

PhD / DVSc / MSc Defences in Population Medicine

This is a *temporary* “guide” for PhD, DVSc and MSc defences during the times of COVID-19 and social/physical distancing, i.e. when defence presentations and exams must be adapted to video conferencing (Population Medicine is currently using “Zoom”). This guide has been adapted from a similar guide prepared by the [Department of Pathobiology](#) and guidelines from the [University of Guelph](#).

- **General considerations**
 - Defences are *final examinations*.
 - Defences are also an *opportunity* for the candidates to present their theses and to *celebrate* their achievements.
 - Communication is to a large part body language and we are missing or misinterpreting parts of the body language in a *videoconference*. Therefore it is considered more *stressful* for everyone and especially the candidates to participate in a defence via video conferencing.
 - The *health* (incl. mental health) of the candidates is most important. The candidates can (perhaps should) have one person for emotional and technical support around during the presentation and exam.
 - It is more likely that *videoconferencing from home* gets disrupted than from an office environment (doorbell ringing or videobombing by kids and pets) – we take this easy, this is our life now and no cause for panic.
 - ⇒ Guiding principle: *be kind to each other!*
 - ⇒ Therefore: *Defence presentation and exam shall be as long but no longer than necessary*

- **Defence procedure in Population Medicine**
 - While the exam should start at the set time, the exam committee and candidate should *join the videoconference 10 to 15 minutes earlier* to sort out any technical issues.
 - The defence starts with a *welcome* message by the chair.
 - This is followed by an *introduction of the candidate* to the audience by their advisor.
 - The highlight is the *public defence presentation* by the candidate (up to 30 minutes for PhD / DVSc, and up to 25 minutes for MSc).
 - Following the presentation, the audience is given an opportunity for *discussion* with the candidate. Let the chair know that you have a question using the “chat tool” in Zoom, on invitation by the chair unmute the microphone and video camera to face the candidate.
 - The chair *ends* the defence presentation.
 - After a *break* the exam committee and candidate as well as a select group of invited guests proceed to the *oral examination* (the candidates and advisor could invite a small circle of collaborators, lab mates, friends and family).

- The oral examination has *two discussion rounds*.
 - For the first round, the *examiners are given up to 20 minutes* time for discussion of the thesis with the candidate, and the *external examiner* is given up to *30 minutes* (PhD and DVSc only, because MSc exams are conducted without external examiners).
 - In the *second round* all examiners have *5 minutes* each for discussion.
 - At the end the *candidate* has an opportunity for comments.
 - The candidate will be excused and leave the Zoom meeting while the exam committee is engaging in *performance deliberations*.
 - The chair will forward the *exam forms* to the examiners for *signatures* and forward these to the department's Graduate Program Assistants (i.e., Ariah or Jessie).
 - The chair will email the candidate to re-join the Zoom meeting to get *feedback* (and – assuming satisfactory performance- virtual hugs!).
- ***Emergency preparations***
 - The candidate and exam chair will conduct a *test meeting prior to the defence*, to assure the chair and candidate are familiar with the software platform (currently Zoom).
 - Prior to the exam, the chair will collect the *phone numbers* of all participants and will advise examiners to have *exam questions* ready
 - In case of an *unforeseen event*, the exam may proceed via phone rather than video conferencing for the affected person.
 - At the discretion of the chair of the examination committee, *a defence in progress may be stopped and rescheduled*, ideally within one week if technical difficulties prevent the student, chair or more than one examiner from participating.
 - The candidates should be prepared for such an unforeseen event and *share their slide show prior* to the defence presentation with their committee. Candidates should number the slides for ease of reference.
- ***Further considerations***
 - Candidates should have their *thesis* available because examiners often discuss specific items (e.g. data tables, graphics, wordings).
 - Zoom allows using a *Whiteboard* to draw diagrams, which examiners or the candidates can use to draw and share during exams.
 - The *exam forms* are fillable PDFs that can be *electronically signed*. And will be send for signature to exam committee members following the exam.
 - Etiquette: Respect each other! Dress-up and Smile!

Olaf Berke
 Department of Population Medicine
 Home phone: 519 – 827 – 1618
 June, 2020