

 UNIVERSITEIT GENT	 FACULTEIT WETENSCHAPPEN	 geografie <small>vakgroep</small> <small>Universiteit Gent</small>
Practical guidelines for obtaining a PhD in Geography, Geomatics and Surveying	PhD in Geography – PhD in Geomatics & Surveying Academic year 2016-2017	

1 INTRODUCTION

The guidelines set out in this document are a combination of some administrative guidelines set out by the university and a consensus discussion in the Education Board for Programmes in Geography, Geomatics and Surveying. This document provides a hands-on overview of some of the key steps to obtaining a PhD. However, and as a consequence, this overview replaces by no means the administrative guidelines in and by themselves. In case of a dispute, Ghent University's 'Education and Examination Code'¹ serves as the one and only guiding principle.

2 PHD ADMINISTRATION

2.1 Registration

PhD student needs to subscribe on a yearly basis during the period they are working on their PhD. For more details, see:

- <http://www.ugent.be/nl/onderzoek/doctoreren/administratie/inschrijven.htm> for Flemish students;
- <http://www.ugent.be/en/teaching/admission/degreestudent/application> for other students.

The progress of the PhD student can be supported and monitored by a 'Doctoral Guidance Committee', which is appointed at the time of the first subscription and supplements the supervisor's scientific guidance. If a PhD student only has one supervisor, then this committee is compulsory.

It is required that students who intend to defend their thesis are registered as a PhD student at Ghent University in the academic year they will defend their thesis, and that the appropriate subscription fee (the examination fee) is paid for the Doctoral Exam. Note that about four weeks are generally required

¹ <http://www.ugent.be/en/education/degree/practical/studentadmin/OEREnglish/overview.htm>

to allow the administrative processing for producing the official PhD certificate. To facilitate this process, it is important that the PhD candidate pays the doctoral examination fee as soon as possible.

2.2 Composition of the Examination Board

Once the dissertation nears completion, the supervisor(s) get(s) in touch with the Chair of the Education Board to discuss the next steps to be taken. Prior to the meeting of the Education Board, the supervisor(s) send(s) the title of the dissertation and the overview of papers included in the dissertation to the Chair and make(s) a suggestion as to the composition of the Examination Board, and provide(s) relevant details regarding the specific roles/areas of expertise of each of the prospective jury members.

Basic requirements for jury membership are described in Article 93 of the Education and Examination code, and imply that jury members must be either:

- active or retired professors, postdocs, doctor-assistants or guest professors at Ghent University;
- professors or postdocs at other universities or research institutes (both national or international);
- people without a PhD, but with special competence in relation to the PhD topic.

Supervisors can be added to the Examination Board, but they have no voting right. Their share (in percentages) in the supervision needs to be specified. The Examination Board must be composed so that there are between 5 and 8 members with voting rights, bearing in mind the following rules:

- at least two members with voting rights do not belong to the Faculty of Sciences, and at least one of them does not belong to Ghent University;
- at least half of the members with voting rights members have the right to be a PhD supervisor at their own institution;
- at least half of the members have an appointment at Ghent University;
- no more than half of the members with voting right have been part of the doctoral guidance committee and/or have co-authored research that is an integral part of the dissertation;
- the Examination Board is chaired by the dean or, more commonly, the Chair of the Education Board for in Geography, Geomatics and Surveying. If s/he is unavailable, then the Examination Board is to be chaired by one of the other full-time tenured staff at the Department of Geography;
- one of the jury members is appointed as the Secretary.

The composition of the Examination Board needs to be approved by the Education Board, whose suggestion is passed on to (and usually approved by) the Faculty Board. It is recommended that the supervisor pre-organizes tentative dates for pre-defense and public defense before the Examination Board is formally appointed, and this to facilitate planning and jury member presence. All members of the Examination Board should obviously (try to) take part in the evaluation, either in writing or being

present at the meetings (virtual or in person). The minimum ratio of attending (virtual or in person) is three out of five. Note that subsequent changes to this composition, as well as any changes to the title of the PhD thesis, require re-approval by the Education Board and Faculty Board.

2.3 Schedule of pre-defense and defense

With the approval of the composition of the Examination Board, the supervisor and candidate agree with the deadlines of submission of the draft thesis and final thesis (see paragraph 4) as well as the schedule of the defences. The pre-defense must take place between 30 and 90 days after the approval by the Faculty Board (excluding academic recesses). The public defense must take place maximum 60 days after the pre-defense (excluding academic recesses), unless the PhD candidate explicitly agrees with a later date. As noted earlier: although the date of the public defense only becomes 'official' after the Examination Board has allowed the PhD candidate to move forward to the public defense, it is advisable that the Examination Board pre-agrees on a date to facilitate planning and organization.

3 WRITING OF THE DRAFT THESIS

Given the collaborative nature of scientific research and the fact that very different topics/methodologies can require very different ways of writing up research, there are no set guidelines as to the format of the thesis. In other words: doctorates primarily based on peer-reviewed publications, more traditional monographs and other formats are possible. However, note that Faculty of Science of Ghent University requires two accepted or published articles in journals listed in the 'Web of Knowledge' or the 'VABB list' are before a student can graduate. These publications may or may not be an integral part of the thesis, but are a compulsory condition before being able to move forward.

Irrespective of the exact format, each thesis should take into account the following general guidelines:

- Introduction: There must be a general introduction setting out the main aims/objectives, a positioning of the dissertation within the wider scientific literature and an outline of the remainder of the thesis. This general introduction must be written by the candidate himself/herself.
- Body of the text: Chapters in the main body of the thesis may be co-authored papers and some of these may even not have been written as the first author. However, at least two chapters need to be written as first author, while the number of chapters not written as a first author should not exceed the number of chapters written as first author. When written in co-authorship, all authors must be mentioned. In case of co-authorship, the thesis should specify the scope of the actual contribution of the candidate (preferably in the introduction). It is

advisable (but not compulsory, see above) that the chapters are written in a format and up to the standards of a manuscript that could be submitted to a peer-reviewed, (S)SCI-or VABB-indexed journal. This can include papers already published, in press, accepted, submitted or in preparation. If already submitted, accepted, in press or published, the full bibliographic reference must be given; if the chapter is an adapted version of a paper/chapter published elsewhere, then this should be clearly mentioned.

- General discussion and conclusions: The integrative contribution of the research summarized in the body of the text must be shown by means of a general discussion. This part of the thesis explains the analytical, conceptual and empirical linkages between the different chapters and shows how these collectively advance scientific knowledge. As a corollary, this must be a synthetic and comprehensive discussion of the other chapters rather than a repetition of the main points and/or an expanded summary of the chapters. Once again, this general discussion must be written by the candidate himself/herself.
- There should also be a summary (in English and Dutch) of approximately 1000 words.

4 SUBMITTING THE DRAFT THESIS AND PRE-DEFENSE

The draft thesis should be made available, via the Chair, to the Examination Board at least five weeks before the pre-defense: this gives jury members four weeks to read and evaluate the manuscript, and the PhD student one week to process the jury members' comments. This means that the candidate needs to submit the draft thesis to the chair at least five weeks before the pre-defense. The draft thesis can be sent digitally (in pdf) to jury members, but note that – as a courtesy – jury members should be asked if they prefer receiving a hardcopy. If this is the case, then the PhD student should organize for this hardcopy to be sent immediately.

With the exception of the Chair, all jury members with voting right have to produce a written report, and this at least one week before the pre-defense. This report needs to be sent by e-mail to the Chair, the Secretary, and the supervisor(s). The report comprises two parts: (1) a part with major comments, suggestions, and critiques (this part will be forwarded to the PhD student), and (2) a part producing an overall advice regarding the quality of the work, and, based on this, an advice regarding the PhD candidate being allowed to move forward to the public defense (this part will not be forwarded to the PhD candidate). The latter advice should set out any changes the jury member would like to see made to the manuscript.

The pre-defense itself starts with a 15-minute-presentation by the PhD candidate in which s/he succinctly summarizes his/her research. This will be followed by a discussion in which all major comments raised by the jury members are taken up with the candidate. Minor corrections (language, references, etc.) will not be dealt with during the meeting but need to be adjusted in the final version of the thesis based on written suggestions provided by the individual jury members.

Given the importance of the pre-defense, all reasonable measures must be taken to allow jury members that cannot be physically present to take part in the discussion (especially international experts), preferably via Skype. The necessary equipment needs to be provided and this process will be discussed with jury members before the pre-defense.

At the end of the pre-defense, the written reports and appraisals of the quality of the oral defense are brought together in an overarching recommendation. Based on the overall discussion, a decision needs to be made regarding the following points:

- Will the candidate be allowed to the public defense based on the current version of the thesis and the discussion following his/her presentation?
- If the PhD candidate is allowed to the public defense, can the thesis remain as is or is the PhD candidate encouraged to make changes? If changes are requested, which modifications would the Examination Board like the PhD candidate to make in response to their comments? This document will be compiled on the basis of the individual reports and the concluding discussion of the Examination Board, and will be delivered maximum one week after the pre-defense; the Chair is responsible for assembling the different suggestions.
- If the PhD candidate is not allowed to the public defense, then the process needs to recommence but it is obviously advisable that - based on the discussion - an overview is compiled of the areas that need further research/scrutiny.
- If the jury cannot reach a consensus on the decision, then there will be a vote on the next steps.

If the PhD candidate is allowed to the public defense, then the PhD candidate needs to produce a formal invitation, which should include a short bio, a summary of the topic of the dissertation, and practical information regarding the public defense. This invitation should also be sent to the Dean's Office and all Department Chairs of the Faculty of Sciences.

5 SUBMITTING THE FINAL THESIS AND PUBLIC DEFENSE

The revised thesis should be sent, via the Chair, digitally (in pdf) to jury members at least one week before the public defense. To facilitate an appraisal of the new version, the candidate is asked to provide digital versions of:

- (1) a 'clean copy' of the dissertation;
- (2) a version with (major changes) tracked;
- (3) a document setting out the gist of the changes made in response to the suggestions of the Examination Board.

Hardcopies of the revised version should be made available at the public defense.

The public defense, which officially runs from the entrance of the Examination Board to the proclamation should be finished within two hours. The public defense is formally opened by the Chair, who briefly introduces the jury members and subsequently invites the candidate to present his/her work; this presentation should maximum take 30 minutes. Unless the candidate does not speak Dutch himself/herself, the presentation is given in Dutch, albeit that the slides must be in English to facilitate subsequent interaction with the jury. After the presentation, a discussion will start between the candidate and the jury members. The discussion is held in English so that all jury members can participate and intervene throughout the entire discussion. The entire discussion phase should last 75 minutes at most, which leaves 15 minutes for the jury deliberation and the proclamation.

Some practical guidelines:

- The order in which jury members ask their questions is in principle not set but usually follows a twofold distance decay function: (i) we begin with non-Ghent University members, whereby the order is set by the distance of their host institution to Ghent University; (ii) we end with Ghent University members, whereby the order is set by the functional distance (members from other Faculties, then members from the same Faculty but another Department, members from the same Department but another research group, etc.).
- To emphasize the importance of a doctorate, tenured jury members are dressed in toga/gown. The supervisor checks with the different jury members if they have a toga and makes the necessary arrangements to provide one if necessary. There is no formal dress code for the PhD candidate but it is expected that his/her attire appropriately reflects the significance of obtaining the highest academic qualification.
- After the proclamation, (one of) the supervisor(s) present(s) a laudation.
- The financing of the costs associated with the public defense (printing of the thesis, reception, etc.) is a matter of agreement between the PhD candidate and his/her supervisor(s). There is, however, one major exception in that the travel and accommodation costs of the jury members need to be covered by the supervisor.