

The University of the West Indies

A New Policy and Procedure for the Examination of MPhil and Doctoral Theses

The School for Graduate Studies and Research

Rationale for Change

The current Policy at the University of the West Indies, captured in the Regulations for Graduate Diplomas and Degrees, is that Supervisors of MPhil and Doctoral students also serve as Examiners of their students' theses following submission for examination. A broad survey of several Universities indicates that this remains the practice at some Universities but not at others. Discussions began at the UWI in 2011 on the question of whether Supervisors should also serve as Examiners of their students' theses. The discussions were primarily driven by two related concerns. First, it is the responsibility of the Supervisor to provide guidance to the student throughout the research process. Supervisors may therefore find themselves in the challenging situation where, to some extent, they could be assessing their own recommendations and guidance. Moreover, it is in the Supervisor's interest that the student does well, which may create an additional bias in thesis assessment. The second concern is an increasing trend, very marked in a few cases, for Examiners Reports submitted by Supervisors to be more favorable than those submitted by the Internal and External Examiners. This situation is complicated by the fact that the UWI Regulations for Graduate Diplomas and Degrees are silent on how to proceed in situations where the Examiners come to different conclusions, and therefore make different recommendations, following their assessment of the thesis. The Regulations simply assume that there will be a consensus of opinion among all Examiners.

Status of Consultation

The suggestion that Supervisors should not also serve as Examiners has been discussed by the Campus Committees for Graduate Studies and Research, or their equivalent, at all four Campuses of the University of the West Indies. Moreover, Deputy Deans for Graduate Studies and Research, who are members of the Campus Committees, have discussed the matter at their respective Faculty Boards. Based on

these consultations, it is now evident that there is an emerging consensus that the University of the West Indies should change the practice of Supervisors of MPhil and Doctoral students also serving as Examiners of their theses.

Recommended Procedures for a New Policy on the Examination of MPhil and Doctoral Theses

Role of the Supervisor

The Supervisor will sign the Certificate of Completion Form, if he/she considers it appropriate to do so, confirming, *inter alia*, that the work has been completed to his/her satisfaction, and that the thesis is acceptable for examination.

In Cases Where the Supervisor Signs the Certificate of Completion Form

- The Supervisor will not take part in the formal examination of the student's thesis.
- In the case of Doctoral candidates, and in those cases where the Examiners have recommended an Oral Examination for an MPhil candidate, the Supervisor will be present at the Oral Examination, but will not take part as an Examiner. During the Oral, the Supervisor may provide information or clarifications of a procedural or contextual nature, if requested of him/her by the Examiners.
- In the case where the recommendation of the Examiners is that the thesis should Pass, subject to corrections and/or revisions being made, the Supervisor will be responsible for ensuring and confirming that the revisions and corrections have been made.
- In the case where the recommendation of Examiners is that the thesis should Fail, but that it should be revised and re-submitted for Examination, the Supervisor will resume his/her responsibility of guiding the student to the point of re-submission of the thesis for Examination.

In Cases Where the Supervisor Does Not Sign the Certificate of Completion Form

- The Supervisor will not take part in the formal examination of the student's thesis.
- In the case of Doctoral candidates, and in those cases where the Examiners have recommended an Oral Examination for an MPhil candidate, the Supervisor will not be present at the Oral Examination.
- In the case where the recommendation of the Examiners is that the thesis should Pass, subject to corrections and/or revisions being made, the Head of Department will be responsible for identifying an appropriate person to ensure and confirm that the revisions and corrections have been made.
- In the case where the recommendation of Examiners is that the thesis should Fail, but that it should be revised and re-submitted for Examination, the Head of Department shall meet with the Supervisor and student to see whether consensus can be reached that the Supervisor will resume his/her responsibility of guiding the

student to the point of re-submission of the thesis for Examination. If consensus cannot be reached, the Head of Department will be responsible for recommending the appointment of a new Supervisor to guide the student to the point of re-submission of the thesis for examination.

Role of the Examiners

- At the beginning of the examination process for MPhil and Doctoral theses, three Examiners will be nominated and written to determine their availability and willingness to serve. The three will be an External Examiner, an Independent Internal Examiner, and a Proxy External Examiner. At the time of writing the Proxy External Examiner, it will be made clear that he/she will only engage in the examination process in one of two circumstances: (1) When the first External Examiner indicates that he/she is unavailable or unwilling to serve as Examiner of the thesis; or, (2) Different recommendations are made by the External and Internal Examiners as to whether the thesis should Fail or Pass.
- If the External and Internal Examiners agree in their assessment of the thesis and make similar recommendations on whether the thesis should Fail or Pass, their collective decision will clearly stand. In this circumstance, for Doctoral theses and for MPhil theses for which an Oral is requested, only these two Examiners will take part as Examiners in the candidate's Oral.
- If the External and Internal Examiners disagree in their assessment of the thesis and make different recommendations on whether the thesis should Fail or Pass, the Report of each Examiner will be circulated to the other, and dialogue encouraged in an effort to reach a consensus. If the difference of opinion remains, the Proxy External Examiner will be engaged, and will submit a written Examiner's report on the thesis. In the case of MPhil theses, the majority decision on Fail or Pass will be accepted. In the case of Doctoral theses, and MPhil theses in which an Oral was requested, the External Examiner, the Internal and the Proxy External Examiner will all take part in the Oral Examination of the candidate. Following the Oral, the majority decision on whether the thesis should Fail or Pass will be accepted.