

Physical Presence Policy for committee meetings, research proposal defenses, and PhD and MSc oral exams:

Approved by WEC Faculty December 2022

Regular Committee Meetings:

The default recommendation of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation (WEC) is that the student and all Committee members should attend committee meetings in person. However, the faculty of WEC have previously voted to maintain ultimate physical presence flexibility regarding committee meetings where all members and the student may choose to be remotely or physically present for committee meetings in any combination.

MSc and PhD Proposal Defense* Exam:

The default recommendation of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation (WEC) is that the student and all Committee members should attend a proposal defense meeting in person. However, the faculty of WEC have previously voted to maintain ultimate physical presence flexibility regarding the proposal defense where all members and the student may choose to be remotely or physically present in any combination. In addition, owing to the benefits to students of handling one or more rounds of proposal draft review and editing by all committee members WEC faculty have voted to allow both MSc and PhD proposal defenses to be conducted in a meeting and/or via email circulation of the draft proposal.

Physical Presence at the PhD General Knowledge Oral Exam* and at MSc and PhD Oral Defense Exams.

Note: WEC faculty voted to require a minimum of 4 committee members for Doctoral students and a minimum of 3 committee members for Masters students.

- (1) The default recommendation of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation (WEC) is that the student and all 4 Committee members attend PhD oral qualifying exam (the general knowledge portion), PhD dissertation defense oral exams, and that all 3 committee members attend MS thesis defense oral exams in person.
- (2) Exception 1: One member other than the committee Chair may be remotely present.
 - (a) PhD: If any member of a dissertation committee other than the Chair cannot be in person, WEC requires the physical presence of the student and at least three members of the advisory committee at PhD oral qualifying exam (general knowledge portion) and the PhD final oral exam. Regarding this exception to the policy of physical presence, WEC does not make a distinction between the External member and regular members; any one of them can be absent if the others and the Chair are present.
 - (b) MSc: For the MSc thesis defense, at least two faculty members, including the Chair, must be present.

The department will develop a form for all meetings (including committee meetings) showing (a) member physical presence status, (b) spaces for all members present or remote to sign off. and (c) a checklist for required elements to maintain exam integrity. In the case of any member attending remotely, the following must be checked on the form:

- (i) presence of sufficient video bandwidth for all remote cameras to be on;
- (ii) use of a whiteboard app
- (iii) that all locations of remote members are free of distraction and secure from disruption

In cases where the committee cannot meet these requirements, the committee chair can petition the department chair with a documented justification to administer the exam with fewer than the required in-person number. In the case of faculty members unable to attend, stand-in faculty members can be used to attain the required number of in-person committee members and can be another graduate faculty member (WEC or External), WEC Chair, or GPC Chair, depending on the situation. In other extraneous circumstances, the committee can discuss/decide on the level of participation of stand-ins.

*** Note:** The Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation revised and clarified the policy regarding PhD oral Qualifying Exam several years ago to recognize two distinct portions to the oral exam.

- The Proposal Defense Exam addresses only the student's research plan for their dissertation or thesis.
- The General Knowledge Exam addresses the student's grasp of the larger conceptual and methodological arena of their chosen discipline(s). In the above policy, the physical presence requirement only applies to the General Knowledge Exam.