



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

The University of Calgary [Doctoral Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program specific requirements associated with the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy under the *Regulations*.

### A. Statement of Purpose

The Admission to Candidacy process tests the suitability of candidates to begin their doctoral research in earnest.<sup>1</sup> Whereas acquiring foundational research skills early in the program can be helpful in developing a research proposal, the Admission to Candidacy should be completed prior to acquiring substantive amounts of data and analyses forming the core of the thesis, which is examined at the thesis defense.

In preparing to meet the requirements of Candidacy, candidates need to demonstrate in writing the ability to design a research project that contributes substantially to their chosen field of study, and to display a solid understanding of the necessary technical and tactical skills required to successfully complete their research project, and to judge the quality of their own work and the work of others. Moreover, candidates need to demonstrate their abilities to speak in public, as well as respond orally to questions on Topic Areas relevant to their thesis topic. Students fulfilling the candidacy requirements in Veterinary Medical Sciences will have acquired the necessary knowledge and technical skills to perform research at the doctorate level.

B. All doctoral students in the Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program must successfully complete the following components to be admitted to Candidacy:

1. All required **coursework** for Veterinary Medical Sciences graduate program,
2. An examination of a written **Thesis Proposal**, and
3. An oral examination on broad knowledge in their **Field of Study**.

#### **Deadlines for Admission to Candidacy:**

Students must complete all the components of the Admission to Candidacy by 24 months after initial registration in the doctoral program (see Figure 1). A student transferring into a doctoral program from a Master’s program before the Master’s program is completed,

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<sup>1</sup> From FGS Calendar (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-j.html>):

#### **J.1 Admission to Candidacy**

Admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree is a judgment by the faculty members in the graduate program that the student is prepared to successfully complete the requirements of the doctoral degree program.



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

must complete any additional required coursework and all the components of the Admission to Candidacy by 36 months after initial registration in the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

### Admission to Candidacy Procedures:

#### 1. Pre-examination Meeting

Within 14 months of first registration, the supervisor convenes a **Pre-examination Meeting** of the candidate's Supervisory Committee. The overarching purpose of the pre-candidacy meeting is to promote early work on the Thesis Proposal, which is supported by professional skills coursework, workshops, and resources in the Faculties of Veterinary Medicine and Graduate Studies.

This meeting has two specific goals:

**(a)** To provide early, specific feedback on the candidate's research proposal. To facilitate this meeting, the candidate will submit a draft (between 8-12 pages double-spaced, 1-inch margins, exclusive of figures and references) of their thesis research proposal to their committee at least 7 business days prior to the pre-examination meeting. Feedback at this meeting should guide the candidate in writing of the final **Thesis Proposal** (see below).

**(b)** To identify the Topic Areas (typically 6-7 areas) that will form the basis of **Field-of-Study** Oral Examination (see below). The committee will identify the relevant subject matter and level of details (e.g., textbook, review, primary literature, etc.) necessary for the student to prepare for the examination, which will be recorded on the "Pre-candidacy Examination Form." This form will also list several suitable nominees to serve as an external examiner of the Field-of-Study oral examination. The Pre-candidacy Examination form is submitted to the Graduate Program Administrator.

Should the topic fields change substantially from the Pre-examination Meeting, a letter amending the initial subject areas should be justified by the Supervisor and signed by the members of the supervisory committee and the candidate. Topic areas cannot be changed once the names of external examiners are submitted to the Graduate Program Administrator (12 weeks before the Field-of-Study examinations—see below).

*NOTE:* The Pre-examination Meeting can also count as one of the VMS-required annual meetings of the Supervisory committee and candidate.



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

### 2. Examinations

#### Appointment of External Examiners

External examiners are required for both the Thesis Proposal and Field-of-Study examinations (see composition of examining committees below). External examiners must be sufficiently qualified to assess the Thesis Proposal. Typically, external examiners will have doctoral training and will have experience in examining doctoral students. An external examiner may be a University of Calgary appointee, and may have supervisory privileges in the VMS program, or may be external to the university, but must not have a conflict of interest with the candidate, or any of the supervisory committee members—See Faculty of Graduate Studies policy on examiner conflicts of interest: <http://grad.ucalgary.ca/current/policies-forms/conflict-interest>.

At least 12 weeks prior to scheduling the Thesis Proposal and Field-of-Study examinations, the Supervisor will forward final recommendations for external examiners of the Thesis Proposal and Field-of-Study examinations to the Graduate Program Administrator. The qualifications of the external examiners are reviewed and approved by Program Director. Whereas external examiners are recommended by the Supervisory Committee, the appointment of external examiners remains at the discretion of the Program Director. The external examiners may be the same or different for the Thesis Proposal and Field-of-Study examinations.

#### 2.1 Examination of Thesis Proposal

##### Format of Thesis Proposal

For the Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program, the Thesis Proposal will consist of a minimum of 20 pages, and a maximum of 25 pages, double-spaced (excluding figures, tables and references) using 12 point font and 1-inch margins. A suggested, though not mandatory, format for the research proposal includes the following sections:

(a) Introduction and background, (b) relevant preliminary data or initial results, (c) rationale, objectives, and hypotheses (as appropriate), (d) specific aims, approach, methodology, and analyses, and (e) significance.

##### Scheduling the Thesis Proposal Examination

A final version of the written research proposal should be submitted and examined before 22 months after initial registration in the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

On the Thesis Proposal Submission Date, the candidate supplies the Graduate Program Administrator with a copy of the written proposal. Within one working day, the Graduate Program Administrator provides all examiners with a copy of the Thesis Proposal and a copy of the Veterinary Medical Sciences Thesis Proposal Grading Form.



## **Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements**

### **Composition of the Thesis Proposal Examination Committee**

As the supervisor and co-supervisors, if applicable, are expected to advise the candidate on the substance and structure of the Thesis Proposal, they do not participate in evaluating the Thesis Proposal. The Thesis Proposal Examination Committee consists of the three supervisory committee members (including one from outside the VMS program), and one additional external examiner (see above).

### **Evaluation of the Thesis Proposal**

Within three weeks after the Thesis Proposal Submission Date, all examiners must provide the Graduate Program Administrator with a completed Thesis Proposal Grading Form, on which each examiner, without consultation with other examiners, assigns a grade and a short explanation to justify the grade. The rubric used to grade the Thesis Proposal (see Table 1 below) is that published in the Graduate Calendar (Section G.1 <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-g-1.html>), in which a grade less than "B-" is considered a "Fail" at the graduate level (see below). If an examiner suspects plagiarism or other academic misconduct in the written document, they must report this to the Dean of Graduate Studies immediately. The average of the individual examiner's letter grades will be calculated to two decimals from the equivalent grade point value (based on a 4.0 scale) by the Graduate Program Administrator and approved by the Graduate Program Director.

The average grade for the Thesis Proposal and the individual examination reports will be forwarded to the Supervisor, who will share the results with the candidate. The Thesis Proposal Grading Form will indicate the grade assigned by individual examiners as well as various categories of evaluation (e.g., relevant literature and techniques; organization; literary competence, logic of enquiry, degree of sophistication, originality and contribution to the discipline) to assist examiners in giving comprehensive feedback to candidates. A thesis Proposal grade equal to or higher than an average grade of "B-" (a grade point value of 2.70) signifies a "Pass" of the Thesis Proposal; an average grade less than "B-" signifies a "Fail" of the Thesis Proposal. Whereas any grade below a B- is considered a failing grade indicative of unsatisfactory performance, examiners may choose to assign a grade of C or lower to indicate their level of dissatisfaction. A grade of "F" indicates a serious flaw that unquestionably renders the proposed studies unsuccessful. Should any examiner assign a grade of "F", the examination is a "Fail" regardless of the averaged score. A failure due to an "F" receives a full review by the Program Director. Should an examiner provide insufficient justification for an examination grade of "F", the Program Director will notify the candidate, supervisor, and examining committee that the examination is under review and may recommend that the student should appeal the decision.

### **Passing the Thesis Proposal**

If the average grade is calculated to be 2.70 or higher, the Thesis Proposal is a "Pass."



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

### **Failing the Thesis Proposal**

If the average grade is calculated to be less than 2.70, the Thesis Proposal is a “Fail.”

The Pass or Fail is reported to the Graduate Program Director.

In the case of a “Fail,” the student must meet formally with the supervisory committee to develop a plan for the student to suitably revise the Thesis Proposal. Minutes of this meeting are submitted to the Graduate Program Director. The candidate must submit a revised Thesis Proposal for re-examination normally within four months of the first Thesis Proposal Submission Date. Normally, the composition of the examining committee remains unchanged for re-examination.

### **Appeal of Failed Thesis Proposal Examination**

In the case of failed outcomes, students have the right to appeal. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies using the procedures outlined in the Graduate Calendar: N.2 Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings, ([www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-n.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-n.html)). Briefly, the student shall address a letter of appeal to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Appeals Committee within fifteen days of the unfavourable decision. In the letter of appeal, the student must clearly and fully state the ruling/decision being appealed, the grounds for appeal and the remedies being sought, together with all supporting evidence or documentation, if any. Mere dissatisfaction with a ruling is not sufficient grounds for an appeal. In the process of deciding to initiate an appeal, the student may seek the assistance of the Student Ombuds Office.

## **2.2 Field-of-Study Examination**

### **Scheduling of Field-of-Study Examination**

The Field-of-Study examination is taken no later than 24 months after initial registration, and is scheduled after the Thesis Proposal is examined.

All official arrangements for the Field-of-Study oral examination must be made by the Graduate Program Administrator.

### **Composition of Field-of-Study Examination Committee**

The Field-of-Study Examination Committee includes the Supervisor, supervisory committee members, and one external member. The external examiner must be sufficiently qualified to assess the Field-of-Study Topic Areas and is appointed by the Program Director in consultation with the supervisory committee (see above). Co-Supervisors, if applicable, may attend the Field-of-Study exam, but may not question the candidate and are non-voting. A Neutral Chair is appointed by the Graduate Program Director.



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

### **Attendance at Field-of-Study Examinations**

The Field-of-Study oral examination is a formal examination limited to the examination committee (and co-supervisor, if applicable) and the student. The Dean of Graduate Studies or Dean's representative, and the Program Director or designate, may attend without prior notice.

### **Format of Field-of-Study Examination**

The Field-of-Study exam is a formal oral exam scheduled to last up to 2 hours not including deliberation time of the Examining Committee. The exam will be comprehensive, covering a broad range of Topic Areas in the student's relevant subject areas of research as defined by the Supervisory Committee at the Pre-examination Meeting (see above) as well as questions arising from the written Thesis Proposal. The Pre-examination form listing the Topic Areas is circulated among the Examination Committee by the Neutral Chair prior to examination to confirm the Topic Areas of the examination.

### **Field of Study Examination Procedure**

The conduct of the oral examination and contingencies for distance examiners, and absences of examiners are specified in the FGS document entitled "Guidelines for Neutral Chairs" (<http://grad.ucalgary.ca/current/managing-my-program/examinations>).

### **Process/Evaluation of Field-of-Study examination**

Assessment of the candidate's performance takes place immediately following the oral examination. Once the candidate has left the room, and before any discussion, the Neutral Chair conducts an anonymous straw vote of each examiner that provides the initial framework of opinion for discussing the student's performance. The goal of the discussion is to reach a consensus recommendation if possible. Performance on the Field-of-Study examination will be judged in view of the Topic Areas set out at the Pre-candidacy Examination Form, a copy of which will be provided to the Neutral Chair.

A successful FOS Oral Examination is one where the student is able to clearly demonstrate mastery over the subject matter on which they have been questioned and critical thinking in the fundamental areas that underpin their research proposal.

Following discussion, each examiner must submit a recommendation of "Pass" or "Fail" to the Chair.

### **Passing the Oral examination**

Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation. Should the outcome of the final vote include one negative vote, the candidate will pass.

**Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program  
Doctoral Candidacy Requirements**

### **Failing the Oral examination**

Should the outcome include two or more negative votes, the committee's recommendation to the Graduate Program Director will be "Fail".

In the case of a "Fail:"

- **The Neutral Chair** must inform the student of the committee's recommendation immediately following the vote of the examination committee. The Neutral Chair will submit the final recommendation of "Fail" to the Graduate Program Director within one working day of the completion of the examination.
- **The examiners** write brief memos to the Graduate Program Director explaining the reasons for his/her vote and submit within five working days from the date of the examination.
- **The Graduate Program Director** may uphold the "Fail" in the case of a clear fail or refer to FGS for decision in the case of an unclear "Fail." If the GPD upholds the "Fail", after consultation with the Supervisor, the Graduate Program Director then summarizes the essential points from the memos to the student, copied to the Supervisor.
- **The Graduate Program** must send the *notice of a failed candidacy component* to the student within ten working days from the date of the examination.

### **Re-take of Examination**

Only one re-take will be permitted. The re-take must take place no sooner than two months and normally by four months from the date of the first examination. Under exceptional circumstances, variation from this interval must be justified to, and approved by, the Program Director. Normally, the composition of the committee will remain the same.

In reporting the results of the second examination, the committee will be limited to recommending either a "Pass" (i.e., no more than one negative vote), or "Fail."

A recommendation of "Fail" requires that, within five working days:

- **each examiner** must submit a confidential written report to the Graduate Program Director, copied to the Supervisor, detailing the reasons for his/her vote.
- **the Neutral Chair** must also submit a written report of the examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director.

If the Graduate Program Director upholds the recommendation to "Fail", the student will be required to withdraw from the Faculty of Graduate Studies. The graduate program must send the *Recommendation of Required Withdrawal from Graduate Program for Failure to Maintain Academic Progress* to [gpoform@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gpoform@ucalgary.ca).



## Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

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### **Transfer to a Master's Program**

Students registered in the Veterinary Medical Sciences doctoral program may elect to transfer to the Master's program in Veterinary Medical Sciences (with the approval of the supervisor and program director—see Change of Program Form available from the Graduate Program Administrator), however, a transfer will not be approved after a second failure of the Thesis Proposal or Field-of-Study examinations. (Note: FGS rules allow program-to-program transfers of doctoral students only before the student's third annual registration—see Graduate Calendar [D.4 Program Transfers](#).)



**Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program  
Doctoral Candidacy Requirements**

**Table 1: Grading Rubric for Thesis Proposal**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade Point Value</b>	<b>Graduate Description</b>
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent - superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
C+	2.3	All grades below "B-" are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements.
C	2	
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1	
F	0	

Veterinary Medical Sciences Graduate Program  
Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

Figure 1: Flow Diagram and Timeline for VMS Admission to Candidacy Process

# VMS Admission to Candidacy Process

