UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY *of* INFORMATION

PhD Handbook

Doctoral Program Guide

Academic Year 2026 – 2027

Program Requirements, Procedures, Policies & Forms

Faculty of Information • University of Toronto

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Program Requirements and Timetable

The Faculty of Information's PhD program is a full-time program. The conventional program length for full-time doctoral study is four years. While our PhD program is officially a four-year program, by custom, our Faculty recognizes that five years is an acceptable time to completion and may extend, if necessary, to a maximum of six years. PhD students must be regularly registered in the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) during each year of their program.

To maintain satisfactory progress, a student must:

- Complete the required courses by the end of Year 1
- Complete the Qualifying Exam before the end of Year 2
- Complete all elective courses before the Thesis Proposal Defence
- Successfully defend the thesis proposal and achieve candidacy by the end of Year 3
- Successfully defend the thesis by the end of Year 5

By end of	Complete
Year 1	Course requirements and electives
Year 2	Remaining electives and Qualifying Exam
Year 3	Defend thesis proposal and achieve candidacy
Years 4 and 5	Research, write, and defend thesis

Coursework Requirements

The Faculty of Information's curriculum reflects our Faculty's rich research and curricular strengths while providing students with a clear structure to navigate a pedagogical foundation. It sets students up for success later in the program as they prepare for their qualifying exam, write a dissertation proposal, and conduct and communicate their future research. The broad and deep course selection supports a wide range of research topics and methods in the field. In addition, its structure enables students to take courses together and thereby have a shared intellectual foundation. Students can choose from either the main curricular program or the Media, Technology, & Culture (MTC) concentration, which offers a predetermined path through the curriculum. Crucially, students should consult their supervisor about their curricular selections to ensure an appropriate pedagogical foundation for their future research goals.

General Curriculum

Students must complete 3.5 full-course equivalents (FCEs):

- INF3001H Research Colloquium (0.5 FCE)
- One course from each of the following areas (1.5 FCE in total):

    - Knowledge Domain
    - Research Methods and Design
    - Design, Applied, and Creative Practice
- One additional course (0.5 FCE) from any of the above areas.
- 1.0 FCE of elective courses from anywhere at the University of Toronto

Specific courses in each area will be offered on a rotating basis. The Faculty will offer new courses, as needed, to reflect the Faculty's research and curricular strengths. Students should consult the academic calendar for specific curricular offerings each year.

- Examples of courses in the Knowledge Domain area include (but are not limited to) Ethics of Artificial Intelligence; Black Custody; Theory and History of Media Technology; Power, Media, and Technology; and Philosophy of Evidence.
- Examples of courses in the Research Methods and Design area include (but are not limited to) Social Science Methods for Media; Cultural and Interpretive Methods for Media and Technology; Methods for Algorithmic FATE Research; Data Science Foundations; and Mining Information Systems.
- Examples of courses in the Design, Applied, and Creative Practice area include (but are not limited to) Interactive Design Studio and Crafting Information.

Media, Technology, & Culture (MTC) Concentration

The MTC concentration provides students with a directed path through the PhD curriculum that focuses on media, technology, and culture. Students should consult with their supervisor to decide if the MTC concentration is an appropriate pedagogical foundation for their future research goals. Students in the MTC concentration complete 4.0 full-course equivalents (FCEs):

- INF3001H Research Colloquium (0.5 FCE)
- INF3012H Social Scientific Methods for Media (0.5 FCE) or INF 3014H Cultural and Interpretative Methods for Media and Technology (0.5 FCE)
- INF3009H Theory and History of Media Technology (0.5FCE)
- INF3010H Power, Media and Technology (0.5 FCE)
- 2.0 FCEs in elective courses relevant to Media, Technology, and Culture

Qualifying Exam (QE)

The Qualifying Examination (QE) is intended to assess a PhD student's ability to situate their area of research interest within the broad intellectual domains of the field of Information. The QE must be completed by the end of the student's second year in the program. The QE consists of:

- Preparation of three reading lists in consultation with the student's research advisor and supervisory committee
- A study period, at the end of which the student receives nine proposed questions from their committee to prepare (three for each reading list)

- A written exam that answers three of the nine questions (one from each list)
- An oral defence

The student must pass both the oral and written component of the QE.

For more details about preparation, the components of the exam, exam procedures, assessment, and possible outcomes, please consult the Faculty's Qualifying Examination Procedure.

Thesis Proposal Defence (TPD) and Candidacy

PhD students must defend a thesis proposal to their supervisory committee before entering candidacy. After a successful defence of the thesis proposal, and after all other pre-candidacy requirements are met, SGS will be informed, the supervisory committee will be formally constituted, and the student will enter candidacy.

The Faculty of Information encourages and supports a wide range of thesis topics and methodologies. The thesis proposal represents a formal understanding between 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. It contains a research problem, grounding and rationale, and research plan.

For details about the elements of the proposal, exam procedures, and possible outcomes, please consult the Faculty's Procedure for Doctoral Thesis Proposal and Oral Defence.

Final Oral Exam (FOE)

The Final Oral Exam (FOE) is the culmination of your doctoral candidacy at the University of Toronto. It consists of an external examiner's appraisal of the written thesis and an oral exam ("defense") before your supervisory committee, an examiner internal to the University of Toronto but external to your committee, and an examiner external to both your supervisory committee and the University of Toronto. Keep in mind that there is a long lead-time necessary to arrange the FOE:

12 weeks before the exam:

- Discuss with your supervisory committee their process for selecting potential internal and external appraisers.
- Notify the Student Services team and PhD Director that you are in the process of preparing for an FOE and provide them with an estimated exam time (e.g. "last week of May").

10 weeks before the exam:

- Complete the Faculty's Pre-Defence/Final Oral Exam (FOE) Thesis Submission Form, which you can receive from the Student Services team.
- Provide the Student Services Team and PhD Director with a copy of your completed thesis to be shared with examiners.
- Provide the Student Services Team and PhD Director with a brief one paragraph abstract of your thesis.
- Do not contact the external appraiser at any point in this process.

2 weeks before the exam:

- You should receive the external examiner's appraisal
- Work on your opening statement for the FOE (no more than 20 minutes) and prepare your responses to potential questions in the defense

1 week before the exam:

- Receive a copy of your FOE program, which includes your name, the exam coordinates, the title of thesis, and names of all exam participants.

For information about the exam procedures, the responsibilities of the Faculty of Information, the responsibilities of the SGS, and the responsibilities of the examination committee, please consult the SGS Guidelines for the Doctoral Final Oral Exam.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Faculty of Information assigns students a primary supervisor upon admission to the PhD program based, in part, on the student's stated preferences in their application. The supervisor and student should meet to clarify the expectations of their relationship, such as the kind and amount of advice that the candidate wants and the supervisor is able and willing to offer, the frequency of meetings, and modes of communication, etc.

Communication

Students are expected to monitor and retrieve their mail, including electronic messaging account(s) issued to them by the University, on a frequent and consistent basis. Students have the responsibility to recognize that certain communications may be time-critical and to respond to communication in a timely manner.

In addition, it is incumbent on the student to schedule meetings; ask questions; read the University and Faculty policies, guidelines, and procedures; and to seek advice from their supervisor, supervisory committee, and administrative staff.

For more information, consult the University's Policy on Official Correspondence with Students.

Changing Supervisors

While many students continue working with their initial supervisor throughout their time in the program, it is also common for students to switch supervisors. Students are encouraged to consider all potential supervisors from among the extensive and extraordinarily wide-ranging faculty members with graduate appointments in the Faculty of Information. Prior to the Qualifying Exam, there is no formal process for changing supervisors, however, you are encouraged to speak to Student Services for guidance. Once a new supervisor has agreed, the student will email Student Services to document the change. After the constitution of a supervisory committee for the Qualifying Exam, students will need to request approval from the Committee on Standing to reconstitute their committee by contacting Student Services, who will assist with the process.

It is the student's responsibility to inform their former supervisor of the change as soon as they have decided on a new supervisor. If students do not feel comfortable doing so, they should seek assistance from the PhD Director, Student Services, or their new supervisor.

Supervisory Committee

In preparing for their Qualifying Exam, students will constitute a supervisory committee that is composed of the student's supervisor and a minimum of two other faculty members with graduate appointments at the University of Toronto. The Faculty encourages the student and supervisor to choose a supervisory committee that is limited to a total of three faculty members (including the supervisor) because of potential scheduling difficulties that can arise with additional committee members. However, if the student and supervisor feel that the benefits of increased expertise on the committee outweigh any potential scheduling difficulties, an additional member should be invited to

join the committee, for a maximum of four faculty members. In the Faculty of Information, at least one member of your committee or your supervisor must be tenured and hold the rank of Associate Professor or Professor.

Committee members are best selected in consultation with the student's supervisor. Here are some key questions when considering prospective members:

- Can they add value (e.g. field-specific advice) to your research program?
- Will they be around and available for consultation and meetings throughout most of your program?
- Will they be approachable and offer constructive advice?
- Can they be objective enough to help if problems arise?
- Will they be able and willing to offer their opinion even if contrary to that of your supervisor or other members?
- Is there a good balance?
- Do their areas of expertise cover a sufficient range?

Students are required by SGS to meet with the committee at least once a year to assess the student's progress in the program and to provide advice on future work. Students and supervisors are required to fill out an Annual Progress Report (APR) once per year to document the student's progress in the program in the past year against prior objectives, provide advice on future work, and advise the student on a timeline for continued progress. (See Supervision and Evaluation.)

Your supervisory committee should:

- Meet regularly (at least once a year)
- Provide guidance during your research
- Add complementary value to your supervision
- Provide meaningful written feedback
- Enhance your professional development

The SGS has developed guidelines for students to consult. It provides more information on responsibilities of the student, supervisor and supervisory committee.

Thesis Supervision

It is critical to the success of the working relationship between supervisor and candidate to develop an initial agreement about the method and scope of the research, and to clarify the expectations of supervisor and candidate: about the kind and amount of advice that the candidate wants and the supervisor is able and willing to offer; about the involvement of the members of the supervisory committee; about the frequency, regularity and contents of consultations; about an appropriate time scheme for the completion of the thesis; and about the way draft work is to be submitted.

The candidate meets with the supervisor and individual committee members according to the schedule they have established, but the candidate must meet with the full supervisory committee at least once every year and complete an APR to meet SGS registration requirements.

Please carefully consult the following SGS publications:

- Supervision Guidelines
- Graduate Supervision Guidelines — Faculty Edition
- Graduate Supervision Guidelines — Student Edition
- Intellectual Property Guidelines for Graduate Students & Supervisors
- The SGS Centre for Graduate Mentorship and Supervision

The CGMS is a tri-campus service that supports graduate students and faculty in building strong mentorship and supervisory relationships through interpersonal skill-building and effective problem-solving strategies.

Co-supervision

If it is in the best interest of a student and their project, the Faculty will allow a student to be co-supervised by two faculty members. The details of the relationship between the student and the two co-supervisors (expectations about communication, division of supervisory labor, whose lab meetings they will attend, questions of funding, etc.) will vary on a case-by-case basis. The details of the relationship should be agreed upon at the onset of the co-supervision.

Academic Integrity

The University of Toronto takes academic integrity seriously. Please consult the University's website on academic integrity and the Code of Behavior on Academic Matters. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the Code. The University expects students to complete their own work, without any outside assistance from another person, tutor, or technology tool, unless otherwise specified by an instructor or supervisor. The use of unauthorized aid or aids or unauthorized assistance for any form of academic work is a violation of the Code, including the use of generative artificial intelligence. Here are additional resources related to academic integrity:

- Writing and Technology Tutors in the Faculty's Learning Hub
- Generative AI in the Classroom FAQs.
- UTL Librarian for the Faculty of Information, Judith Logan
- Graduate Centre for Academic Communication
- Citing AI and Generative Tools
- Using Generative AI on Marked Assignments
- Certificate in Academic English at the School of Continuing Studies
- Centre for Learning and Strategy Support
- Centre for International Experience

Funding

PhD students receive a base funding package of $40,000 per year for 4 years, which comes in the form of tuition and fees, a TAship, and Faculty scholarship. In the fifth year, students receive a funding package consisting of tuition and fees and a TAship if they qualify for a CUPE Subsequent Appointment. The base funding package acts as a base upon which to add additional funding. Students are expected to receive RAships, TAships, external grants, awards, scholarships, and fellowships from inside and outside the University of Toronto. Certain external awards within a student's first four years are also eligible for the Faculty's Academic Excellence Award, which would be in addition to the base funding package. In their final year in the program, students are encouraged to apply for the Doctoral Completion Award.

For more information about funding, please consult the Faculty's PhD funding webpage.

Teaching Assistantships (TAships)

TAships are an employment engagement in which students assist a course instructor with instructional responsibilities such as grading assignments, facilitating tutorials, delivering lectures, and advising students on course assignments. TAships are paid a standard hourly rate as negotiated with CUPE 3902 Unit 1, currently $53.92/hour + 4% vacation pay as of January 2026.

To receive a TAship, students must apply to positions through the CUPE 3902 Unit 1 Job Board. To ensure our hiring process aligns with the CUPE 3902 Unit 1 provisions, all TA offers should come from the University's TA software, TRACS, not directly from a faculty member. The number of TA hours given to a course is dependent on enrolment. Instructors and TAs are required to discuss the specific responsibilities and expectations of the role by completing the Description of Duties and Allocation of Hours (DDAH) form within the start of the term. For TA roles that are unfulfilled due to a lack of suitable candidates or vacant due to unforeseen circumstances, the Faculty will open up an emergency job posting to hire a graduate or doctoral student to fill the role.

Under the CUPE 3902 Unit 1 Collective Agreement, a PhD student's first TA appointment at the University of Toronto is considered their initial appointment. This applies whether the appointment is held in the Fall-Winter session or the Summer session. For PhD students, subsequent appointments refer to the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth contractually obligated appointments. These appointments are a guarantee that the responsible hiring unit will offer the required TA hours. Each appointment is for no more than one academic session (Fall-Winter or Summer). The number of hours offered in the second through sixth appointments is based on the greater of the student's initial appointment or second appointment in the responsible hiring unit, up to the maximum set out in the Collective Agreement. TA hours worked in other units are not included when determining that unit's minimum obligation.

If a student holds TA appointments in more than one unit during their initial appointment, the unit in which the student holds the greatest number of TA hours is responsible for providing the contractually obligated subsequent appointment. If a student only holds a TAship in another unit during their initial appointment, that unit will hold the subsequent appointment. TA income may

form part of a student's funding package. Where TA hours are included as part of the funding package, declining some or all of the offered TA hours means the student is also declining that portion of their funding package. Declined TA income is not replaced by the Faculty of Information.

After the sixth contractually obligated appointment, PhD students have the right to additional appointments of at least 70 hours per academic year, in accordance with the Collective Agreement.

Research Assistantships (RAships)

An RAship is an employment engagement in which students perform specific duties and are paid an hourly rate with hours recorded on timesheets. These positions are unionized under USW Local 1998 casual unit. Faculty members can either advertise the position on the PhD listserv or make offers directly to students. Incoming students may be hired as early as the summer before they enrol in the program. A student must be legally entitled to work in Canada and be in possession of a current Social Insurance Number (SIN) card. Students conducting research with a faculty member must be paid for their labour, especially on projects that mutually benefit both the student and faculty member (e.g. under the aegis of a faculty member's lab or for which the faculty member receives authorship). The Faculty's payroll office assists faculty members with generating the official letter of offer. Full time registered students can be offered contracts up to one year in length, though there are exceptions.

The nature of the work and the student's level of experience, skill, and education inform the compensation amount. The Faculty's guidelines are as follows, though faculty members can alter at their discretion:

- Undergraduate student: $19-25/hour + vac. and benefits
- Master's student: $25-35/hour + vac. and benefits
- PhD student: $35+/hour + vac. and benefits

The University of Toronto's minimum wage for a USW casual worker is $19.00/ hour.

Research Stipends and Fellowships

A research stipend or fellowship is a trainee engagement in which the student and faculty collaborate on a research project that coincides with the student's degree requirements and students are paid a research stipend. Research stipends are considered T4A income rather than employment income; as a result, they are not subject to employment-related deductions and are not considered Employment Insurance (EI) insurable earnings. Like an RAship, faculty members can either advertise the position on the PhD listserv or make offers directly to students. A student must be legally entitled to work in Canada and be in possession of a current SIN card. The Faculty's payroll office assists faculty members with generating the official offer letter.

Awards and Scholarships

The Faculty of Information assists with several awards and scholarships for doctoral students. Review our awards page for a comprehensive list of available awards for our doctoral students. We have highlighted a few below:

- **PhD Research and Conference Grant:** The award assists Faculty of Information doctoral students with travel costs associated with presenting original research at a conference or symposium, or to engage in other appropriate scholarly activity at a conference.
- **Ethel W. Auster Scholarship for Doctoral Research:** This award was endowed by a donation from family and friends of the late Professor Auster. Awarded by the Council of the Faculty of Information, this award is open to doctoral students in the middle of their dissertation research.
- **Doctoral Completion Award:** The aim of the DCA is to support full-time PhD students who are beyond the funded cohort but within the time limit for the degree.

Academic Excellence Award

The Faculty of Information provides an Academic Excellence Award to students who successfully receive an external award or scholarship of $10,000 or more within their first four years.

Award Value ($k)	Academic Excellence Award
Under 10	0
10 to 15	$2,000
15 to 25	$4,000
25 to 50	$7,500
50 or over	$10,000

Work Study Program

The Work Study program offers part-time, paid on-campus employment to eligible undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Toronto. The program provides students with an opportunity to earn money while learning, developing workplace knowledge and skills, and exploring how their academic studies translate to career possibilities.

Emergency Grants and Loans

The Faculty and SGS offers emergency grants and loans for short-term financial support.

- **The SGS Emergency Grant program** aims to provide short-term financial relief to students experiencing an immediate financial crisis. The Emergency Grant cannot serve as a continued funding source or make up for a shortage in OSAP and other graduate funding sources. Students are encouraged to meet with a member of the SGS Financial Advising Team to discuss available resources including government financial aid programs and review grant eligibility and may be asked to complete a financial need assessment.
- **The SGS Emergency Loan** alleviates temporary cash flow problems for students who are expecting the release of funds soon (i.e., 30 to 120 days) from employment (U of T internal),

a major award instalment, OSAP (Ontario Students' Assistance Program), teaching assistantship, or research assistantship payment, etc.

- **The Faculty of Information Emergency Grant** currently registered Faculty of Information students who encountered an unanticipated, urgent, and/or serious need.

Resources and Supports

This section brings together the services and supports available to doctoral students at the Faculty of Information and across the University of Toronto.

Health and Wellness

The Faculty of Information has a Wellness Counsellor & Coordinator available to its students. Appointments are available Monday-Friday during the academic year. Contact Health & Wellness, 416-978-8030 ext. 5, to book an appointment with a Wellness Counsellor or for questions about the counselling service. Students can request to meet with the "Faculty of Information Counsellor" to access counselling on campus.

- Students can also choose to see a counsellor during the academic year and over the summer at the Health & Wellness Centre, located at 700 Bay St., during its hours of operation.

Numerous additional health, wellness and counselling services are offered through the University of Toronto's Health and Wellness Centre.

- You can access free mental health and wellbeing services at Health & Wellness such as same day counselling, same day medical clinics, brief counselling, medical care, skill-building workshops and drop-in peer support. You can also meet with a Wellness Navigation Advisor who can connect you with other campus and community services and support. Call the mental health clinic at 416-978-8030 ext. 5 to book an appointment or learn more at uoft.me/mentalhealthcare
- The Health & Wellness Centre's Medical Services Clinic provides a wide range of medical services for U of T students. These services include routine health care services, such as sexual and reproductive health counselling, allergy care, nutrition consultation, and support with many other health concerns. Call the medical services clinic at 416-978-8030 ext. 2 to schedule an appointment or explore services online.

Accessibility Services

Students with a disability or health consideration (ongoing or temporary) that affects their academic work can register with the University's Accessibility Services to arrange academic accommodations and supports. Students are encouraged to register as early as possible, as accommodations are not applied retroactively. Student Services can help students connect with Accessibility Services and can advise on how accommodations interact with program requirements and timelines.

The Learning Hub

The Faculty of Information's Learning Hub is a dedicated teaching and learning centre that supports students, instructors, staff, and alumni in the pursuit of knowledge and creativity. Through workshops; individual consultations with writing, technical, and research tutors; physical resources and community events; the Learning Hub reinforces curricular and research activity happening within the Faculty of Information and provides para-curricular and pedagogical instruction.

Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC)

The Graduate Centre for Academic Communication offers five types of support designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers of English: non-credit courses, single-session workshops, individual writing consultations, writing intensives, and a list of additional resources for academic writing and speaking.

Student Services

The Faculty of Information's Student Services team supports doctoral students with registration and enrolment, forms and petitions (including extensions and leaves of absence), examination scheduling and paperwork, funding administration, and referrals to services across the University. Students are encouraged to book an advising appointment with a member of the Student Services team whenever they are unsure how to proceed. (See Key Contacts at the beginning of this handbook.)

Additional Resources

Research and Academic Resiliency and Adaptation Tool Kit helps students maintain timely research and academic progress, while considering the students personal and professional goals.

- UTL Librarian for the Faculty of Information, Judith Logan
- Certificate in Academic English at the School of Continuing Studies
- Centre for Learning and Strategy Support
- Centre for International Experience

Academic Progress

This section describes how academic progress is assessed in the PhD program, and the options available to students who need additional time to complete course or program requirements.

Extensions and Leaves of Absence

The Faculty recognizes that students might need extra time to complete course or program requirements because of reasons beyond their control. Students can request extra time through coursework extensions, program extensions, and leaves of absence. Please connect with Student Services for assistance.

Coursework Extensions

For coursework, extension requests during the term are typically negotiated between students and their instructors directly. However, if an extension is needed beyond the end of the term, then students need to petition to the Committee on Standing for an official coursework extension. It is important for students in such a situation to book an appointment with an advisor from the Student Services team, who will help with academic planning based on a student's individual circumstances and facilitate the petition to the Committee on Standing.

Program Extensions

If you do not complete all degree requirements within the time limit for the PhD program, you may submit a request for program extension. PhD students may apply for a maximum of four one-year extensions. The first two extension requests require the approval of the Faculty's PhD Director and the Doctoral Subcommittee of the Committee on Standing. The second two requests require the approval of both the Faculty and SGS. To seek an extension, complete a Program Extension (Current Regulations) form and submit it to Student Services in the Faculty of Information. Provide an explanation for the delay and evidence that the remaining degree requirements may be completed within the period of the extension request.

Leave of Absence

Students can request a leave of absence from the University without having that time count towards their degree duration if they experience one of the following:

- Health or personal problems which temporarily make it impossible to continue in the program; or
- Parental leave by either parent at the time of pregnancy, birth or adoption, and/or to provide full-time care during the child's first year. Parental leave must be completed within 12 months of the date of birth or custody. Where both parents are graduate students taking leave, the combined total number of sessions may not exceed four. Learn about the SGS Parental Grant program.

Students on an approved leave of absence are not required to pay fees for the period in which they are away. Since students on leave are not considered registered students of the University, they are not

eligible to receive University of Toronto financial assistance. In the case of other graduate student awards, the regulations of the granting agency apply.

Students may request a leave of absence by completing the Leave of Absence Form (PDF) and submitting it to Student Services at the Faculty of Information. The form is then sent to the SGS for processing. Any student considering a Leave of Absence is strongly encouraged to book an advising appointment with both their primary supervisor and a member of the Student Services team to discuss all available options before making a final decision.

An approved leave of absence will pause a student's academic progress and time allowed to complete degree requirements. The termination date of the degree program will be extended by the duration of the leave taken. Students may request up to three terms (one academic year) per leave request. If students require additional time away (i.e., more than 3 terms of leave) they must submit an additional leave request. This additional request will be subject to review and approval by the SGS. Please review the SGS policy on Leave of Absence and Understanding Leaves of Absence carefully. Except for parental leave or in exceptional circumstances, it is not guaranteed that a student will be granted more than one leave under the terms of this policy.

Graduate students on leave may request continued access to University of Toronto library services by sending an email to graduate.information@utoronto.ca. The SGS will review the request and contact the library to allow access to library services if the request is approved.

Finally, graduate students on a leave can also opt-in to paying compulsory non-academic incidental fees, to receive continued access to campus services offered by Student Life (First Nations' House, Academic Success, Accessibility Services, etc.).

Standing

As a graduate student, you are required to make "satisfactory progress" toward the completion of your degree requirements and thereby remain in "good standing."

You are in good standing when you maintain the requirement of minimum grade performance in coursework and successfully complete written and oral examinations, as well as all other degree requirements. (See Program Requirements and Timetable.)

Satisfactory progress refers to the timeliness of progression through degree requirements such as coursework, examinations, and research, while demonstrating quality of performance established by the University and the Faculty. See the School of Graduate Studies general information on Understanding Good Standing & Satisfactory Progress.

Good standing and satisfactory progress typically encompass either all or some of the following:

- Satisfactory completion of all graduate courses.
- Regular satisfactory evaluations of overall academic progress, including research progress, by the supervisory committee.

- Timely achievement of candidacy, including all required examinations, as well as the formation of the supervisory committee, led by a supervisor, and selection of the research topic.
- Completion of thesis and its defense within timeline of the Faculty of Information.

Supervision and Evaluation

Students are required to meet with their supervisory committee at minimum once a year and to complete an Annual Progress Report (APR). The purpose of the APR is to assess and document the student's progress in the program in the past year against prior objectives, provide advice on future work, and advise the student on a timeline for continued progress. The supervisory committee will detail its observations for the student and the Doctoral Subcommittee of the Committee on Standing. The Doctoral Subcommittee will determine whether a student has made satisfactory progress and is in good standing. It may also commend the student on any major milestones or accomplishments they achieved in the past year. A template of the APR form is included at the end of this handbook (see the Annual Progress Report (APR) Form) so that students and supervisors know what to expect.

If a student neglects to schedule a supervisory committee meeting or complete the APR, they will be considered to have received an unsatisfactory progress report and to be not in good standing, regardless of their year in the program.

A student without a primary supervisor is not in good standing, regardless of their year in the program. The PhD Director serves as the de facto supervisor while the student secures a new primary supervisor.

While our PhD program is officially a four-year program, by custom, our Faculty recognizes that five years is an acceptable time to completion and may extend, if necessary, to a maximum of six years. Any student in Year 6+ who has not already scheduled a Final Oral Exam (FOE) or who is not in the process of scheduling an FOE is not in good standing.

If a student has made some progress but is behind schedule in the first five years of the program, the student is in good standing. However, the Doctoral Subcommittee of the Committee on Standing records that the student is behind schedule. It should refer the student to the Faculty's PhD program timetable.

If a student has made no progress for a year or more within the first five years of the program, the student is not in good standing.

Students can and should meet or consult with their supervisors regularly beyond the context of annual supervisory committee meetings to seek feedback on their progress and the quality of their work.

Not in Good Standing

A student's standing does not immediately affect a student's registration status. Instead, its designation helps document a student's progress through the program. If the Doctoral Subcommittee of the Committee on Standing determines a student is not in good standing for two consecutive years, there is no guarantee that a student will be granted a program extension. At that time, the Doctoral Subcommittee will adjudicate how best to proceed on a case-by-case basis, with special consideration

of the advice of the student's primary supervisor, including the recommendation to the School of Graduate Studies the termination of registration and eligibility of that student.

Students not in good standing within the first five years of the program, even if they are allowed to continue in the program, are no longer guaranteed the base funding package in the form of tuition, fees, or scholarships from the Faculty.

A student's standing does not affect a student's eligibility for other awards, bursaries, and fellowships, unless the award criteria stipulate otherwise. Finally, a student's standing does not affect their eligibility for TA and RA positions.

Appeals

In the Faculty of Information, the Graduate Committee on Standing's Doctoral Subcommittee handles all requests for appeals. Please consult the SGS Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee.

PhD Qualifying Examination Procedure

PURPOSE: The Qualifying Examination (QE) is intended to assess a PhD student's ability to situate their area of research interest within the broad intellectual domains of the field of Information.

TIMING: The QE will need to be completed by the end of Year 2. It is usually held in Year 2, or during the second or third term of INF3006Y, depending on the student's concentration. The timelines set out below are intended as planning guidelines. The Qualifying Exam Committee (QEC) is responsible for establishing the specific schedule for each examination and may adjust the recommended intervals where appropriate, taking into account the student's circumstances, committee availability, and any applicable academic accommodation. Within these parameters, scheduling adjustments do not require separate program approval. The QEC must communicate the agreed schedule to the student in advance.

STRUCTURE:

- Preparation of three reading lists in consultation with the student's research advisor and supervisory committee
- A study period, during which time the student receives nine questions from their committee to prepare (three for each reading list)
- A written exam that answers three questions (one from each list)
- An oral defence

The student must pass both the oral and written component of the QE.

PREPARATION:

The student establishes a Qualifying Exam Committee (QEC), consisting of their research advisor and two professors.

NOTE: All QEC members must hold full or associate memberships with the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies. If a QEC member is external to the university, contact the Graduate Administrator well in advance of the QE to start the appointment process.

Once the committee is established, the student submits the names to the PhD Director.

Each QEC member assists the student in preparing a reading list appropriate to the student's area/s of research.

The QEC as a whole approves the reading lists. The reading lists should normally be finalized approximately six weeks before the written exam begins. The QEC may establish a different date as part of the examination schedule, provided the student is given a reasonable period to prepare after the lists are finalized.

Each QEC member sets three questions, for a total of nine. The QEC consults to ensure the nine questions are comprehensive. The QEC selects one question from each member/list for the student to answer during the written exam.

The student normally receives the nine questions approximately four weeks before the written exam. The QEC establishes the date and time at which the student receives the three selected questions at the start of the written exam. These date and times should be communicated to the student in advance.

The QEC establishes the schedule for the written and oral components of the QE in consultation with the student. The student is responsible for coordinating the practical arrangements, including booking a room for the oral defence where needed. The student must alert the Student Services Graduate Administrator that the exam is taking place via email at PhD iSchool Inquire <phd.ischool@utoronto.ca>.

The entire QEC must be present at the oral examination (either in person or remotely via videoconference), and a majority must be present in person. The research advisor chairs the QE.

THE EXAM:

Written component:

The research advisor sends the student the nine questions on the date established by the QEC, normally approximately four weeks before the written exam begins. The list should not specify which professor set which question.

At the agreed start time for the written exam, the research advisor sends the student the three questions selected by the QEC. The written component is normally completed over 14 calendar days. The QEC establishes the start and submission dates and times as part of the examination schedule and may adjust the recommended period where appropriate, subject to the overall Year 2 requirement and any applicable academic accommodation.

The answer to each question should be approximately 2,000-3,000 words (excluding references). The minimum length for each answer is 2,000 words.

The student emails their written exam to all members of the QEC. All QEC members will review all of the answers.

Oral component:

The oral defence is normally held approximately one week after the student submits their written answers, unless the written answers are patently unacceptable to the QEC. The QEC may set a different date as part of the examination schedule, taking into account the time needed to review the written answers and committee availability.

The aim of the oral exam is to allow the student to provide context for their written answers and to demonstrate further depth and breadth of knowledge. The oral exam is typically between 1.5-2 hours.

At the end of the oral exam, the QEC meets in camera to assess and vote on the QE as a whole, both oral and written components.

Immediately after the oral examination, the research advisor informs the student in the presence of the QEC of the committee's assessment of both the oral and written components of the examination.

The research advisor completes the QE Report form and a grade report and submits them to the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program. Both reports are kept in the student's file as a record of the exam.

NOTE: The student receives a single grade of credit or no credit (CR/NCR) for both parts of the exam. This grade is recorded on the student's academic transcript as a Departmental Exam: Qualifying Exam.

ASSESSMENT:

The QE is assessed on the student's demonstrated critical ability and mastery of the topics involved through:

- Comprehensive knowledge of the main issues or problems
- Incisive evaluation of current and past research
- Rigorous analysis, organization and synthesis of information
- Clear written and oral communication.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES:

Pass: If, through both the written and oral components of the examination, the student has clearly met the requirements outlined in #6 above, the student will receive a pass.

Conditional Pass: If the written examination is weak in certain aspects and the student fails to address these weaknesses during the oral component of the qualifying examination, the student will receive a conditional pass (see below for process to be followed).

Adjournment: If, in the QEC's estimation, the student has failed to demonstrate sufficient critical ability and mastery of the topics involved in both written and oral components, the examination will be adjourned (see below for process to be followed).

Process for dealing with a conditional pass:

The QEC outlines the revisions the student must make to one or more of their written answers to address the identified weaknesses. These will be communicated to the student verbally at the conclusion of the oral component of the qualifying examination and in writing normally within one week, or within another timeframe established by the QEC.

The student will normally be given one month to complete and submit the revised answer(s) to the QEC for re-assessment. The QEC may establish a different deadline based on the scope of the revisions and relevant circumstances.

Once the QEC has approved the revisions, the research advisor will notify the PhD Director and the Student Services Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program in writing that the revisions have been made and approved.

If the student fails to complete the revisions by the deadline established by the QEC, and no revised deadline has been agreed by the QEC, the conditional pass will be converted to an adjournment and the process for dealing with an adjournment will be initiated.

Process for dealing with an adjournment:

The Committee may recommend either:

1. That the written and oral examination be taken again after a period of additional preparation (see process below); or
2. That the student be presented with an option to voluntarily withdraw from the PhD program, or 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.

In the case of #1, the process is as follows:

- The membership of the QEC for the first qualifying examination shall remain the same.
- The reading list for the first qualifying examination shall remain the same.
- The three questions the student will be asked to answer will be drawn from the original set of nine questions from the first QE.
- The re-taking of the QE should occur within three months of the oral component of the first QE. The QEC establishes the specific timeline for the re-take based on the additional preparation required and the circumstances of the examination. Any schedule must remain consistent with the requirement that the QE be completed by the end of Year 2, unless an approved leave of absence or other applicable University process changes the student's program timeline.
- The normal procedures for conduct of the written and oral components of the QE will be followed.

Students may only re-take the QE once. If the second QE results in another adjournment, 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.

QE Planning Guidelines

The intervals below are recommended planning benchmarks. The QEC may establish a different schedule in accordance with the timing provisions above. The agreed schedule should be communicated to the student and Student Services in advance via email at PhD iSchool Inquire <phd.ischool@utoronto.ca>.

Procedure	Who	Recommended timing
Confirm QEC membership in SGS	Research advisor	8 weeks prior to written exam Day 1
Finalize reading list	QEC	6 weeks prior to written exam Day 1

Procedure	Who	Recommended timing
Schedule exam and book room	Student	4-6 weeks prior to written exam Day 1
Set 9 questions; choose 3 questions	QEC	4 weeks prior to written exam Day 1
Student receives 9 questions	Research advisor	4 weeks prior to written exam Day 1
Student receives 3 questions	Research advisor	Written exam Day 1, at the agreed start time
Student submits QEC to advisor	Student	Normally Day 14, at the agreed submission time
Oral exam	All	Approximately one week after written component ends
Submission of QE Report form and Grade Report	Research advisor	Normally within 3 days of oral exam

Qualifying Exam Report

To be completed by Research Advisor. Use word document and expand any sections as needed.

Student Name	
Student Number	
Student Email	
Research Advisor	
Research Advisor Email	

Qualifying Examination Committee (QEC) Members: (e.g. Prof Smith, Dept of Math)

I confirm that all members of the QEC are either associate or full members of SGS.

Research Advisor Signature	**Date**

Qualifying Exam Procedure

Questions sent to student (Date)	
Written responses submitted by student (Date)	
Oral exam date	

Qualifying Exam Questions

1.
2.
3.

Result (Initial one. Attach the appropriate grade submission form.)

Pass	

Conditional Pass	
Adjournment	

Justification (2-3 sentences of justification. Comment on whether student has demonstrated critical ability and mastery of topics through: comprehensive knowledge of main issues/problems; incisive evaluation of current and past research; rigorous analysis, organization and synthesis of information, and clear written and oral communication)

Research Advisor Signature	**Date**

Director of PhD Program	**Date**

Procedure for Doctoral Thesis Proposal and Oral Defence

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.

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.

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.

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.

- The Thesis Proposal Defence Committee meets initially in camera, without the student present.
- The Chair invites the student to join the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee for the defence.
- 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.
- The voting members of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee question the student.
- 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:

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.

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).

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).

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:

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

Appointment of Chair for the Thesis Proposal Defence

1. Purpose

This procedure outlines the process for appointing the Chair of a Thesis Proposal Defence in the PhD program in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto, including eligibility criteria and the Chair's role and responsibilities.

2. Appointment Process

a) When a Thesis Proposal Defence is scheduled, the Research Advisor of the PhD Student shall identify potential Chairs by contacting eligible members of the graduate faculty within the division.

b) Once a faculty member has agreed to serve as Chair, the Research Advisor shall notify the PhD Director and Graduate Administrator no later than one week prior to the scheduled defence.

c) The PhD Director shall issue a written confirmation of the appointment.

3. Eligibility Criteria

a) The Chair must hold Full or Emeritus Membership in the graduate faculty of the University.

b) Chair must be external to the Student's Thesis Proposal Defence Committee.

c) The Chair may be appointed from outside the graduate unit, subject to program policy.

d) The Chair shall not hold any supervisory role with the student or be in a position that presents a conflict of interest.

4. Role and Responsibilities of the Chair

a) The Chair is responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of the examination in accordance with School of Graduate Studies regulations and program policies.

b) The Chair shall maintain full procedural control of the examination and may suspend or terminate proceedings if necessary to ensure fairness or compliance with policy.

c) The Chair shall:

I. Ensure that the student is provided reasonable opportunity to defend the thesis proposal;

II. Ensure that the defence is conducted by the student alone, without intervention from the Research Advisor or other committee members;

III. Protect the student from any form of harassment during the examination;

IV. Submit a completed Thesis Proposal Defence Report to the Graduate Administrator following the examination.

Thesis Proposal Defence Report

To be completed by the Chair of the Defence. Use word document and expand any sections as needed.

Student Name	
Student Number	
Student Email	
Research Advisor	
Research Advisor Email	
Thesis Proposal Title	
Date of Thesis Proposal Defence	
Chair	

Thesis Proposal Defence (TPD) Committee Members: (e.g. Prof Smith, Dept of Math)

I confirm that all members of the TPD Committee are either associate or full members of SGS.

Research Advisor Signature	**Date**

Signatures. Each member of the TPD committee must sign next to their name above attesting to the decision of the Thesis Proposal Defence Committee. The Chair may sign on behalf of any Thesis Proposal Defence Committee members who are not physically present.

Result (initial one):

Accept/Credit	
Accept with minor corrections	
Accept with minor revisions	
Reject	

Note: *Following the Defence, the Chair of the TPD Committee and the Research Advisor should review the process associated with each of these decisions laid out in the Procedure for Doctoral Thesis Proposal and Oral Defence to ensure that all the necessary follow-up actions to be taken are understood and completed within the designated timeframes.*

Reasons for decisions (To be completed by the Chair in consultation with TPD committee. Topics that you may choose to comment on: whether the research questions/problems is/are clearly defined and motivated; whether the significance of the problem is articulated; description of the chosen method is accurate and appropriate; comprehensiveness of theoretical, conceptual and technological precedents; clarity of research plan with a clear research process; justification of methodological approach)

Chair Signature	**Date**

Director of PhD Program	**Date**

Publication-based PhD thesis at the Faculty of Information

Doctoral students at the Faculty of Information can build a PhD thesis around several papers (typically three) that are considered to be of publishable quality by the student's thesis committee. The publication-based thesis allows students to structure their thesis as three related but independent contributions, each publishable or published, that together form a cohesive exploration of the thesis topic. The format of this thesis can vary, but typically consists of the three articles framed by an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction and conclusion describe how the papers fit together and can draw implications that emerge across the articles.

Overall parameters are outlined in the School of Graduate Studies' guidelines for the doctoral thesis:

> *"[t]he publication-based thesis (PBT), also referred to as the manuscript or article-based thesis, is a coherent work consisting of a number of scholarly publications …. The PBT, which takes many forms, generally includes an introductory section, the publishable manuscripts, and a cumulative discussion or conclusion chapter. To promote coherence, the introduction and cumulative concluding chapters clearly explain how these separate manuscripts fit together into a unified body of research…"*

The following FAQ provides guidance for students pursuing the PBT at the Faculty of Information, drawing some inspiration from the Faculty of Social Work guidelines.

Can a publication-based doctoral thesis be written and defended at the Faculty of Information?

Yes.

When should a student decide to write a publication-based thesis?

Students should decide as early as possible, with their supervisor and committee, whether to pursue a publication-based thesis. If so desired, students should specify in their thesis proposal that they are writing a publication-based thesis (versus a traditional, or monograph-style, thesis). However, they may switch from one format to the other at any time as long as their committee approves the change in format.

What are the guidelines and criteria, and who determines the parameters?

The same fundamental principles apply as with other thesis formats. The student's supervisory committee has the major responsibility for maintaining the rigour of the dissertation and for negotiating issues as they arise. It's up to the examining committee to evaluate the thesis on its own merits. In fact, the Governing Council at U of T delegates the authority over final decisions in the Final Oral Examination to the examining committee. The supervisory committee, in particular the supervisor, should guide the student and agree on the form and expectations as early as possible. The SGS guidelines apply as guidelines.

How many articles make up a PBT?

Typically, three. As listed in the SGS guidelines, deviations are possible and should be discussed and agreed upon by the supervisory committee.

How should I identify where articles are or will be published?

The thesis's introduction should contextualize and explain where articles have been or will be published. If appropriate, at the beginning of each chapter, indicate the venue and link to the published version.

Do all articles have to be accepted or published at the time of the FOE?

No. It is up to the committee to evaluate whether the contributions are sufficiently established and the work is sufficiently advanced to be considered defensible based on the context and audience of the research. This varies across fields. The SGS guidelines speak of publishable manuscripts:

> *"Published-based theses may include published, in press or in review manuscripts or articles that have not yet been submitted for publication. Normally, the thesis and examination committees must deem the articles as publishable if the articles are not published at the time of defence."*

Do all articles have to be published in journals?

No, but if submitted/accepted/published, articles need to have gone through a structured peer-reviewed process appropriate to the disciplines in which the author is working. These can be varied based on discipline (blinded, non-blinded, multiple reviewers vs. single reviewers, reference to an editorial board, etc.). For example, in many computing fields, research is published in conference proceedings. It is up to the dissertation committee to evaluate and decide whether the peer-review process was sufficient to determine whether or not the specific paper meets this requirement. Similarly, the paper needs to be appropriately accessible over scholarly timelines. What counts as "accessible" and over what duration again differs by discipline and should be determined by the dissertation committee. Potential examples include articles published in a journal and indexed accordingly, posted to a scholarly archive, or stored on an institutional repository.

Should articles be reproduced as they were published?

Yes, unless the student and supervisory committee agree otherwise. That is, published articles do not have to be revised for inclusion as chapters. Normally, the introduction and conclusion should contextualize any issues or updates the student or committee want addressed. If revisions are made, they should be explained in the introduction.

Can co-authored publications be included?

Yes. As with other aspects, the SGS guidelines and this document provide high-level guidance only. It is ultimately up to the examining committee to judge the contributions of the thesis. In this sense, the

student should work with the supervisory committee to plan and explain their contributions to any collaborative work.

For multi-authored papers, it is important that the student's specific role in the formation, writing, and editing of the paper is described as part of the publication-based dissertation. This information needs to be considered by the dissertation committee in deciding whether or not the paper can be appropriately considered as part of the dissertation. Papers in which the student was not listed as the first author should not be automatically excluded from consideration, but should be evaluated by the committee.

A note on examiners:

Internal and external examiners should be asked whether or not they are familiar with publication-based theses, and if they have questions, should be given this FAQ. This needs to occur prior to the external examiner providing their appraisal to the dissertation committee to ensure expectations are being met.

Samples of paper-based theses

This list will be updated as Faculty of Information theses are defended and deposited.

Keidar, N. (2021). The Making of Urban Knowledge: Ideas, Cities, Gurus. University of Toronto Sociology. https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/109636

This is a very "clean" example of a 3-article thesis in terms of structure, with a brief introduction and conclusion.

Guha, Shion. (2016). Aspects of Privacy in Location Based Social Networks. Cornell Information Science. https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/45348/sg648.pdf?sequence=1

This is a slight variation on the three-paper dissertation. Three first-author papers published in the main venues in the field make up the bulk of the dissertation and are wrapped up by an introduction and conclusion section. However, there is also an extra Chapter 2 that introduces the idea of Transparent Statistics in HCI as an additional methodological contribution and provides an example as an additional co-authored journal publication. This was deemed necessary by the dissertation committee because (a) a significant methodological contribution was made and (b) a Cornell PhD requires a doctoral minor; which in this case was Statistics and it showed a secondary contribution in Statistics in addition to primary contributions in Information Science/HCI. Email Shion to chat more if necessary.

Research-creation as a component of the PhD thesis in the Faculty of Information

Research-creation is an approach to research that combines artistic, curatorial, making, or design practices with academic research and writing to support the development of knowledge through creative expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The goal of the PhD program is to support advanced research on the interactions between information, technology, culture, people and communities. Given the importance of critical making, design thinking, aesthetic investigations, curatorial practices, and community engaged research to exploring these interactions, our PhD program supports projects that involve creative research (research creation) methods at the doctoral level. The research-creation option is available to cultural producers who are interested in engaging their practice with rigorous theory, traditional methods, and scholarly analysis. Students must have an established practice, academic qualifications in a relevant practice, and/ or engage in coursework, creative labor, or similar rigorous preparatory work prior to writing their thesis proposal.

The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of technological or media formats. Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula. Just as a conventional dissertation contains research of publishable quality, research-creation methods and resulting artistic, curatorial, making, or design outcomes must meet academic and artistic expectations and the standards of disciplinary or creative rigour in the sphere(s) in which they operate.[1] The research-creation component of a dissertation is up for critique as much as research and analytic writing. Examples of research-creation include technical design, curation, media art, craft, theatre, dance, music, film, and fine arts.

Students and supervisors must think about ways to practice and include integrative research-creation methods at all research stages, from conception through qualifying exam, proposal, formal defenses, and final output. Research-creation components are not to be considered as an "add-on" to traditional components.

Research-creation components emerge in different orders, from different foundations, and may have various foci. One might consider research-creation on a continuum framed by the following two modalities:

Research-for-creation — in which research into a topic or skill is necessary to produce a creative expression. All research-for-creation components must include a significant written component, as described below.

Research-from-creation — in which an artist/researcher produces an artwork that they then analyze through traditional research methods, such as formal analysis, interviews, surveys, or ethnography, etc.

Can I do research-creation if I am not already engaged in artistic, curatorial, making, or design practices?

Research-creation is available to cultural producers who have an established practice, academic qualifications in a relevant practice (e.g. an MFA, MDes, MArch, MVS, MMSt, etc.)., and/ or engage in coursework, creative labor, or similar rigorous preparatory work prior to writing their thesis proposal.

Can I present my research entirely as an artistic, curatorial, making, or design mode?

Research-creation practitioners are required to make apparent the ways their creative product addresses research questions — and to show awareness of the work's theoretical frameworks, methodologies, conditions of production, academic and artistic inspirations and interlocutors, and implications for academic scholarship or public understanding. As with all dissertations, dissertations with a research-creation component are expected to have a significant written component that demonstrates strong evidence of original thinking, excellent organization, capacity to analyze and synthesize, superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations, and evidence of an extensive knowledge base.

Typically, this includes an introduction, literature review, research methods (such as formal analysis, interviews, surveys, ethnography, or quantitative methods), and analysis in written form following established academic format and citation practices.

How do I support a research-creation project as a supervisor?

Different students require different forms of support. Some students may need to be assisted in the development of clear research questions. Others may need ideas for bringing their practice to the fore as a driving element of the project, not merely a form of display of findings. The ratio and relation between the production and the analytical component will be determined in consultation with the supervisory committee. Students and supervisors must think about ways to practice and include integrative research-creation methods at all research stages, from conception through qualifying exam, proposal, formal defenses, and final output. Research-creation components are not to be considered as an "add-on" to traditional components.

Supervisors should work closely and early with students on feasibility, timeline, and logistics – all of which should be addressed in the thesis proposal, along with a plan for documentation of the artistic work and a clear statement of its relation to scholarly and critical contexts.

How do I format the research-creation component of my thesis?

A research-creation project or portfolio might consist of a collection of creations in varied formats, media, or voices. They do not need to be of equal size, and it is up to the student how to order them. Insofar as design elements may be integral to the research process or method, students may include graphic and image elements throughout the text. In addition, audio, visual, and multimedia elements should be submitted separately as supplementary files. Students will want to consider how and where to digitally archive their work for full functionality.[2]

Additional Resources

SSHRC Guidelines for Research-Creation Support Materials

Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances" (Chapman and Sawchuck, 2012).

Notes

[1] This definition is modified from "Definitions of Terms" (2021, May 4). Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. December 9, 2024. Retrieved from SSHRC terminology

[2] These FAQs are modified from "Research Creation" (2023). Cultural Studies – Interdisciplinary Graduate Program, Queen's University. December 9, 2024. Retrieved from https://www.queensu.ca/culturalstudies/academics/research-creation

Pre-Defence/Final Oral Exam (FOE) Thesis Submission Form

Doctoral Candidate

To be completed by Supervisor. Use word document and expand any sections as needed. Note: Earliest date for FOE is 8 full weeks after External Appraiser has received Thesis.

Date Form Submitted	
Name of the Candidate	
Student Number	
Student is registered and has completed all requirements (Yes/No)	
Title of Thesis	
If this final title is updated from an earlier approved title, please include previously approved title (both will be forwarded to the Committee on Standing for approval)	
Name of Supervisor	
Doctoral Supervisor of the supervisor (for SGS process to ensure arm's-length when reviewing/approving External Appraiser)	
Name and affiliation of Final Oral Exam Committee Members	
Confirmation Thesis is attached/digital format (separate PDF)	
Confirmation Abstract is attached (separate PDF)	
Timeframe for FOE (Note: Earliest date for FOE is 8 full weeks after External Appraiser has received Thesis.)	

Potential Examiners. List of at least three potential examiners – we will be contacting them in sequence. The external appraiser must be a recognized expert on the subject of the thesis, and an Associate or Full Professor at their home institution, and experienced as a successful supervisor of doctoral candidates through to defence (Guidelines for the Doctoral Final Oral Examination). Include the following information:

Potential Examiner 1

Name of Examiner	
Title	
Year Current Rank Attained	
Departmental and University Affiliation	
Email Address	
Webpage	
Brief biographical sketch	
Four sentence justification as to why the individual would make an ideal examiner for this thesis which can be included in a letter of invitation	
Confirmation that there is an Arms-length relationship between the potential examiner, the candidate, the supervisor, the Faculty and the University	

Potential Examiner 2

Name of Examiner	
Title	
Year Current Rank Attained	
Departmental and University Affiliation	
Email Address	
Webpage	
Brief biographical sketch	
Four sentence justification as to why the individual would make an ideal examiner for this thesis which can be included in a letter of invitation	
Confirmation that there is an Arms-length relationship between the potential examiner, the candidate, the supervisor, the Faculty and the University	

Potential Examiner 3

Name of Examiner	
Title	
Year Current Rank Attained	
Departmental and University Affiliation	
Email Address	
Webpage	
Brief biographical sketch	
Four sentence justification as to why the individual would make an ideal examiner for this thesis which can be included in a letter of invitation	
Confirmation that there is an Arms-length relationship between the potential examiner, the candidate, the supervisor, the Faculty and the University	

Internal-External Committee Member

Name of Internal-External Committee Member (Supervisor to send thesis to Internal External)	
Title	
Department	
Agreed/To be asked (If they have not yet agreed please let us know when they have.)	
Names of Committee Members Participating Remotely (if any)	
Zoom link (or other platform) if remote/hybrid	

Key Contacts

Two key contacts can help you navigate the PhD program. When in doubt about whom to ask, start with Student Services, who will direct your question to the right person or office.

Student Services — Christine Chan, Graduate Administrator

Christine Chan is the Graduate Administrator for the doctoral program and your first point of contact for most administrative matters. Connect with Student Services about:

- Registration, enrolment, and official forms
- Coursework extensions, program extensions, and leaves of absence
- Scheduling and paperwork for the Qualifying Exam (QE), Thesis Proposal Defence (TPD), and Final Oral Exam (FOE)
- Documenting a change of supervisor or supervisory committee
- Funding, awards, payroll, and emergency grant questions
- General questions about program requirements, procedures, and University resources

PhD Director — Ebrahim Bagheri

Ebrahim Bagheri is the Director of the PhD program and oversees the academic side of your doctoral studies. Connect with the PhD Director about:

- Academic planning and concerns about your progress in the program
- Supervision issues, including changing supervisors when you are not comfortable approaching your current supervisor
- Interpretation of program requirements, policies, and procedures
- Approvals related to supervisory committees, examinations, and extensions
- Any academic matter that has not been resolved through other channels