Toronto Metropolitan University

Faculty of Engineering & Architectural Science
Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

FEAS internal procedure for hybrid PhD and MASc oral examinations

1. Context

The rapid advancement of Large Language Models (LLMs) in recent years has outpaced the development of corresponding university policies. While LLMs can be valuable tools for research and learning when used responsibly, they also pose significant risks related to academic integrity across all levels of higher education.

At the same time, one of the lasting positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the ability to conduct academic activities, including graduate defenses, in hybrid formats. This approach has enhanced access to expertise by enabling participation from examiners and committee members worldwide, improving the quality of feedback and visibility of student research.

However, the growing capability of LLMs to generate real-time, voice-activated responses raises new integrity concerns, particularly during oral examinations and defenses. In addition, the exclusive use of virtual platforms has, at times, diminished the academic decorum and significance of these events—milestones that represent the culmination of years of scholarly effort and recognition of original contribution to knowledge.

2. Procedure

Beginning as a pilot project in Fall 2025, and subsequently implemented across all FEAS graduate programs, all PhD and MASc oral examinations, including candidacy exams and final defences will be conducted in a hybrid format following the principles below:

1. In-person participation is required for:
    - The PhD/MASc candidate;
    - The examination committee chair;
    - The supervisor(s);
    - The majority of committee members from the home program and/or TMU.
2. Remote participation is permitted for:
    - The external examiner, especially if located outside the Toronto region;

    - Committee members on sabbatical, leave, or temporarily away for professional (conference, research travel) or health reasons.
3. Audience participation may occur both in-person and remotely.

Annual supervisory committee meetings including the final supervisory committee meeting, otherwise known as an internal PhD defense, may be conducted either in a hybrid format or fully virtually, at the discretion of the program.

3. Policy Alignment

All other aspects of the defense or oral examination, including documentation and evaluation procedures, shall remain consistent with TMU Senate Policy 170(b) — *Graduate Status, Enrollment and Evaluation*, specifically:

- Procedure 21: *Master's Thesis Requirements*
- Procedure 23: *Doctoral Dissertation Phase*