

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

GUIDELINES ON ORAL DEFENSE FOR MASTERS AND DOCTORAL DEGREES

REVISION HISTORY

VERSION NUMBER	DATE (dd.mm.yyyy)	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION	Reviewed by	Review Date
IPQA OD 1..01	03.07.2008	IPQA	1 ST Revision	QAP Board	August 2008
IPQA OD 1.02	04.03.2009	IPQA	2 ND Revision	SENEX	09 March 2009
IPQA OD 1.03	12.08.2009	IPQA	3 RD Revision	Senate	26 August 2009

Department : **Institutional Planning & Quality Assurance**

Policy Reference Number : **IPQA OD/1.01/2009**

Date Approved by Council : **18 September 2009**

Signature of the Registrar :



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GUIDELINES ON ORAL DEFENSE FOR MASTERS AND DOCTORAL DEGREES

(To be read in conjunction with the Regulations in respect of Assessment and Examinations and the Assessment Policy)

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the oral examination (a.k.a. the oral, viva or viva voce) occurs after the written final exams or submission of the dissertation/thesis. There is a lot of misunderstanding and misplaced apprehension about such oral exams, and this policy presents an overview of the oral examination, removes some of the mysteries, instills confidence and helps stakeholders to prepare effectively.

Oral presentations and examinations are becoming more common throughout degree courses, as educational practitioners increasingly appreciate that a very good measure of someone's understanding of a subject is their ability to verbally explain the subject to someone else.

Oral examination can be a very useful learning experience and the most can be gained where it is clear what the exam is for and that there is a debriefing following the viva.

2. Guidelines

2.1 Oral examination before an examination committee is mandatory for Doctoral degrees.

2.2 An oral examination mark shall be an integral part of the overall assessment.

2.3 An examiner may, if he/she deems it fit, recommend that a Masters degree candidate be called in for oral examination before an examination committee.

2.4 An oral examination may only proceed when all examiners are present unless Senate decides otherwise.

2.5 The purposes of oral examinations are:

2.5.1 To enable the candidate to demonstrate his/her knowledge and understanding of the discipline or field of study, the appropriateness of the research methodologies and methods of analysis, and the validity of the conclusions;

2.5.2 To clarify any matters that the examiners regard as being of concern;

2.5.3 To allow the examiners and candidate to discuss any amendments which may be required;

- 2.5.4 To assist the candidate in understanding the full importance of the examiners' comments.
- 2.6 For successful candidates, examination will normally be held within three (3) months of the date of receipt of all examiners' reports. Any deviation should be approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic.
- 2.7 Candidates should be given at least a two (3) weeks notice of undergoing oral examination.
- 2.8 There shall be no time limit as the duration of the oral examination session will depend on the extent to which the candidate has, in the opinion of the examination committee, dealt satisfactorily with all questions and concerns raised.
- 2.9 Attendance in an oral examination by the supervisors/promoters is compulsory as he/she may be asked to clarify certain issues.
- 2.10 The oral examination shall take the form of a defence of the dissertation/thesis wherein candidates should expect to be challenged on their ideas and findings, but should be assured that the experience is intended to be constructive, helpful and positive.
- 2.11 In preparation, candidates are advised to re-familiarise themselves with their dissertation/thesis, make their own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and try to anticipate issues that are likely to be raised.
- 2.12 When the oral examination is concluded, the candidate shall be excused and the examination committee shall evaluate the candidate's performance and award a pass or a fail.
- 2.13 The decision arrived at in (2.12) shall stand pending Senate's ruling.
- 2.14 Oral examination shall not be used for dispute resolution in cases where a candidate is not satisfied with the marks he/she has been allocated.
- 2.15 The entire process will be minuted or tape-recorded and stored for at least one year.

3. The Oral Examination Panel

The oral exams shall have a panel of a minimum of four (4) to a maximum of seven (7) members:

- The Dean (Chair);
- External Examiner(s) (with voting rights);
- Internal Examiners/Supervisors, (with voting rights);

- Higher Degree Committee member/representative; and
- The Head of Department.

Other members of the School/Department are invited as observers but they are not allowed to ask questions.