*The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) recognizes Indigenous rights to sovereignty and is committed to having these rights reflected in our policies and procedures that govern graduate education at Western.*

*The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) appreciates and values your expertise around Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. It also recognizes the vital role you play as an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper examiner in ensuring that graduate student research, scholarship and creative activity are reviewed by someone who holds inherent rights related to Indigenous sovereignty, knowledges, perspectives, and cultures.*

*In partnership with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, SGPS has revised their master’s and PhD thesis regulations with a decolonization and indigenization lens, work that is ongoing. A key change has been the inclusion of an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Examiner on the thesis examination board.*

Miigwetch, Yaw^ko, Anushiik for considering serving as an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper examiner on a student’s thesis. Below please find information to help you understand what this role involves, and how the thesis examination process works.

**What is involved in agreeing to be an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Examiner on a student’s Master’s or PhD thesis:**

What is a thesis? During their time in graduate school, a student creates a body of work under the supervision of a faculty member supervisor(s). A thesis should contribute to new knowledge and constitute research, scholarship, or creative activity. Before the student can graduate, the thesis is assessed by an examination board to determine if it is acceptable to meet the expectations of the graduate degree.

What form does a thesis take? The thesis can take a variety of forms and reflect a multitude of ways of knowing, being and doing. Most theses are written, but a thesis may include non-written elements, such as exhibited artworks, design projects, audio productions, musical compositions, or recorded live performances.

The thesis examination and the role of the examination board: After a student has completed the thesis, the student’s supervisor(s) and/or Graduate Chair (or equivalent) puts together an examination board to review and examine the work. The examination board is composed of faculty members with relevant expertise. When a thesis involves Indigenous issues, an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper may be invited to serve as an examiner*. Each examination board member has voting rights regarding the acceptability of the work.*

What is the role of an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Examiner?

Drawing on your expertise and knowledge as an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, your role is to:

1. Determine if the thesis and the student meet the expectations for research, scholarship, and /or creative activity.
2. Appraise the thesis for content, its underlying assumptions, methodology, findings, and the scholarly significance of the findings. This should include evaluation of the thesis in terms of its organization and presentation.
3. Evaluate the student’s skill and knowledge in responding to questions and defending the thesis in the oral exam.
4. Ensure authenticity of authorship. For example, does the work appropriately acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous communities and organizations in the role of knowledge creation?

Before the examination, the examiners are asked to attend a Public Presentation where the student presents their work. The presentation occurs in an open forum and could be in-person or remote (e.g., on Zoom). If the examination is in-person, the public presentation and examination are usually held on Western’s campus, but it is possible that other arrangements could be made. For example, the public presentation and examination could occur at the Wampum Learning Lodge or within an Indigenous community.

What is important to consider if I am invited to sit on a thesis examination board?

The date and time of the examination will be decided based on your availability and the availability of the student, supervisor, and other members of the examination board.

Examinations can be in-person or virtual, depending upon the needs of the participants.

Your responsibilities as an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper examiner include reviewing the thesis and submitting a written report electronically (it will be sent to you via email). In your report, you comment on the thesis and then assess whether, in your view, the work is acceptable to go to examination. Please reach out to the Thesis Coordinator via email at thesis@uwo.ca with any questions.

What happens if I agree to be an examiner?

1. You receive an email invitation to examine the thesis.
2. The email invitation asks you to confirm that you commit to examine the thesis (Click on ‘I will review it’ or ‘I will not review it’).
3. You receive a second email that provides information about creating an account (Scholarship@Western with links) and downloading the thesis. Instructions on uploading a preliminary report are included.
4. You review the thesis and upload a preliminary report, which is due one week before the exam.
5. The preliminary report asks you to determine, by checking the appropriate box, whether the thesis is ‘acceptable to proceed to exam’ or ‘unacceptable to go to thesis exam’.
6. The thesis coordinator receives the examiner reports and reviews them. If the majority find the thesis acceptable to go to examination, the examination proceeds.
7. You receive a notice confirming details of the examination (date, time and place).
8. If a majority of examiners find the thesis unacceptable, the examination is cancelled. You receive an email asking you to attend a resubmission meeting. In the resubmission hearing meeting, the examiners will work with the Chair to compile revisions to the thesis to improve the quality of the work. After the student revises the thesis, the examiners review the thesis once again, and the examination proceeds.

What happens in the thesis examination?

The examiners are invited to ask the student questions about the thesis over two rounds of questioning. Round one is usually 15–20 minutes per examiner and round two is 5–10 minutes per examiner. Once the two rounds of questions are completed, the student leaves the room. The supervisor is invited to comment on the thesis and the examination. The examiners are invited to deliberate on the defense and the thesis.

Each examiner then records their assessment of the thesis and the oral exam using a confidential electronic form. The examiners email their form to the exam Chair. The Chair compiles the assessments and announces the result.

What is the time commitment for an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Examiner?

1. You will have up to 3 weeks to review a master’s thesis and up to 5 weeks for a doctoral thesis. While the time needed will vary depending on the thesis’s length, format, and complexity, a typical review takes approximately 5–10 hours.
2. You will complete an Examiner Report for SGPS. This typically takes 1–2 hours, depending on the level of detail you include in your report.
3. For the PhD exams, examiners attend a 1-hour public presentation (either remote or in-person).
4. The oral examination (either remote or in-person) normally lasts 3–4 hours.

What happens if a thesis is deemed unacceptable based on the examiner reviews?

*If the thesis is deemed unacceptable based on the examiner reviews*, you and the other examiners will be asked to attend a resubmission meeting. In this meeting the Chair will ask the examiners if they feel the student should be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit the thesis for examination. If yes, the Chair will moderate a discussion among the examiners about suggested revisions that would strengthen the thesis. This meeting usually takes one hour.

Once the student has revised the thesis, it will be sent to you (and the other examiners) again for review. You will be asked to write a new report and attend a second thesis examination. The time commitment will vary depending on the nature and extent of the revisions and the time needed for the second thesis examination.

How are Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Examiners compensated for their time and expertise?

You will receive an honorarium as a gesture of respect and appreciation for your time, expertise, and contribution to the examination process.

It is expected that the Associate Dean or Graduate Chair of the graduate program will discuss your honorarium at the time of the invitation to serve as an examiner. They will explain how you will receive the honorarium. The Office of Indigenous Initiatives has created an Indigenous honorarium payment schedule for programs to use.

It is expected that the payment form will be submitted 4 weeks in advance of the examination. Should additional hours exceed the honorarium, it is expected that you will receive a second honorarium.

The minimum recommended honorarium amounts are:

* $100 per hour
* $350 half-day
* $700 full-day

Travel expenses and out-of-pocket expenses incurred as a result of your participation in the thesis examination should not be part of the honoraria. Instead, the graduate program should arrange for reimbursement of these out-of-pocket expenses separately.

We hope this information has been helpful and addressed all of your questions. If you have further questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to the Thesis Coordinator at thesis@uwo.ca.