

GUIDELINES FOR THE EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE PhD DEGREE AT THE NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES (UMB)

Based on 'Guidelines for the Evaluation of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees' recommended by the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions on 22 March 2007

Approved by the Board of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences on 5 March 2009

1. Regulations and supplementary provisions

The evaluation of scientific theses for doctoral degrees at Norwegian universities and university colleges is regulated by this institution's Regulations for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) and supplementary provisions to these regulations. The 'Regulations for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences with supplementary provisions' shall be made known to all persons who participate in the evaluation of doctoral theses at UMB.

While these guidelines are formulated within the framework of UMB's regulations for doctoral degrees, they focus in particular on the evaluation process and provide supplementary provisions on the norms and procedures which apply to the evaluation of doctoral degrees at UMB and which are to all intents and purposes assumed to be common to all Norwegian doctoral degrees. These guidelines must therefore always be interpreted and practised in the context of the regulations.

In case of any inconsistencies between the guidelines and the regulations, the regulations will always take precedence. In case of any inconsistencies between the Norwegian and English versions of the regulations or guidelines, the Norwegian version takes precedence over the English version.

2. Preliminary procedures

2.1 Appointment of the evaluation committee and submission of the thesis

Appointment of the evaluation committee shall be done in accordance with the provisions in the PhD Regulations Chapter 13.

UMB's representative on the committee shall, in addition to being a full member of the committee, act as the committee's administrator (cf. Section 13-1 and Ad 13-1 of the PhD Regulations).

The doctoral thesis shall be forwarded to the committee together with additional information; the names of the supervisors, authorship declarations (if applicable) and an overview on the candidate's approved academic training component. The committee may accord weight to the academic training component when formulating the specified topic for the trial lecture.

2.2 Corrections of a formal nature etc. in the doctoral thesis after its submission for evaluation

A thesis submitted for evaluation may not be withdrawn. The doctoral candidate may, however, make minor corrections of a formal character after the thesis has been forwarded to the committee (cf. the PhD Regulations section 14-2). No other corrections may be made to work which has been submitted for evaluation.

The committee shall be provided with a summary of any corrections made (an errata list), no later than one week prior to the public defence, and shall notify the doctoral candidate (preferably by e-mail) of whether or not the corrections have been approved. If the committee is in doubt as to whether the corrections may be approved, this should be clarified with the Department of Academic Affairs.

3. The committee's evaluation report

The committee shall submit a reasoned joint report, stating whether the thesis is worthy of defence for the PhD degree (cf. The PhD Regulations Chapter 16).

The administrator of the committee is responsible for organising the committee's work (cf. The PhD Regulations Re 13-1), including coordinating the compilation of the joint report and informing the other committee members of deadlines for their individual evaluations of the thesis and for the joint report. The deadlines shall be within the time frame set out in the PhD Regulations section 16-1.

3.1 Description of the thesis

The committee's report shall describe the scientific significance of the thesis and its most central elements relating to theory, hypotheses, material, methodology and findings. Furthermore, the report must include a brief description of the format (monograph/ collection of articles), type (for example theoretical/empirical work) and scope.

3.2 Evaluation of the thesis

A Norwegian doctoral degree is a certification of research qualifications of a certain standard. In a PhD programme, qualifications are also documented through tests and participation in various types of activities that are part of the academic training component. As the academic training component has been approved by the department prior to thesis submission, an evaluation of this component is not included in the work of the evaluation committee.

The evaluation of the thesis shall be based on sections 10-1 and 15-1 of the PhD Regulations. If the thesis includes a joint publication, the doctoral candidate must have obtained declarations from the co-author(s) (cf. the PhD Regulations section 10-2). The committee must consider whether the candidate's contribution can be identified and whether the candidate has sole responsibility for a sufficiently large portion of the thesis. If the candidate's own documentation (in the form of enclosed co-authorship declarations) is insufficient, the committee may take steps to obtain further information.

If the whole thesis has been submitted as a joint publication, it is reasonable to expect the research project and/or thesis to be more comprehensive than would be expected of an individual piece of work. As far as possible, each of the doctoral candidates must be evaluated and tested according to the same requirements as if the work had been carried out by one person.

3.3 The conclusion

As described in the PhD Regulations section 15-1, the strong and weak points of the thesis should be considered and discussed, leading to a conclusion as to whether or not the committee finds the thesis worthy of public defence (cf. the PhD Regulations Chapter 16).

3.4 The committee's report/recommendation

The committee shall submit its reasoned report/recommendation to the department.

It must be clearly stated in the report's conclusion whether the committee:

- approves the thesis for public defence (cf. the PhD Regulations section 16-4)
- does not approve the thesis for public defence, but will allow a revision (cf. the PhD Regulations section 16-5)
- does not approve (i.e. rejects) the thesis (cf. the PhD Regulations section 16-6).

If the conclusion is that the thesis should be approved for public defence, the committee should formulate its reasoning fairly brief, and make the report general and concise. If the committee

concludes that the thesis should not be approved for public defence, it will be natural to give more detailed reasons for the conclusion.

3.5 Treatment of the committee's report on the thesis

On completion of the committee's report, the committee's administrator should submit it to the department, within the agreed deadline. Any individual statements must be enclosed. The department shall then forward the report as soon as possible to the PhD candidate (and main supervisor), and also inform the candidate about the deadline of 10 working days for submitting written comments (cf. the PhD Regulations section 16-2) and about the right of appeal (cf. the PhD Regulations section 22-3). Any comments from the doctoral candidate should be sent to the administrator of the evaluation committee, with a copy to the main supervisor.

An unanimous report from the evaluation committee has the status of a decision, and it will not be considered by other bodies unless the PhD candidate appeals the decision. In the event of dissent among the committee's members, the report has the status of a recommendation. The Department of Academic Affairs will then present the case to the University Board, which will make a decision (cf. the PhD Regulations section 16-3).

4. The committee's evaluation of the trial lecture and public defence

4.1 The trial lecture (the PhD Regulations Chapter. 18)

The purpose of the trial lecture is to document the doctoral candidate's ability to impart to others knowledge gained through his/her research. The lecture should be structured so that it is accessible to an audience with knowledge corresponding to what would be expected of students at an advanced level in the academic field, i.e. master's degree students.

The topic of the trial lecture should contribute to documenting the doctoral candidate's academic breadth (within the candidate's chosen field), and it should not be selected from the central research questions covered by the candidate's degree work. The evaluation committee prescribes the topic and the administrator informs the PhD candidate about the topic 10 working days prior to the trial lecture and public defence.

When evaluating the trial lecture, emphasis should be placed on both its academic content and the candidate's ability to impart knowledge. The trial lecture is part of the doctoral degree examination and it must be approved before the PhD candidate can defend his/her thesis in a public defence. Should the trial lecture not be approved, the PhD candidate may present a new trial lecture and public defence at the earliest after a period of six months.

4.2 The public defence of the thesis

The public defence should be carried out in accordance with the PhD Regulations Chapter 19. Normally, there are two ordinary opponents (cf. sections 19-3 and 19-4). The evaluation committee decides itself which of its members will be first opponent, second opponent and, if applicable, third opponent.

If the whole thesis has been submitted as a joint publication, the committee shall decide how the public defence should be conducted. If the doctoral candidates are given an opportunity to defend the thesis in a joint public defence, the opponents must ensure that each candidate is individually tested to a sufficient extent.

The chairperson of the public defence is responsible for ensuring effective use of the time available for the different parts of the public defence within the time frame set for the public defence as a whole.

The chairperson declares the public defence closed, without giving any evaluation of the defence, but merely referring to the evaluation that will be given in the “Statement from the evaluation committee” (see 5.4).

4.3 Evaluation of the public defence

If a thesis is found worthy of a public defence, this will normally result in the thesis and its defence being approved for the doctoral degree. If, in light of new factors that emerge during the public defence, the central conclusions of the thesis are indisputably untenable, the evaluation committee must evaluate the public defence as not approved. The same applies if the public defence uncovers blameworthy factors that are material to the evaluation of the thesis, such as a breach of ethical research norms or sound academic practice.

4.4 The committee's recommendation – 'Statement from the evaluation committee' (the PhD Regulations Chapter 20)

Following the public defence, the evaluation committee formulates a recommendation to the University Board concerning as to whether or not the thesis, the trial lecture and the public defence has been approved. The recommendation is submitted in the form of a signed ‘Statement from the evaluation committee’ to the Department of Academic Affairs.

It is the responsibility of the committee to make a recommendation as to whether the public defence should be approved or not approved. Should new factors come to light during the public defence that give rise to uncertainty among the committee members, and these factors cannot be clarified during the public defence, the committee should clarify and consider the possible consequences of these factors before making a final recommendation in the report. In such cases, the administrator of the evaluation committee should contact the Department of Academic Affairs as soon as possible.

5. Concluding procedures and conferral of the degree (the PhD Regulations Chapters 20 and 21)

The Department of Academic Affairs presents the evaluation committee's recommendation to the University Board for consideration.

If the committee is unanimous in its approval of all elements on which the conferral of the PhD degree is based, the committee's recommendation shall be respected, but the University board *may nonetheless* deviate from this principle if there are extraordinary and compelling reasons to do so. Such reasons could, for example, be an obvious misinterpretation by the committee of the institution's quality standards, or the emergence after the recommendation has been submitted, of new information which is crucial to the question of approval (e.g. the uncovering of ‘cheating’).

6. Right of appeal

Reference is here made to the provisions in UMB's PhD Regulations section 22-3.