

Procedures for OSC PhD and MS oral defenses and exams

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

From: Brian Anderson

Dear OSC Grad Students and Faculty,

This message is aimed at OSC students and faculty involved in scheduled or planned Spring 2020 PhD and MS oral exams and defenses.

Some of you are already aware of the recent guidance from the Graduate College regarding PhD and MS oral exams/defenses, and the recent UA social distancing policies. If not, they are summarized as follows

From the UA Graduate College:

- PhD dissertation defenses and MS oral exams should NOT contain a public in-person/on campus event.
- Committees will decide how and whether they might want to facilitate the public dissemination of the student's research. The options might include:
 - Videoing and posting what would have been the public presentation to a departmental website or youtube
 - Synchronously Zooming the public portion
 - Simply cancelling the public portion
- For the duration of the public health emergency ***you do not have to request the Graduate College's permission*** to cancel or restructure the public portion of the defense.
- Since many faculty and staff are likely to be members of at-risk groups, it is best practice to conduct exams and defenses remotely in almost all circumstances. Meetings of more than a handful of people are clearly not a good idea at this time.

From the UA Provost's office, Campus Mitigation Plan for Events, Meetings and Gatherings

[<https://provost.arizona.edu/news/2020/03/covid-19-campus-mitigation-plan-events-meetings-and-gatherings>]: "all in-person meetings or gatherings, formal or informal, should be limited to no more than 4 people. Please practice social distancing methods in all interactions on campus, including maintaining a 6-foot separation from others."

While the Graduate College urges exams/defenses to be conducted remotely rather than in-person, the Wyant College of Optical Sciences (OSC) will support limited in-person participation if the student is in mutual agreement with at least one other committee member to convene the exam/defense in a conference room or lecture hall that has sufficient size and seating to be compliant with UA's COVID-19 social distancing policies. This includes no more than 4 attendees and social distancing with at least 6' separation between attendees. Students and the attending committee members are encouraged to schedule room 307 or room 821 for such purposes.

- Any student or committee member participating in an oral exam/defense who wishes to participate remotely may do so. Any person who is a member of an increased-risk group is

urged to attend the exam/defense remotely. A student shall not be coerced into giving an on-campus in-person defense in front of committee members.

- OSC is not supporting a public in-person portion of the defense during this period. However, the student is allowed to have a spouse/partner in attendance as long as UA's social distancing policies are adhered to in the venue. The spouse/partner must leave the room as usual prior to the committee questioning stage of the defense.
- An advisor or committee member shall not pressure a student into postponing their exam/defense to the Summer or the Fall semester in lieu of having a remote exam. However, the student may prefer and elect to postpone the exam in order to have an in-person and public exam at a later date.
- Students or committee members who need to travel to Tucson via public transportation for an exam/defense are strongly encouraged to attend the exam remotely instead.
- If the exam has a remote component to it, the student may consider using Meinel 307 which has a whiteboard and overhead projector. If the student does not feel safe coming to campus, the whiteboard feature of web conferencing software such as Zoom may offer a viable alternative.
- The technical aspects of remote exams/defenses must be set up, and validated in advance by the student and the committee. Academic Programs does not have the expertise or resources during this period to set up and monitor the technical equipment and procedures.
- To discourage social interaction, if there is to be any in-person portion of the exam/defense for the student and committee, food and beverages should not be provided.
- For PhD and MS exams that are conducted with any remote component, extra safeguards are encouraged. These may include:
 - setting up Zoom but also having Skype ready to go if needed
 - having the student send via email the slides of the presentation to all committee members in case a connection is weak and the video portion of the exam is interrupted, or if the student and/or committee want the camera focused on the student
 - the student and the committee chair exchange phone numbers
 - allowing extra time for the exam in case technical problems arise.
- The structure of the exam is to be determined by the committee. This includes portions of the exam/defense that involve private committee discussion periods, private discussions between the committee and student, public viewing of a presentation (remote public viewers should have their microphones muted and cameras not active), and a period for public questioning.
- If the exam involves use of an OSC conference room or classroom, please confirm this with Jini Kandyil to make arrangements to have the room unlocked prior to the exam, and for any practice or setup that needs to occur.

I am happy to discuss any questions you may still have about MS and PhD exams and defenses, especially issues not addressed above or concerns related to your specific situation. Please feel free to send me email or call.

Thanks,
Brian

Brian P. Anderson
Professor & Associate Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs
Wyant College of Optical Sciences
University of Arizona
1630 E. University Blvd.
Tucson, AZ 85721
www.optics.arizona.edu

(520) 626-5825
bpa@optics.arizona.edu