

Guidelines for TAC exams

Last updated 13/10/2020

Regulations: Article 7 - Doctoral examination

1. *To earn the doctorate, an oral exam is required in addition to earning the course credits required for the doctoral training concerned and, if applicable, credits for other courses, seminars, and advanced training set forth in Article 3 (co-requisites), the thesis project, and its oral defense.*
2. *The oral examination must take place at the end of the first year. If the doctoral student has not taken the exam after 15 months, he or she is eliminated from the doctoral program.*
3. *The oral examination covers general disciplinary knowledge, the progress made by the doctoral student on research projects, and the thesis project.*
4. *The oral examination is assessed by the thesis advisory committee (TAC).*
5. *The TAC comprises a minimum of 2 members, and if applicable the thesis co-director, approved by the director of the doctoral program concerned. In principle, the members of the TAC are Professors or Research and Teaching Associates ('MER'), and must hold a doctorate. At least one of the members must hold a doctorate in the sciences. At least one of the members must be from a department other than that of the doctoral student. The thesis director, and if applicable the thesis co-director, participate in the TAC in an advisory capacity.*
6. *In preparation for the oral examination, the doctoral student submits to the TAC members a written report on the progress made on research projects and the thesis project. The examination begins with an oral presentation by the doctoral student, followed by a series of questions.*
7. *After having heard independently from the student and the thesis director (and, if applicable, the thesis co-director), the TAC, in their absence, produces a report assessing:*
 - i) *the scientific knowledge acquired by the student, in general and more precisely in connection with his or her project,*
 - ii) *the quality of the thesis project,*
 - iii) *the quantity and quality of the work produced by the student to achieve prescribed objectives,*
 - iv) *the specific strengths and weaknesses of the student in relation to his or her thesis project,*
 - v) *the quality of the interactions between the student and his or her thesis director (and thesis co-director if applicable),*
 - vi) *and delivers an assessment report, signed by the members of the TAC, the doctoral student, the thesis director, and the thesis co-director (if applicable).*
8. *A positive assessment report permits the doctoral student to pursue his or her thesis. If the report is negative, the examination can be taken a second and final time before the end of the first 18 months. If the doctoral student does not make the second attempt, or if he or she fails on the second attempt, he or she is eliminated from the doctorate.*

TAC exam proceedings

Committee:

The thesis director and co-director, if applicable, do not count towards the committee members and assist in a consultative capacity.

If the program (co-)director is not part of the committee, at least one of the committee members should be a member of the PhD School. He/she may represent the program director. The PSLS member (program (co-)director or full member) is responsible for writing the TAC meeting report.

PhD students are strongly encouraged to add external experts to their TAC committee.

Exam session:

After the presentation and the Q&A session, discussions proceed in three different constellations (committee with student without PI, committee with PI without student, committee alone); they can be followed in any order.

[Text box: Progress assessment]: both the student and the thesis director (and co-director if applicable) leave the room. The committee discusses the progress of the student. Aspects to consider are work effort, progress, literature knowledge, written TAC report, and presentation.

[Text box: Comments 1]: the student leaves the room; the thesis director (and co-director, if applicable) remain inside. The committee discusses the student's strengths and areas to improve with the thesis director (and co-director if applicable).

[Text box: Comments 2]: the thesis director (and co-director, if applicable) leaves the room; the student remains inside. The committee discusses the strengths and areas to improve of the student's project, research environment or relationship with the supervisor.

Once the report is completed (by a PSLS member), it should be submitted to all participants for approval. If all approve, the report can be downloaded and signed by all participants.

The committee notes whether the exam has been passed or failed on the 'PV TAC' and signs the document.