



GRADUATE DIVISION

University of California, Merced  
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To all Graduate Students, Graduate Group Chairs, Faculty,

As long as in-person student and faculty meetings are suspended on campus, qualifying exam committees and thesis defense committees are encouraged to work with candidates to arrange for oral portions of exams and defenses to be conducted remotely and synchronously if at all possible, and to consider asynchronous alternatives if necessary. Arrangements should be made with the understanding that real-time presentations and synchronous discussions are difficult to conduct remotely, and this difficulty may affect the examination process. Students and faculty should take measures to minimize the potentially detrimental effect of remote interactions. The Graduate Division offers the following suggestions to help:

- For examinations as well as regular committee meetings, students and faculty should use Zoom or other social media platforms like Skype and Microsoft Teams, depending on individual preferences. The campus has now acquired a site license for Zoom Pro and all faculty, staff and students will be proactively provisioned in the next few days. Watch your email for a confirmation from Zoom.
- Zoom has several functions that may be useful during examination, including screen sharing, chat messaging, virtual whiteboarding, and virtual hand raising. OIT/CETL offers 1-1 consultation on Digital Tools for Thesis Defense which includes using Zoom. [Use this link to sign up.](#)
- It may be helpful for the candidate and committee to do a test Zoom session beforehand to ensure that all the desired functions are working, and everyone knows how to use them. OIT also offers group Workshops on Using Zoom. [Use this link to sign up.](#)
- Committee members should ensure that functions are working while the candidate is presenting, and all members should be prepared to pause the candidate if they notice a malfunction (the chat and virtual hand functions may still work if the audio and video signals are not working).
- If only audio conferencing will be used, the candidate should distribute slides and any other visual materials beforehand, in an agreed-upon format.
- Committee members should have an agreed-upon protocol for managing questions during and after presentations. It may be helpful for the Chair to coordinate questions explicitly rather than “open the floor” to questions.
- After the presentation and questions are done, the candidate can leave the Zoom session while the committee deliberates and then invited back by e.g. email when deliberations are done.
- Thesis defenses may be announced to the community electronically as usual. It is common that a portion of thesis defenses are open to the campus community. The student and committee may

consider sharing a recording of the public portion, and/or others may be invited to join the public portion of the Zoom session. Invitees should disable their video to conserve bandwidth.

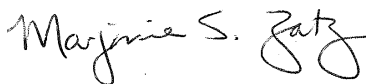
- If presenting via Zoom or a similar platform is prohibitively difficult, committee members may consider whether it would be acceptable for the candidate to make a pre-recorded presentation available via Box, YouTube, or a similar platform. Then synchronous interactions could focus on questioning and be done by Zoom, possibly with audio only, or a platform for instant messaging if bandwidth is not enough for audio. OIT offers online workshops for creating videos. [Use this link to sign up.](#)
- Forms for reporting examination outcomes may be signed electronically. Multiple signatures may be gathered on one form, or if easier, the form may be filled in and then copied to each committee member for them to sign separately. Then the separate forms may be gathered and merged into a single PDF. Forms and other information may be found here: <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/academic-information>

Finally, students and committees should make every effort to conduct examinations remotely rather than postpone them. If a qualifying exam or thesis defense must be postponed, the delay should not factor into assessment of the examination or the student's progress towards degree. The Graduate Division will make every effort to process forms for advancements and degree clearances in time for the standard deadlines that still apply (see <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/calendar-and-deadlines>).

Contact Associate Dean Chris Kello ([ckello@ucmerced.edu](mailto:ckello@ucmerced.edu)) if there are any questions about policy or possible modes of examination.

On behalf of all of us in the Graduate Division, please do all you can to stay healthy and safe.

My best to all,



Marjorie S. Zatz  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education  
Professor of Sociology