

University of Victoria

School of Earth and Ocean Sciences

Graduate Handbook

Last updated: March 2024



**University
of Victoria**

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1. Administration of the SEOS graduate program

Faculty and students are bound by policies set by the University of Victoria (UVic), the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), and the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences (SEOS). FGS policies are given in the Graduate Calendar and in policy documents found on the [FGS webpages](#). In particular, students and faculty members should read the [Graduate Supervision Policy](#), which outlines the rights and responsibilities in the supervisory relationship.

In SEOS, the graduate program is overseen by the Graduate Committee, which is chaired by a faculty Graduate Advisor, and typically includes several other faculty members, all appointed by the SEOS Director, and two graduate student representatives.

The Graduate Committee is collectively responsible for discussing issues concerning the graduate program and making recommendations to the SEOS Departmental Committee. Faculty members on the Committee work with the Departmental Secretary to allocate UVic Graduate Awards and Fellowships ahead of each new academic year (Section 8.3) and they make recommendations to FGS for UVic Graduate Entrance Awards, and BC Graduate Scholarships. Faculty members on the Committee also review SEOS graduate student applications for NSERC Post-graduate Scholarships (Section 8.5), and UVic Donor Awards (Section 8.6), making recommendations to the university committees that oversee these awards.

The Graduate Advisor is responsible for chairing meetings of the Graduate Committee and acts as an advocate for the graduate students at the faculty level. They also serve as an ombudsperson in the rare instance of any conflict arising between a graduate student and their supervisor. They arrange Chairs for SEOS candidacy exams (Section 5). Lastly, they represent the SEOS graduate program externally, such as at meetings of the Faculty of Science and FGS. Graduate students can seek confidential advice from the SEOS Graduate Advisor or SEOS Director at any time. Students can also seek support and advice outside the School, most commonly starting with an Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (gsadean6@uvic.ca, see also Section 1.1).

The Departmental Secretary and Graduate Advisor are the main points of contact for current and prospective graduate students with questions about the graduate program. The Departmental Secretary handles administration of graduate student offers, funding memos, committee meetings, oral examinations, and program completions. In consultation with graduate students and their supervisory committees, the Graduate Advisor schedules candidacy examinations. Together the Departmental Secretary and the Graduate Advisor serve as the main point of contact between SEOS and FGS. The Co-op program is administered separately, by the Co-op Advisor (see Section 7).

Contact details

Role	Current holder	Telephone	e-mail
Chair/Director	Dr. Jay Cullen	250-472-4353	seosdirector@uvic.ca
Graduate Advisor	Dr. Roberta Hamme	250-472-4014	seosgradadvisor@uvic.ca
Graduate Committee member	Dr. Dante Canil		dcanil@uvic.ca
Graduate Committee member	Dr. Jody Klymak		jklymak@uvic.ca
Graduate Committee member	Dr. Ed Nissen		enissen@uvic.ca
Graduate Committee member	Dr. Ruohong Jiao		rjiao@uvic.ca
Departmental Secretary	Catherine Duncan	250-472-5133	seosgsec@uvic.ca
Co-op Advisor	Diane Luszniak	250-721-8649	eosco@uvic.ca
Student representative	Katie Jamson		katiejamson@uvic.ca
Student representative	Stacey Edmonsond		sedmonsond@uvic.ca

1.1. Broader support for Graduate students

Many supports exist for UVic Graduate Students outside of SEOS. A list of many can be found [here](#). University support systems are always evolving, and this list may not always be completely up to date, but important support systems include:

- The SEOS Mental Health Contact Person (Dr. Andy Fraass andyfraass@uvic.ca) can assist students in navigating the web of support systems below.
- [SupportConnect](#) is a free, confidential mental health support service available to UVic students that can connect students with qualified counsellors, consultants, and life coaches anytime, anywhere.
- [Here2Talk](#) is a confidential, free, single-session BC government service that offers appointments for students by app, phone, or online chat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- [The International Centre for Students \(ISC\)](#) is a centralized resource providing international services, information, and programs for students from pre-arrival to degree completion.
- [The Student Wellness Centre](#) offers a variety of services to support students' mental, physical, and spiritual health including counselling services. The [Multifaith Centre](#) also provides some counselling, sometimes with shorter wait times.
- The [Sexualized Violence Resource Office](#) offers information on consent, finding support on and off campus related to sexualized violence, and options relating to UVic's sexualized violence prevention and response policy.
- The [Office of Student Life](#) has a [Student Support Coordination Program](#), which is designed to guide students through a variety of complex personal and/or academically challenging experiences. They help to identify on and off-campus resources, help with academic concession processes and requests, and so on. Students must be referred into the program by either staff or faculty.
- The [Peer Support Centre](#) in the Student Union Building (SUB) is a space to speak to trained student volunteers about mental health, concern for friends, or help accessing resources on- and-off campus. They also run support groups.
- The [UVSS Food Bank & Free Store](#) is located in the lower level of the SUB. They provide food and goods free to the community. Extra resources can be provided to students with families. See the website as they sometimes require appointments due to increased demand.
- Some buildings (e.g., [Mearns-McPherson Library](#)) or organizations ([Society for Students with a Disability](#)) have Respite Rooms, which can provide a private space to rest or lie down while on campus.
- The UVic [Graduate Student Society](#) can offer information specific to graduate students at UVic. You can also apply for [conference travel grants](#) through GSS.
- UVic has an [emergency loan program](#) through Student Awards and Financial Aid. It can provide short term assistance to students with an unanticipated and urgent financial crisis. Students with delayed funding payments should contact the [SEOS office](#) and [Graduate Advisor](#) first.
- [Occupational Health, Safety & Environment](#) administers some mandatory training courses such as [lab safety training including the WHMIS training](#) required before using any lab facilities on campus.
- The [UVic Faculty of Graduate Studies](#) administers all graduate programs and can provide advice on all issues. This includes various [funding opportunities](#) beyond the Donor awards (see Section 8.6) advertised by the School in early summer (typically May).

- The [Ombuds Office](#), an independent, impartial, and confidential resource for undergraduate and graduate students and other members of the University of Victoria community. The ombudsperson helps resolve student problems or disputes fairly.

2. Graduate student supervision

2.1. Supervisors and co-supervisors

The primary academic supervisor is your main source of guidance on all matters relating to your studies and research in SEOS. If appropriate, a graduate student may also have a maximum of one co-supervisor. Primary supervision by adjunct faculty or faculty in other departments is permissible, but in this case a regular faculty member from SEOS must serve as co-supervisor.

Students are advised to familiarize themselves with both their own and their supervisor's responsibilities by reading this Handbook, the information on the [SEOS Current Students webpages](#) and in the [FGS Graduate Supervision Policy](#) document.

2.2. Supervisory committee

The supervisory committee plays an important role in guiding your studies and research in SEOS and notifies the student of University expectations concerning the quality, volume, style, and presentation of the thesis. If progress towards the degree is not satisfactory, the committee can recommend to the FGS corrective steps or withdrawal. All changes in programs, or difficulties encountered in completing programs, are to be reviewed first by the supervisory committee. The committee also participates in the student's final oral examinations and Ph.D. candidacy examinations.

2.2.1. Nomination and make-up of the supervisory committee

The supervisory committee is formed by consultation between the student and supervisor, and must be settled upon within the first two terms (eight months) of the program. The student is responsible for informing the Graduate Advisor and Departmental Secretary of the proposed committee composition. Any subsequent changes to that composition must also be reported to the Graduate Advisor and Departmental Secretary. The following rules outline the make-up of supervisory committees.

M.Sc. program: at least **three** members, including:

- a primary or co-supervisor from SEOS faculty, *excluding* adjunct faculty.
- at least one other SEOS faculty or adjunct faculty member.

Ph.D. program: at least **four** members, including:

- a primary or co-supervisor from SEOS faculty, *excluding* adjunct faculty.
- at least one other SEOS faculty or adjunct faculty member.
- at least one outside member who is not a member of the SEOS faculty or adjunct faculty. Faculty members who are jointly appointed between SEOS and other departments may only be the outside member by permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies, which is rarely granted.

Faculty from other institutions, government scientists, or industry scientists with appropriate experience and credentials may all serve on supervisory committees, including as the outside member of a PhD committee. They must be assigned a UVic ID number and then appointed by SEOS to the Faculty Membership List (FML). The primary supervisor is responsible for initiating this process with the SEOS office during formation of the student's committee.

2.3. Expected meeting frequency

2.3.1. With your supervisor

While the FGS indicates that the minimum frequency of meeting (in person, virtual, or through detailed correspondence) should be twice a term, SEOS recommends a minimum of monthly contact to discuss program progress and weekly is preferable. Delays due to field work, remote study, supervisor or student vacation, sick leave, etc. can be expected.

2.3.2. With your supervisory committee

In addition to regular meetings with your supervisor, you must meet with the entire committee at least once per year throughout the period of study. It is the responsibility of the primary supervisor to ensure that these meetings happen in a timely manner.

SEOS recommends that the student send a brief summary report to the committee before the meeting. At the meeting, the student typically makes a short presentation of their research progress. The committee discusses research progress and course work with the student, and makes recommendations (such as identifying additional course work required, or important research avenues to consider). The committee must complete and sign a short report on each committee meeting using the Graduate Student Supervisory Committee Report form (available from the Departmental Secretary or from [this weblink](#)). It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure it is completed and forwarded to the Departmental Secretary to be placed on the student's file in a timely manner (normally within a week) after the committee meeting.

2.4. Expected turnaround time for comments on a thesis, dissertation proposal, or dissertation

When giving supervisory committee members work to read (e.g., a thesis, dissertation proposal, or dissertation or sections thereof), you should ensure they have enough time to read the work, ideally substantially before any deadlines in case revisions are required. The FGS suggests that it is the responsibility of committee members to provide feedback after 20 business days as a maximum, except in extenuating circumstances. Ensuring your supervisor and/or supervisory committee know when to expect to receive such documents, and any associated deadlines, will help ensure the best chance of timely turnaround.

2.5. Supervisor and committee member absences

Under FGS guidelines, if the primary academic supervisor takes a leave of absence from the University for six months or more, an interim supervisor must be appointed. If another committee member (other than the primary supervisor) is absent for twelve months or more, an interim member must be appointed. In either circumstance, the student, the FGS, the Graduate Advisor, and the Departmental Secretary must be notified in writing. Written notification of any change in the original structure of the supervisory committee must also be given to the Graduate Advisor, the Departmental Secretary, and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

3. Program requirements

Graduate students in SEOS receive credits toward their M.Sc. or Ph.D. degree programs by completing research and coursework. Minimum units of total credit and coursework credit are provided in the following sections, but the supervisory committee, in consultation with the student, determines the exact content of the program and division of credits between research and coursework. For example, a supervisory committee might require that a student with a gap in their academic background take additional coursework, on top of the specified minimum.

Students should consult the department for courses that will be offered in any given year. Coursework may include Directed Studies (EOS 580), which requires the submission of a Proposal for Graduate Pro Forma form, available from the Departmental Secretary or from [this weblink](#). EOS 580 may be taken more than once but only with different instructors and topics. Coursework may also include

graduate courses in other departments (see the graduate calendar for more details) or upper-level undergraduate courses, but these require submission of a Graduate Registration form, found at [this weblink](#). Lastly, it is also possible to include courses from other institutions, but the supervisory committee must provide written justification to FGS, who must approve the request.

UVic graduate degree program requirements are also controlled by the Faculty of Graduate Studies as described in the Calendar. If program information differs between this document and the UVic Graduate Calendar, the latter takes precedence.

3.1. M.Sc. program requirements

The M.Sc. program consists of a minimum of 15 units with no fewer than 12 graduate-level credits (i.e., excluding 300- and 400-level undergraduate courses). Normally, students must complete a minimum of 4.5 units of graduate or upper-level undergraduate coursework, which must include EOS 525 Research Frontiers in Earth and Ocean Sciences (1.5 units). The M.Sc. thesis (EOS 599) makes up the remaining units.

All M.Sc. students are also required to present their research at the annual Graduate Student Workshop once during their degree program. Normally this is held during the Reading Break in Fall Term; students typically present during their second year in the program.

3.1.1. EOS 599 M.Sc. thesis

The thesis requirement applies to all Master's students in the School. Students must enroll in EOS 599 in their first term and remain enrolled until their thesis requirements have been completed. The thesis must be defended in a final oral examination (see Section 6).

3.2. Ph.D. program requirements

The Ph.D. program consists of 45 units beyond the Bachelor's level, or 30 units beyond the Master's level. Ph.D. students who enter the program with a Master's Degree must complete a minimum of 3 units of graduate or upper-level undergraduate coursework units. Students who enter the Ph.D. program with only a Bachelor's degree (i.e., those students who transfer from a Master's to a Ph.D. at UVic), must complete a minimum of 7.5 units of coursework. All Ph.D. students must take EOS 525 Research Frontiers in Earth and Ocean Sciences (1.5 units), unless they took it previously as part of an M.Sc. degree (since this course can only be taken once for credit). The Ph.D. Candidacy Examination (EOS 693) and Ph.D. dissertation (EOS 699) make up the remaining program units.

Like M.Sc. students, Ph.D. students are required to present their research at the annual Graduate Student Workshop at least once during their degree program, typically in their second or third year. Ph.D. students are also required to give a one-hour SEOS seminar on their research, normally within the last six months before the defence of their Ph.D. dissertation and normally during the regular Tuesday afternoon seminar slot (booked in consultation with the seminar committee well in advance).

3.2.1. EOS 693 Ph.D. candidacy examination

The candidacy examination is a requirement of the FGS and cannot be waived. SEOS requires that a PhD student take a candidacy exam within two years of first registration as a provisional doctoral student (or within 18 months of transferring from an M.Sc. program but not more than 36 months after first registration in the MSc program) and at least six months before the final oral examination. This exam requires a written dissertation proposal that will then be discussed with the supervisory committee in an oral candidacy examination. Protocols for the process, proposal, and examination are described in Section 5.

Students enroll in EOS 693 upon registering in the Ph.D. program (or upon switching to the Ph.D. program from the M.Sc. program) and remain enrolled until all candidacy requirements have been completed. EOS 699 is a co-requisite (see below).

3.2.2. EOS 699 Ph.D. dissertation

The Ph.D. dissertation is another requirement of the FGS and cannot be waived. Students must enroll in EOS 699 in their first term and remain enrolled until their dissertation requirements have been completed. EOS 693 is a co-requisite until the candidacy exam has been passed. The dissertation must be defended in a final oral examination (see Section 6).

3.3. Transfer from the M.Sc. to the Ph.D. program

A student and their supervisor(s) may decide it is desirable for the student to transfer from the M.Sc. program into the Ph.D. program. Students must have completed at least two terms in the M.Sc. program and will normally have first class standing.

The student must formally request the transfer with a letter to their supervisor. This letter should outline the student's progress and offer a detailed justification for the request. The supervisory committee will then meet to determine whether the student has the potential to satisfy the requirements of the Ph.D. program. If the committee's decision is positive, then the student must complete the re-registration form and provide it to the Departmental Secretary. The transfer recommendation will be sent to FGS for final approval.

4. Timelines for program completion

Full details of the required timelines for M.Sc. and Ph.D. program completion are provided in the [graduate calendar](#). All students, supervisors, and committee members are encouraged to regularly discuss progress towards completion. At the start of the final year of a program (year two for M.Sc. and year 4 for Ph.D.), students should provide their committee with a written timeline of their plan for completion within term limits.

4.1. M.Sc. program timeline

Students proceeding towards a M.Sc. degree are required to complete all the degree requirements within five years (60 consecutive months) from the date of their first registration in the program. Normally, however, students can be expected to complete all M.Sc. requirements within or shortly after two years. Recommended and/or required targets include:

- Completing EOS 525 at the first opportunity;
- Forming the supervisory committee within eight months;
- Meeting with the supervisory committee in the second or third term;
- Presenting at the Graduate Student Workshop in Fall of the second year (normally, the fourth term);
- Completing coursework by the fifth term;
- Meeting with the supervisory committee in the fifth term to discuss progress and plans for degree completion;
- Completing the thesis and defending it in a final oral examination in the sixth or seventh term.

Under exceptional or extenuating circumstances, M.Sc. program extensions beyond the normal five year limit can be requested by submitting a Request for Extension: Program form, available from [this weblink](#). Approved extensions are normally granted on a term-by-term basis. Please also review the [graduate calendar](#) on regulations regarding the implications on your program time limit before requesting the extension. The Departmental Secretary is to be notified when a program extension is required.

4.2. Ph.D. program timeline

A student proceeding toward a Ph.D. degree is required by the FGS to pass a candidacy examination; in SEOS this is required to happen within two years of the date of the student first registering in the program. FGS also require students to complete all degree requirements within seven years (84 consecutive months) of their first registration. In addition, a doctoral degree will not be awarded in

less than two years (24 consecutive months) from the time of first registration, or within less than six months of the time of the candidacy examination. Normally, students can be expected to complete all Ph.D. requirements within or shortly after four years. Recommended or required targets include:

- Completing EOS 525 at the first opportunity;
- Forming the supervisory committee within eight months;
- Meeting with the supervisory committee in the second or third term;
- Presenting at the Graduate Student Workshop for the first (required) time in the second or third year (normally, the fourth or seventh term);
- Completing coursework by fifth term;
- Meeting with the supervisory committee, typically in the fourth or fifth term, to discuss progress and set the terms of the candidacy exam (note that this meeting must occur at least four months before the exam);
- Writing a dissertation proposal and taking the candidacy oral examination before the end of the sixth term;
- Meeting with the supervisory committee in the third and fourth year to discuss progress and plans for degree completion (and in any subsequent years);
- Delivering a SEOS seminar in your final months (plan well ahead by booking a slot with the SEOS seminar committee, as the schedule can fill up early);
- Completing the dissertation and defending it in a final oral examination in the twelfth term.

Under exceptional or extenuating circumstances, Ph.D. candidacy examination extensions beyond the FGS three year limit can be requested by submitting a Request for Extension: Candidacy form, available from [this weblink](#). However, since SEOS requires a candidacy exam within two years of entering the program this should not be an issue. Similarly, Ph.D. program extensions beyond the normal seven year limit can be requested by submitting a Request for Extension: Program form, available from [this weblink](#). Approved extensions are normally granted on a term-by-term basis. Please also review the graduate calendar on regulations regarding the implications on your program time limit before requesting the extension. The Departmental Secretary is to be notified when a program extension is required.

4.3. M.Sc. to Ph.D. transfer timeline

A student who transfers to the Ph.D. program after an initial period in the M.Sc. program is required to complete all the Ph.D. requirements within seven years of the date of the first registration in the M.Sc. program. In addition, students must take their Ph.D. candidacy examination within 18 months of transfer and a maximum of 36 months after first registration in the M.Sc. program.

4.4. Leaves of absence

Leaves of absence are available to graduate students for a variety of reasons or circumstances (e.g., medical, parental, compassionate). Tuition fees are not charged during the leave.

Leaves of absence are normally granted in 4-month blocks, to coincide with the usual registration terms. Students must have completed one term in the graduate program to be eligible. Students in the M.Sc. program may take a maximum of three terms within the maximum 5-year period allowed, while those in the Ph.D. program may take a maximum of six terms within the maximum 7-year period allowed. To request a personal leave, students should apply through their UVic Online Services prior to the course add deadline. To request a leave with permission or a personal leave after the course add deadline, students should submit a Graduate Academic Concession form, available from [this weblink](#). Time taken on a leave of absence with permission is not included in the time period for completion of the degree and deadlines will be adjusted accordingly. All other program requirements and academic unit expectations remain the same.

Students and fellows who are paid out of an NSERC grant, and those receiving awards directly from NSERC, may be eligible to receive up to 12 months of paid parental leave. They may also be eligible to defer their award or take an unpaid leave of absence related to maternity, child rearing, illness, or health-related family responsibilities.

4.5. Graduate student vacation

Graduate students are entitled to a *minimum* of 10 working days of vacation per year (i.e., 10 days that do not include weekends, statutory holidays, or the December university closure). Students may combine these days with weekends to take two consecutive weeks of vacation or, with permission of their supervisor, take vacation days in smaller increments or combine their vacation days with statutory holidays or the December university closure for an extended absence. Students planning to take vacations must consult with their supervisor in writing in advance of the planned absences and make appropriate arrangements for care of ongoing research projects if necessary. The time taken for vacation leave will be counted toward the maximum time allotted to minimum funding term limits and degree completion. All program requirements, academic unit expectations, and deadlines will remain the same.

5. Ph.D. candidacy protocols

The purpose of the candidacy examination is to test the student's understanding of material considered essential to completion of a Ph.D. as well as their competence to do research that will culminate in the Ph.D. dissertation.

5.1. Pre-examination supervisory committee meeting

At least four months prior to the candidacy examination, the supervisory committee will meet with the student to decide on possible dates for the oral exam and provide the student with verbal guidelines for what material will be covered in it. Material to be examined will be that considered necessary background for the student to complete a Ph.D. successfully in their subject area (and thus includes everything discussed in the dissertation proposal). Guidance on the format of the dissertation proposal will also be given to the student at this meeting.

The chair of the supervisory committee is responsible for transcribing these verbal guidelines into a memorandum that should be provided to the student (copied to the supervisory committee and Graduate Advisor) within two working days following this meeting. The memo must state the date of the candidacy exam (which should be decided in consultation with the Grad Advisor to ensure they or their delegate is available to chair the exam), and it must also include a copy of or link to [dissertation guidelines](#) that detail the requirements of the FGS.

Between the time of the pre-examination supervisory committee meeting and the candidacy exam, the student must write their dissertation proposal and study the material outlined by the supervisory committee. During this time, students are encouraged to discuss any uncertainties, concerns, or questions that they have about either the proposal or the material they need to know for the exam with any committee member.

5.2. Dissertation proposal

The dissertation proposal is a 10–20 page document (double spaced, excluding references and figures) that outlines a research plan for the dissertation project. It should both provide the scientific background and rationale for the proposed dissertation research, and propose the methodology for undertaking the research. This may include brief discussion of preliminary results if appropriate.

The dissertation proposal must be provided to the entire committee and the SEOS Graduate Advisor at least four weeks prior to the candidacy exam. Within two weeks of receiving the dissertation proposal, the committee will decide (by vote if necessary) on whether the proposal is of sufficient quality for the candidacy exam to go ahead. If it is not, the student is asked to submit a revised proposal within one month. If a Ph.D. student wishes to transfer to the M.Sc. program prior to their Candidacy Exam, the

student must make this request to their supervisor and the Graduate Advisor prior to submitting their Candidacy Exam Proposal to their committee.

5.3. Oral candidacy examination

The oral candidacy examination is chaired by a SEOS faculty member from outside of the supervisory committee, normally a member of the Graduate Committee, who is assigned by the SEOS Graduate Advisor. It is otherwise closed to all except the student and their supervisory committee. The exam begins with a brief (~15 minute) presentation by the student that provides the background for the project, updates the committee on research carried out to date, and introduces proposed future research. The exam proceeds with normally two rounds of oral questions from the supervisory committee, with the supervisor(s) being the last to question the student in each round. Questions are aimed at determining the student's understanding of background knowledge required to undertake the proposed research and on any other related subject areas that have been specified in advance by the supervisory committee. The time taken for these questions and answers does not usually exceed two hours from the end of the candidate's presentation.

At the end of the examination, the student will leave the room, and the chair will then ask each committee member to review the student's performance and to assign a grade of pass, fail, or adjourn.

5.4. Possible outcomes

Based on the supervisory committee members' assessments, there are three possible outcomes to the candidacy exam:

- **Pass:** the student receives no more than one vote of either fail or adjourn. Students who pass the exam have successfully advanced to Ph.D. candidacy and will continue in the program.
- **Fail:** the student receives two or more votes of fail. Students who fail the exam will be required to withdraw from the Ph.D. program.
- **Adjourn:** the student receives either (a) one vote of fail and one or more votes of adjourn, or (b) more than one vote of adjourn. In such cases, the student will be offered the opportunity to take a second (and final) candidacy exam within three months. In the event of a second exam, the candidate may be required to revise their thesis proposal and will be given a second opportunity to defend the proposal orally and demonstrate suitable background and competence for successful completion of a Ph.D. Votes of adjourn are not allowed during a second candidacy exam. If the student does not pass the second exam (indicated by two or more votes of fail), they will be required to withdraw from the Ph.D. program.

The Chair of the examination informs the Graduate Advisor of the final assessment and any additional requirements imposed by the committee. The Graduate Advisor is then responsible for preparing and submitting the paperwork to the FGS Graduate Admissions and Records Office (GARO).

6. M.Sc. and Ph.D. defence protocols

Assuming that all other requirements are fulfilled, SEOS graduate students complete their degrees by writing a M.Sc. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation and defending it in a final oral examination. Since there are strict timelines for each step in this process, students are advised to consult with their supervisory committees on their desired schedule for graduation and should inform the Departmental Secretary of this schedule well in advance.

6.1. Thesis and dissertation guidelines

The FGS webpages outline permitted thesis and dissertation format requirements and provide additional [resources](#). The student should consult with their supervisory committee to decide upon a date, time and location for their final oral examination. The location is often BWC A319, which can be booked by the Departmental Secretary. Hybrid exams are often conducted in the Clearihue

Videoconferencing Facility, which can be booked [here](#). The student's supervisor requests the participation of an external examiner and determines their availability for this time.

The student's thesis or dissertation must be sent to their supervisory committee at least 2 weeks before the Request for Final Oral Examination form is submitted, and the committee may require changes to be made before signing the Request for Final Oral Examination form.

M.Sc. students must submit their thesis together with the Request for Final Oral Examination for Master's Program form (available from [this weblink](#)) to the Graduate Advisor for signature at least 20 working days before the examination date (not including statutory holidays, weekends, or the actual date of the defence).

Ph.D. candidates must submit their dissertation and the Request for Final Oral Examination for Doctoral Program form (available from [this weblink](#)) to the Graduate Advisor for signature at least 30 working days before the examination date (not including statutory holidays, weekends, or the actual date of the defence).

Graduate students can also request a twelve-month delay to publishing their thesis or dissertation on UVic's online repository (in the case that publishing it sooner would jeopardize patents or independent publications) by submitting to FGS a Withholding form at the same time. The form is available from [this weblink](#).

6.2. Final oral examination

The final oral examination is chaired by a member of the FGS external to SEOS, whom the FGS appoints. The examining committee otherwise comprises the student's supervisory committee and an external examiner. The exam begins with a brief (10-20 minute) presentation by the student that summarizes their thesis or dissertation. The exam proceeds with normally two rounds of oral questions from the examining committee, starting each round with the external examiner, proceeding next to any supervisory committee member from outside SEOS, then to supervisory committee members from SEOS, and ending with the supervisor. If there is sufficient time, the Chair may also call for questions from the audience. When questioning is completed, the student and audience are asked to withdraw so that the examining committee can consider the thesis and oral exam in private.

6.3. Possible outcomes

Based on the examining committee members' assessments, there are five possible outcomes to the final oral exam:

- *The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to editorial changes as presented and the oral examination is acceptable.*
- *The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to minor revisions and the oral examination is acceptable.* Minor revisions are more than corrections of typographical or punctuation errors, and include clarification of textual material, the qualification of research findings or conclusions, or minor additions that improve the reading and understanding of the dissertation or thesis.
- *The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to major revisions and the oral examination is acceptable.* An example of when a dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to major revisions and the oral examination is acceptable might be when a candidate has orally convinced the examining committee of the validity of the research results but has failed substantively to express this in the dissertation or thesis.
- *The examination is adjourned.* This result should not be confused with failure. Adjournment may be called for in three different types of circumstances. (1) A sudden illness or emergency that does not allow for the examination to be completed; an external environmental situation arises that forces the exam to be prematurely terminated (such as fire alarm, power failure or natural disaster); or when the technology being used breaks down and cannot be repaired in

time to continue the examination. (2) Where the external examiner casts the lone dissenting vote. (3) Where the thesis is acceptable, but the student has failed the oral defence.

- *The examination is failed.* If two or more members of the examining committee are opposed to passing the student, the student will not be recommended for the degree.

7. The graduate Co-op program

Participation in the Co-operative Education ('Co-op') program enables students to acquire knowledge, practical skills for employment, and workplace experience. M.Sc. and Ph.D. students may add work terms to their graduate education by enrolling with the Co-op program. Requirements include completion of two work terms for M.Sc. students and three work terms for Ph.D., where a work term consists of four months of full-time, paid employment with an approved employer.

Students require permission from their academic supervisor and the Graduate Advisor, as well as the Co-op Coordinator, to participate in the Co-op program. Interested students should contact the SEOS Co-op Coordinator early in their first term. For more information on co-op opportunities for graduate students visit the [Co-operative Education Program and Career Services webpage](#) or contact the SEOS Co-op Advisor (Section 1).

8. SEOS funding policies and awards

SEOS graduate students are supported financially through stipends that seek to offset living costs and tuition expenses. As of 1 Sep 2024, SEOS guarantees a *minimum stipend* of \$27,000/yr paid to M.Sc. students for a minimum of six terms, to Ph.D. students for a minimum of twelve terms, and to M.Sc. → Ph.D. transfer students for a minimum of fourteen terms provided students maintain an acceptable level of academic performance as judged by their supervisory committee. Because TA positions take time away from your research, these minimum funding term limits are increased by 1 week for each 35 hours of TA position held that is included in meeting the minimum stipend, starting with TA positions held after 1 Sep 2022. Additionally, these minimum funding term limits are increased by one term for SEOS students who were enrolled in their current degree program during Spring or Summer 2020 (COVID). The minimum stipend level applies to all students within the term limits, regardless of the minimum stipend level at their start date.

Students are typically expected to be working full time on their graduate studies. Absences for longer than two weeks per year or outside work during business hours may only occur by agreement with the supervisor and may result in reduced financial support from the supervisor commensurate with the reduced time spent on research.

Students pay their own tuition and fees. These are not paid directly by the department or supervisors. Information on current tuition and fee levels can be found in the UVic Calendar at [this link](#).

Supervisors have the discretion to ensure students are financially supported at a level higher than the minimum. Supervisors often try to extend funding further beyond the minimum funding term limits, but this is not guaranteed. SEOS supervisors are required to provide students a written Supervisor Funding Policy, when issuing an offer letter or to current students whenever their policy changes, that details their funding philosophy for their research group or individual students within their research group. A SEOS template is available to supervisors to support creation of these policies. A summary sheet of the current SEOS minimum stipend, current tuition and fees levels, and other information is provided to supervisors in advance of funding decisions each term.

Funds that make up this minimum stipend can come from many sources, including: research assistantships (paid from supervisors' grants or contracts for work on research projects); teaching assistantships (paid by the University for work teaching undergraduates); UVic graduate awards/fellowships (paid by the FGS to graduate students with qualifying GPAs and without other large awards); President's Research Scholarships and UVic graduate entrance awards (given to select students on the basis of their academic record); and external scholarships such as NSERC, MITACS, and others. Students should be aware of UVic policies and guidelines for each of these funding

sources, and can seek advice, guidance, or answers to questions from their supervisor, Graduate Advisor, Departmental Secretary, or FGS. Annually, or more often, you will receive a Graduate Funding Memo from the Departmental Secretary that provides the break-down of your funding (Section 8.6). If you are unsure about anything to do with your funding, please ask the Departmental Secretary for a copy of your latest memo and speak with your supervisor.

While all of the above funding streams can be combined towards meeting the minimum stipend, UVic Donor Awards (Section 8.6) are always “on top” of the minimum stipend.

8.1. Research assistantships

Part of the minimum level of support is usually paid out of supervisor’s research grants or contracts in what is known as a research assistantship. The decision to provide a research assistantship and the amount is made by the supervisor. Research assistantship stipends are usually paid in monthly instalments.

Normally, expenses incurred as part of the student’s research are also paid by a research grant or contract held by the supervisor. There is no direct SEOS funding support for graduate student research expenses; everything from photocopying to long distance telephone calls must be paid from research grants or personal resources.

8.2. Teaching assistantships

Appointments are available for qualified students to work as teaching assistants (TA’s) in laboratory classes or as markers for non-laboratory courses. A single competition for positions for the Fall, Spring, and Summer terms is generally held in June/July each year; students will be advised when and how to apply by email. Applications are reviewed by SEOS staff (not by the Graduate Committee) and outcomes are usually confirmed in August. SEOS students may also TA in other departments and should contact those departments for information on available positions and application deadlines.

Unlike the other sources of financial support listed in this section, teaching assistantships are classified as salary (not stipend) and are therefore subject to taxation, although most students receive a refund of these taxes after completing their tax return.

SEOS has the following policies related to teaching assistantships and sessional instruction:

- a) Salary derived from TA positions is part of a student’s funding package. (Note that the total amount of a student’s funding package may exceed the SEOS minimum.)
- b) Hours spent on TA duties are considered part of a student’s regular work week, not on top of a full week of research work.
- c) TA positions must be approved by the student’s primary supervisor. Supervisors are responsible for communicating their expected number of TA positions to their students at least one week in advance of the TA application deadline.
- d) Within funding term limits, research supervisors may require students to undertake a maximum of 196 hours of TA position per year to meet the SEOS minimum funding level. Further TA hours above 196 per year, within funding term limits, must allow students to obtain a correspondingly higher total funding level than the SEOS minimum.
- e) Students who do not secure a TA position because there are not sufficient TA positions for a student with their qualifications are not financially responsible for this situation, i.e., their research supervisor is required to increase funding from other sources to compensate for the funding that the lost TA position(s) would have provided.
- f) Students who do not secure a TA position because: 1) they freely chose to undertake fewer TA positions than the level required by their supervisor, 2) they failed to apply for a TA position, or 3) they have chosen for personal reasons to live outside the Victoria area such that they cannot accept an in-person TA position, are financially responsible for this situation, i.e., their research supervisor is not required to increase funding from other sources to compensate for the funding that the lost TA position(s) would have provided. Such a situation may result in a student earning less than the SEOS minimum.

- g) Sessional instructor appointments cannot be required to meet minimum funding levels. Sessional instructor appointments are considered equivalent to TA positions for the purposes of policies a, b, and c above.

8.3. UVic graduate awards & fellowships

Eligible SEOS graduate students will normally receive UVic Graduate Fellowships from the FGS for the first 6 terms of the M.Sc. program, for the first 12 terms of the Ph.D. program, or for the first 14 terms for MSc. → Ph.D. transfer students. These awards may make up part of a student's minimum funding. To qualify, students must maintain a minimum GPA of 6.0 (entering GPA for new students or UVic graduate GPA once students have taken at least one graded course).

Students receiving major awards of equal to or over \$12,000/year, and/or who are enrolled in their program with the financial support of their employer (e.g., through a military sponsorship program), are ineligible for these awards. There is no way of deferring the UVic graduate awards or fellowships until after the external funding expires; the 6-term (M.Sc.), 12-term (Ph.D.), or 14-term (M.Sc. → Ph.D.) eligibility limits still apply.

The value of the UVic graduate award or fellowship varies from year-to-year depending on the budget allocated to SEOS by FGS and the number of eligible SEOS graduate students. Annually, roughly 90% of the SEOS FGS funding allocation is awarded to students starting or continuing their program in September, with 10% retained to support students starting at other times in the year. If not enough funds remain in the SEOS FGS allocation to fund all students starting later, funding will be deferred for one term for these students (i.e., students still receive the full 6 or 12 terms but possibly beginning with their second term).

In the past few years, full UVic graduate awards or fellowships have varied from \$6,000 to \$7,000 per student depending on the number of eligible SEOS students and the total funding received from FGS. The award is typically paid to the student in three equal instalments, in September, January, and May.

8.4. UVic graduate entrance awards

These annual awards are administered by the FGS, with the number allocated to SEOS each year varying over time. Like the UVic graduate awards and fellowships, they may make up part of a student's minimum funding.

The SEOS Graduate Committee selects the award winners when there are insufficient awards for all eligible students to get such an award. President's Research Scholarships are automatically awarded to students who hold active NSERC postgraduate scholarships. UVic graduate entrance awards are given to incoming graduate students based on their academic record. To be considered, students must have a GPA of at least 7.0. In the interests of equity, SEOS does not assign UVic graduate entrance awards to NSERC postgraduate scholarship or BCGS holders.

8.5. External scholarships

Certain external scholarships may also form part of a student's minimum funding. These include NSERC postgraduate scholarships, which are open only to Canadian students and which require students to submit applications in the Fall (details [here](#)); NSERC Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, which are open to students from any nationality and which must be nominated by UVic with the support of their supervisor (details [here](#)); China Scholarship Council scholarships, which are open to students from China and which require students to submit applications with the support of their supervisor; and BC Graduate Scholarships, which are open only to Canadian students and which must be nominated by the SEOS Graduate Committee.

8.6. Donor awards

Various scholarships, medals, and prizes funded by private donors to UVic are awarded to graduate students based on academic merit, disciplinary research focus, and/or financial need. Unlike the

assistantships, awards, and scholarships described above, donor awards **do not** count towards the minimum funding levels specified above but are “on top” of this.

Donor awards are administered either by the FGS (a list of awards and eligibility criteria can be seen [here](#)) or by the Faculty of Science (information is given [here](#)). Most donor awards require an application from students, while others require nominations from supervisors.

Calls for applications and nominations for a variety of awards appropriate for SEOS graduate students are made, generally around early summer, each year by e-mail to the SEOS graduate student and faculty mailing lists. Internal deadlines for applications and nominations are usually set for early-July in order to give the SEOS Graduate Committee time to rank candidates, request letters of support from supervisors, and forward their selections to FGS and Faculty of Science, whose awards committees then decide upon the final award winners.

8.7. Notification of funding

The Faculty of Graduate Studies will inform eligible students of their individual UVic graduate award or fellowship in the late summer. Soon afterwards, the Departmental Secretary will work with your supervisor to draft a full payment schedule that incorporates all other sources of funding for the coming academic year (Fall–Spring–Summer) and provide this as the Graduate Funding Memo. This is normally sent to students in early September. Your funding is subject to change. In particular, some supervisors set up funding from their grants separately for each term. An updated funding memo will be sent if you win further awards or as further funding is designated by your supervisor. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in your memo, please speak to the Departmental Secretary and/or your supervisor as soon as you receive this memo.