

PHD IN LAW – CANDIDACY REQUIREMENTS

Introduction

The candidacy requirements of the Faculty of Law at the University of Calgary include the completion of coursework and other program requirements, the completion of a written thesis proposal for approval by the supervisory committee, and the completion of field of study exams that require the student to demonstrate command of the field of study. The purpose of the candidacy requirements is to demonstrate students' familiarity with the most important literature in their field and the approaches and debates within that field, such that they will be equipped to write their dissertations. Students will demonstrate their ability to read critically and to independently and effectively make original arguments, both orally and in writing, that will make a novel contribution to the field of research.

Coursework

Doctoral students will complete their coursework in the first year of their programs.

Supervision

The timetable for candidacy for doctoral students in the Faculty of Law appears in summary form below. Upon entering the program and based on the student's interests, each student will be matched with a supervisor. Within the first eight months of the student's program, a permanent supervisor will be identified, who will replace any interim supervisor assigned when the student was admitted. The thesis topic will be identified and, no later than three months after the permanent supervisor is determined, the **supervisory committee** will be established. The supervisory committee will ordinarily consist of a supervisor and two University of Calgary faculty members, typically members of the Faculty of Law (full details on supervision and timelines are available in the graduate calendar under [Academic Regulations](#)).

Candidacy Requirements: The Research Proposal

According to the timelines, the student will prepare a full **research proposal**, which will be 25 to 30 double-spaced pages long (around 7500 words), including a single-spaced bibliography. The proposed research must be original work that will make a significant contribution to knowledge and demonstrate critical understanding of the relevant literature. The proposal will have a short, accurate, and descriptive title. At minimum, it will:

- state the research question to be investigated in the PhD thesis and its background and intellectual motivation,
- explain how the research question will be answered,
- identify whether ethics approval will be needed,
- briefly review important related literature and its relation to the proposed research contribution,
- describe the methodology,
- provide a draft table of contents,

- supply a narrative commenting on each chapter, and
- include a proposed timeline for completion.

The proposal must also include a bibliography of at least three pages listing the most relevant primary and secondary literature for the dissertation. The student is expected to consult with the supervisor and members of the supervisory committee in preparing the proposal.

The proposal must be approved by the supervisory committee before the field of study examination according to the timelines below. When the supervisor and student agree that the proposal is ready, the student must submit it to the members of the supervisory committee at least 21 days ahead of a meeting to be attended by all of the members of the committee and the student. At this meeting, the student will present the proposal and explain and justify the topic, the underlying theory, and the methodology. After the discussion, the student will be asked to leave the room so that the committee members can deliberate. If the committee is satisfied with the proposal and the student's capacity to undertake the work, the members will formally approve the dissertation proposal.

If any member of the committee is of the opinion that the thesis proposal cannot be approved, the supervisor will inform the Graduate Program Director (GPD) immediately, each committee members will provide the supervisor with a written report on the thesis proposal within two business days. With the guidance of the supervisor and in response to the committee's reports, the student will be permitted to resubmit the proposal to the supervisory committee at least two, but not more than six, months later. Should the revised thesis proposal not be approved by the committee, the student will be requested to withdraw from the program. If the thesis proposal is not approved, the student has the right to appeal the decision to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Procedures for appeal are described in the Graduate Calendar under [Academic Regulations](#).

Candidacy Requirements: The Field of Study Examination

In accordance with the timelines below, after the proposal has been approved, the student will complete their **field of study examination** and advance to candidacy. The examining committee will be composed of the supervisory committee and two additional examiners (ordinarily members of the academic staff of the University of Calgary), as well as a neutral chair.

The supervisor will coordinate the timing of the oral examination with the student and the other examiners. Four weeks before the scheduled oral examination, the supervisor will instruct the Graduate Program Assistant (GPA) to set up the oral candidacy examination, specifying the date, time and place or mode (remote and hybrid examinations being possible) and the composition of the examining committee.

The field of study examination is designed to assess the student's command of the existing literature in the area of the proposed research. The basis of the exam will be the bibliography of the research proposal or a draft dissertation chapter on the previous work underlying the research, with the supervisor determining which of these options is most appropriate for the student. By exploring the literature as presented by the student and examining any gaps in what has been presented, the examiners will make sure that the student has the breadth and depth of knowledge required to undertake the proposed research.

Four weeks before the oral field of study examination, the supervisor will assign five questions to the student. These questions will have been developed through consultation with the other members of the supervisory committee and will probe the student's preparation for embarking

on the thesis research, exploring such matters as the theory, methodology and familiarity with secondary literature. The questions will be based on the proposal's bibliography and, if available, the introductory and previous work sections of the draft dissertation. The questions will be designed to allow the student to demonstrate knowledge in the field of study that is the subject of the research proposal.

No later than three weeks after the questions are assigned to the student, the student will submit written responses to three of the questions to the neutral chair, who will immediately distribute the student's responses to members of the examination committee. The student's written response to each question should be a maximum of 10 pages in length (double spaced, 12 point font, 1" margins). The written answers will form the basis of the oral examination.

The oral examination will proceed according to the regular processes for administering oral examinations at the University of Calgary, with rounds of questioning in which each examiner has an opportunity to ask the student questions to probe the student's answers to the assigned questions and the research area more generally. The procedure for oral field of study examinations is set out in the graduate calendar. See [K.4 Oral Examination Process \(for Field of Study and Thesis Proposal\)](#).

A student must pass the oral examination with no more than one examiner voting to fail. If the student fails the examination, the student will be allowed to retake the examination no sooner than two and no later than six months after the original oral candidacy examination. The composition of the examination committee normally will remain the same. A second failure of a candidacy component will result in a student being required to withdraw. A student failing an examination has a right of appeal as set out in the graduate calendar ([K.5 Appeals of Decisions Regarding Candidacy Components](#)).

A student who successfully completes these steps becomes a doctoral candidate in Law.

Candidacy Timeline Summary

Students entering the PhD program directly:

Year 1:

Coursework completed:

Law 703, Law 705, Law 709, and any other courses required

Supervisory committee established:

By 8 months after the program start-date: permanent supervisor identified

By 3 months after permanent supervisor is identified, the supervisory committee members will be identified.

Year 2:

Proposal:

By the end of the first sixteen (16) months of the student's program, the student's research proposal will have been submitted to, and approved by, the supervisory committee, as set out above.

Field of Study Examination:

- By the end of the first twenty (20) months of the student's program, the Field of Study examination will be completed.

Students transferring into the PhD program from an LLM program at the University of Calgary:

Year 1:

Coursework completed:

Law 705 (if not already taken), Law 709, and any other courses required

Supervisory committee established:

By the end of the student's first semester, the supervisory committee members will be identified.

Proposal:

By the end of the first ten (10) months of the student's program, the student's research proposal will have been submitted to, and approved by, the supervisory committee.

Field of Study Examination:

By the end of the first year of the student's program, the Field of Study examination will be completed.

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