonstrate a depth and breadth of understanding of the proposed thesis research sufficient to enter candidacy, the thesis proposal is rejected. Following a decision to reject, the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee may decide:

   1) that a second defence be permitted after a period of additional preparation (*see below for process to be followed*); or

   2) that a second defence not be permitted. In this case, the student will be presented with an option to voluntarily withdraw from the PhD program or the student will be advised that a recommendation for termination of registration in the program will be forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies.

A recommendation for termination of registration may be appealed to the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Board as per University Appeal Policy.

Once the Committee has reached its decision, the Chair will record that decision on the *Thesis Proposal Defence Report*. Each member of the Committee will then attest to that decision by signing their names on that report. The Chair may sign on behalf of any Thesis Proposal Defence Committee members who participated, but are not present in person at the exam.

The Thesis Proposal Defence Committee must reach agreement with at most one dissenting vote. In the event that such agreement does not occur, the deliberations of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee are continued with a decision required to be made within ten days of the thesis proposal defence date.

If the Committee cannot come to a decision within ten days then the student, in consultation with the Research Advisor, may reconstitute the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee and schedule a new defence within three months of the first defence.

At the defence, the Chair of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee will inform the student verbally of the decision reached by the Committee. Following the defence, the Chair, in consultation with the members of that Committee, will prepare a written report setting out the
reasons for the decision and summarizing the corrections or revisions, if any, that are recommended. Once approved by the Committee, the report will be forwarded by the Chair to the student, the PhD Director, and the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program.

   NOTE: The written report should be completed, approved, and forwarded within three days of the defence.

Once the student has satisfied all the requirements for the Doctoral Thesis Proposal and Oral Defence, the Research Advisor completes the grade report and submits it to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program.

   NOTE: The student receives a single grade of credit or no credit (CR/NCR); this grade is recorded on the student’s academic transcript as a Departmental Exam: Thesis Proposal Defence.

Following the completion of the grade report, the student will submit to the Committee on Standing the names of the members of the student’s Supervisory Committee along with the thesis title for its approval. Once the Committee on Standing has approved the membership of the Supervisory Committee and the thesis title, the student will enter candidacy (assuming all other pre-candidacy requirements have also been met).

**Process for dealing with minor corrections**

The Research Advisor will work with the student to ensure completion of minor corrections. Minor corrections must be completed within two weeks of the date of the defence and approved by the Research Advisor.

The Research Advisor will notify the PhD Director in writing that the corrections have been made and approved and will forward a paper copy and PDF of the final proposal to the Student Services Graduate Administrator.

**Process for dealing with minor revisions**

Following the defence, the Research Advisor and at least one other member of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee will work with the student to ensure completion of the recommended revisions.

The student has one month from the date of the defence to complete the minor revisions.

Once the Supervisor and Committee member have approved the revisions, the Research Advisor will notify the PhD Director in writing that the revisions have been made and approved and will forward a paper copy and PDF of the final proposal to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program.

If the student fails to complete the recommended revisions within one month, the decision of *accept with minor revisions* will be converted to *reject* and the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee will follow the process for *reject* in d) above.
Process for dealing with a re-defence of the thesis proposal

If, in the case of a decision to reject the thesis proposal, the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee recommends that a second defence be permitted after a period of additional preparation, the process is as follows:

(1) The Research Advisor, in consultation with the members of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee, prepares a written report setting out the Committee’s requirements for a re-defence.

(2) Once the Committee has approved the report, it will be sent to the student and to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program who will place it on the student’s file.

(3) A re-defence of the thesis proposal must be held within three months of the original defence. The same requirement applies in cases where the student has had an accept with minor revisions converted to a reject, i.e., the three-month time frame is tied to the date of the original defence, not the date on which the accept with minor revisions was converted to a reject.

(4) The membership of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee for the original defence shall remain the same for the re-defence.

(5) The normal procedures for conduct of the defence and voting are to be followed.

(6) Only one re-defence of a thesis proposal is allowed. If the second defence results in another decision to reject the proposal, the student will be presented with an option to voluntarily withdraw from the PhD program or the student will be advised that a recommendation for termination of registration in the program will be forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies.

A recommendation for termination of registration may be appealed to the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Board as per University Appeal Policy.