



**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**  
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE,  
PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE

**Doctor of Design Candidacy**

The University of Calgary [Doctoral Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes the specific School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL) requirements associated with the conduct of admission to the Doctor of Design (DDes) graduate candidacy under the *Regulations*.

## **A. Statement of Purpose**

The SAPL DDes is intended for students who are mid-career creative design professionals in architecture, planning, landscape architecture, and related creative design disciplines. The program challenges students to explore a focused area of creative design practice-based research, that emanates from their professional practice. The intent is that student research will have a positive impact on one’s professional practice and discipline, ultimately improving the quality of built and natural environments. Students who have fulfilled the DDes candidacy requirements will be prepared to undertake independent, design practice-based research, demonstrating: expert knowledge of the theoretical and practical contexts of such research; the ability to synthesize, integrate and apply such theoretical and practical expertise in their research; expertise in the application of such creative research methodologies; and the ability to execute and document an original, innovative and independent design practice-based research project.

## **B. Candidacy Components**

All doctoral students in the SAPL Doctor of Design Graduate Program must successfully complete the following candidacy components:

1. All Course Requirements as identified in the Graduate Calendar
2. Written Thesis Proposal
3. Oral Field of Study (FoS) Examination

Note that given the design practice-based research focus of the DDes, utilizing the insights and data obtained from years of experience in creative design practice, the DDes is intended to be completed within three years. Indeed, given this practice-based research focus, students are seen as experts in their field of study upon admission to the program, as effectively, they are experts in their professional design practice. Additionally, there is no residency requirement, and DDes students can therefore work remotely. To facilitate rapid progress, the DDes program incorporates two symposia per year that allows students to connect with their cohort, supervisory committee, and guest reviewers, to present their developing work in a symposium setting. Attendance and participation in the symposia, throughout the student’s career in the DDes program, are required. Also, given the tight three year schedule, and the student’s expertise in their field, the entire candidacy process is expected to be completed within 12 months of the student’s first registration, as outlined below:

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CANDIDACY COMPONENT	WITHIN 8 MONTHS OF FIRST REGISTRATION	WITHIN 9 MONTHS OF FIRST REGISTRATION	WITHIN 12 MONTHS OF FIRST REGISTRATION
1. Required Courses	Complete Required Courses		
2. Written Thesis Proposal (TP)		TP evaluated as written component of candidacy	
3. Oral Field of Study Examination			Oral FoS Exam (typically scheduled during the spring symposium)

**SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

Within 3 months of their first registration, students are required to have a permanent supervisor. Within 6 months of the student's first registration, the supervisor, in consultation with the student, shall constitute the Supervisory Committee. The Supervisory Committee shall consist of the supervisor and at least 2 additional faculty members. The supervisor will submit the Appointment of the Supervisor/Supervisory Committee form to the GPA, who will then forward it to the Graduate Program Director (GPD) for approval.

**1. COMPLETION OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The Supervisor will ascertain that the student has successfully completed all required course work, as identified in the Graduate Calendar. The Supervisor will confirm the student's course completion with the Graduate Program Director (GPD). To comply with the timing noted in the table above, students will normally complete their course requirements by the end of their first winter term, that is, within eight months of the student's first registration in the program.

**2. WRITTEN THESIS PROPOSAL**

Prior to the Oral FoS Examination, students are required to submit a Written Thesis Proposal for evaluation and approval. Given the reflection and synthesis activities leading to the articulation of the student's research question, students will develop their Thesis Proposal, to be evaluated as the written component of candidacy. The Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee will review, evaluate and make a recommendation of pass or fail to the GPD, who then issues the final assessment.

The Thesis Proposal offers the Supervisory Committee an opportunity to evaluate the synthetic process leading to the development of the student's research question, and the student's preparedness to complete the design practice-based research for the thesis component of the DDes degree. The proposal is intended as a "road map" of the creative, design practice-based research to be completed.

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Given the range of disciplines and approaches within SAPL, students should seek the mentorship of their Supervisor, and Supervisory Committee, to produce a Thesis Proposal document that is acceptable.

As a guide, the thesis proposal should be 5000 - 7500 words, and it should include visual aspects/components (such as photographs, drawings, diagrams, models, etc.). The proposal should address the following:

- Introduce the background and context for the practice-based research inquiry arising from the candidate's reflection upon their practice.
- Provide a comprehensive, critical and creative summary of appropriate precedents and other practice-based factors that contextualize the proposed research. This may include previous projects completed by the candidate, precedent projects and approaches of others working in related areas of design inquiry, a literature review (both professional and academic publications), and potential areas of applicable design theory and design methods.
- Provide a clear research question emerging from this reflection and summary.
- Outline the design practice-based research approach, plan or methodology.
- Describe how the practice-based research will contribute to the student's professional practice and the profession at large.
- Provide a research timeline.

**SCHEDULING OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

Students should start working on their Thesis Proposal as early as possible after their first registration. The required courses are intended, in part, to aid students in crafting their research question and approach to undertaking their practice-based research. Additionally, within 6 months of the student's first registration, it is expected that students will submit an initial draft thesis proposal to their Supervisory Committee. Subsequently, students are expected to meet with committee members to discuss the draft, allowing committee members to provide iterative guidance towards the development of the student's final Thesis Proposal. While the Supervisory Committee may provide guidance in development of the final proposal, the student must write the final document.

The final version of the Thesis Proposal must be submitted and evaluated within 9 months of the student's first registration. Within this timeframe, the student will submit the final Thesis Proposal to the SAPL GPA, who will then distribute it, within one business day, to the student's Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee.

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**THESIS PROPOSAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE**

The Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee plus two additional faculty members, at least one of whom must be external to SAPL. These two additional examiners will be selected by the Supervisor in consultation with the student and the Supervisory Committee. The final committee is subject to GPD approval. Note that the supervisor is also a voting member of the committee. It is anticipated that this would be the same committee to evaluate the student's Oral Field of Study Examination.

**THESIS PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

Within one week of receiving the student's final Thesis Proposal, each member of the Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee, including the supervisor, will read and evaluate it, judging if the proposal can be accepted as submitted, with no further changes. Note that the Evaluation Committee makes a recommendation to the GPD, who then makes the final determination of Pass or Fail for the Written Thesis Proposal. The proposal will be evaluated based upon:

- Relevant knowledge of the background and research context, to support the rationale of the proposed research project;
- The clarity of the research question(s);
- The logic and feasibility of the design practiced-based methodology and research plan;
- Significance of the proposed research to one's practice and to the discipline.

If the Thesis Proposal is judged, overall, to be acceptable, the committee member will recommend that the Thesis Proposal merits a Pass. If assessed as a Pass, each committee member must communicate their recommended grade of Pass, in writing, to the GPA within one week of receiving the Thesis Proposal to read. The GPA will forward these to the GPD for the final determination.\*

If the Thesis Proposal is judged, overall, by the committee member to be unacceptable and thus a Fail, they will communicate this recommendation to the SAPL GPD, in writing, within one week of receiving the Thesis Proposal to read (or to the Dean of SAPL, if the GPD is a member of the Examining Committee). Included in this communication of a fail, the committee member will provide a brief account of that proposal's shortcomings and suggest what remedial actions are needed.

A Thesis Proposal will be considered by the GPD\*\* as a Fail if two or more of the Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee members have judged the proposal to be a fail. Otherwise, the Thesis Proposal will be considered a Pass. The Graduate Program Director will inform the student and the examining committee members of the result of the Thesis Proposal Evaluation within two business days of receiving all the committee members' assessments.

In the case of a fail, within two days of receiving the accounts of the Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee members, the Graduate Program Director (or the Dean) will communicate in writing to the

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student, summarizing the essential points from the accounts received from the Evaluation Committee members, with a clear indication of the next steps for the student. If the Thesis Proposal is a fail, the student's subsequently scheduled Oral Field of Study Examination will be cancelled.

Each member of the evaluation committee must sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form. The signed form and a copy of the approved Thesis Proposal must be submitted to the GPA to be added to the student's file.

*\*Note that once approved, the Oral Field of Study Examination can proceed, even if the project might evolve and change after the Thesis Proposal has been approved. The proposal is a written examination testing the student's ability to effectively structure and compose a research proposal.*

*\*\*Note that in instances of a potential conflict of interest, such as when the GPD is a member of the examination committee, the SAPL Dean, or designate will substitute for the GPD.*

**RESUBMISSION OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL**

If the outcome of the Thesis Proposal evaluation is deemed a Fail, one resubmission of it will be permitted. This resubmission must occur between two and six months following the date of the first submission. Normally, the composition of the Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee will remain the same. If a student fails the Thesis Proposal a second time, they will be required to withdraw from the DDes program.

**APPEAL OF A FAILED THESIS PROPOSAL**

If the outcome of the Thesis Proposal evaluation is deemed a Fail, then the student has the right to appeal the decision. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies following the procedures described in the Graduate Calendar under *Academic Regulations - Appeals - Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings*.

**3. ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

All SAPL DDes students must complete the Oral Field of Study (FoS) Examination. This allows students to synthesize knowledge emanating from their coursework, professional experience, precedent and literature reviews, reflective analysis, and to integrate this relative to the fields of study within which their design practice-based research is situated.

**SCHEDULING OF THE ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

At least 4 months before the FoS Examination (this can occur before the Thesis Proposal evaluation), the Supervisory Committee members will work together with the student to define and agree upon a list of topics for study and a reading list for the Oral FoS Examination. While the specific number of topics may vary based on the student's professional practice context, background knowledge, and area of research interest, a minimum of 2 topics, to a maximum of 4 topics, are required. The topics and reading list are

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first submitted to the GPD for approval, and then the list will be provided to the student at least 3 months prior to the FoS exam. The Oral FoS Examination will be scheduled no later than the 12<sup>th</sup> month\*\*\* after the student's first registration in the DDes Program. Typically the Oral Field of Study Examination will be scheduled to occur during the DDes Spring Symposium, held within the student's first year.

*\*\*\* Given the limited timeframe for the DDes candidacy process, it is important to note that APLA 684 Strategies for Design Practice Research (required course, offered in the student's first winter term), is intended to provide a structure and scaffold for the student's preparation for candidacy, providing guidance in the preparation of the Thesis Proposal and in the identification of study topics for the Oral FoS Examination. The course is intended to support the student in working with their Supervisory Committee to prepare for these crucial candidacy milestones, expediting these steps once the course is completed.*

**COMPOSITION OF THE ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION COMMITTEE**

The Examination Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee members plus two additional faculty members, at least one of whom must be from outside the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. These two additional examiners will be selected by the Supervisor in consultation with the student and the Supervisory Committee. Note that the supervisor is also a voting member of the committee. It is expected that the composition of the Field of Study Examination Committee will consist of the same members as the Thesis Proposal Evaluation Committee.

The additional examiners must be approved by the Graduate Program Director not less than two months before the oral examination. The Notice of Oral Candidacy Examination form, listing the date, time and location for the exam, plus all members of the Examination Committee, must be submitted to the Graduate Program Administrator at least four weeks prior to the Oral FoS exam, and kept in the student's file. A Neutral Chair will be assigned to oversee the Oral FoS Examination (see below).

**FORMAT OF THE ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

The FoS exam is a formal oral examination. The exam will address the topics and reading list agreed upon with the student (see above). Additionally, the Oral FoS exam is based on the broad field of knowledge and insight, necessary to conduct the design practice-based research outlined in the student's proposal. Note that students will not be re-evaluated on their written thesis proposal *per se* at this examination, as it has previously been evaluated and approved. Thus, examiners may not ask specific questions about the content of the proposal itself, though they may explore alternative contextualizations, ways of framing the design problem, and alternative design methods to address the proposed research. Students are expected to be able to position their specific research area within the broader interdisciplinary milieu of SAPL, and discuss its potential contribution to their practice, design discipline, and to society.

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The exam will last up to two hours. The student may choose to begin the exam with a 15 minute presentation, locating their research within the agreed upon topics. Subsequently the exam will allow for two rounds of questions from each examiner, and further follow up questions, time permitting. The Neutral Chair will ensure that examiners ask clear and succinct questions and that the student has ample time to respond or seek clarification to each question. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not engage in a prolonged interrogation of the student.

**EVALUATION OF THE ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

At the end of the Oral Field of Study Examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room, and the Neutral Chair immediately manages a secret straw vote in which all examiners indicate either pass or fail for the exam. The evaluation is based on the examiners' comprehensive review of all responses to the questions posed in the Oral FoS Examination.

The pass/fail votes provide the Committee with a frame of opinion on which to base a discussion of the student's performance on the Oral FoS Examination. Every effort should be made by the Examination Committee to reach an unanimous recommendation of pass or fail. A failure is indicated by two or more examination committee members voting for a failed examination; otherwise, the examination will be considered a pass. In all instances of a recommended Fail, the supervisor should provide feedback to the student regarding the recommendation of the failing assessment. This is particularly important in instances where there is only one Fail recommendation.

When the deliberations are completed, the Neutral Chair will record the final outcome and have each Examination Committee member record their vote on the designated form. The Neutral Chair will then immediately inform the student about the outcome of the examination. The Report of Candidacy Oral Examination form must be delivered to the Graduate Program Administrator within one business day of the exam's completion.

**FAILED ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

If the Examination Committee recommends a fail for the student's Oral Field of Study Examination, each member will provide a detailed letter to the Graduate Program Director (or the Dean of SAPL, if the Graduate Program Director was a member of the examining committee)\*\*\*\* stating the rationale for their evaluation. The Neutral Chair also will provide a letter that details the examination procedures, including timing and any irregularities that may have been observed. Each letter must be delivered within one business day following the date of the Oral FoS Examination. Within three business days of receiving the letters from the Examination Committee, the Graduate Program Director (or the Dean of SAPL, if the GPD is a committee member) will communicate in writing to the student indicating whether the recommendation of Fail is upheld; this letter also will summarize the essential points made in the letters received from the examiners, with a clear indication of the next steps for the student.

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*\*\*\*\*Note that in instances of a potential conflict of interest, such as when the GPD is a member of the examination committee, the SAPL Dean, or designate will substitute for the GPD.*

**RETAKE OF THE ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

If a student fails the Oral FoS Examination, one retake of it will be permitted. Any retake of an Oral FoS examination must occur between two and six months following the date of the first examination. Normally, the composition of the Examination Committee will remain the same. If a student fails the Oral FoS Examination a second time, they will be required to withdraw from the DDes program.

**APPEAL OF A FAILED ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION**

If the outcome of the Oral Field of Study Examination is deemed a Fail, then the student has the right to appeal the decision. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies following the procedures described in the Graduate Calendar under *Academic Regulations - Appeals - Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings*.





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