

Appendix C – ENLS Conversion From the MSc to PhD Program

Revised: March 2019

In exceptional cases, students may enter the PhD program without having received an MSc (or equivalent) degree. Such students are already enrolled in the ENLS MSc program, and may apply for conversion to the PhD program by petitioning the Director, between 9 and 15 months of commencing their MSc program, to undertake the Conversion Examination.

Students wishing to take advantage of this procedure should discuss the matter with their Supervisory Committee early in their first year, and the development of their research project would normally reflect the intention to convert.

Criteria

Applicants for conversion to the PhD program must meet the following two criteria:

(1) Ability

Students must have completed at least two half-courses at the time of request for conversion and have obtained at least an A-minus (80%) in each course. Permission to take the Conversion Examination for entry to the PhD program will be based largely on comments from the Supervisor and the Supervisory Committee. Those confidential assessments should include comments on the student's intellectual and technical abilities, motivation, and general preparedness. Other information such as scholarships and awards should be included. The applicant will also be evaluated on the basis of the MSc progress report and research proposal for the PhD program which must accompany the petition for conversion. (See Procedures).

(2) Support

Evidence of sufficient financial ability from the Program, the Supervisor and/or scholarships to provide both research and subsistence support for the duration of the PhD program (normally 3 years following conversion) must be documented to the satisfaction of the Executive.

Procedures

Application

Students wishing to convert from an MSc degree program to a PhD program and who satisfy the criteria above will petition for conversion between 9 and 15 months of commencing their MSc program. Hence all petitions and supporting documentation must be submitted to the Director by no later than:

1. 1st December of Year 2 for students beginning their MSc in September of the previous year; or
2. 1st April of Year 2 for students beginning their MSc in January of the previous year, or

3. 1st August of Year 2 for students beginning their MSc in May of the previous year.

After having secured the approval of the Supervisory Committee, a student may petition the Director for permission to convert to the PhD program. The petition should include confidential letters of reference from all members of the Supervisory Committee, a letter from the Supervisor providing evidence of sufficient financial support, a progress report on research and course work completed to date, and a detailed proposal for the PhD research program.

The proposal should include a discussion of distinctions between the current MSc program and that proposed for the PhD, the nature of the scientific contributions expected to arise from the PhD program, and a detailed schedule of proposed research and expected completion dates. The proposal will adhere to the following format: 10-15 pages in length (plus a summary of less than 300 words and literature cited), double-spaced with 2.5 cm margins and 12-point font. The proposal should include a title and describe the rationale for the project; background, including relevant literature; objectives, hypotheses, and predictions; methods, including a time line; and anticipated significance.

It is recognized that the direction of research may change. Thus, the research proposal is not meant to constrain future development of the project, but rather to indicate current thinking and program development. Any other information which the student considers relevant to his/her case may be included with the application (e.g., papers completed, courses in progress). Incomplete proposals will not be considered by the Executive. It is the applicant's responsibility, therefore, to ensure that all appropriate material is submitted with the petition for conversion.

Students intending to apply for conversion should continue to satisfy the course requirements for the MSc degree. Students should complete any remaining MSc courses pending the decision of the Executive regarding permission to take the Conversion Examination and the outcome of the examination itself.

Decision

Within 3 weeks of submission of the petition, the Program Director, in consultation with the Executive, will decide if the student will be granted permission to take the Conversion Examination. The decision will be based on the following criteria:

- Performance to date in the MSc program
- Availability of a Supervisor and evidence of sufficient financial support for the PhD program
- Letters of recommendation from the Supervisory Committee
- Quality of the progress report and research proposal

If a student is found to be satisfactory in all categories, the Executive will recommend that s/he be permitted to take the Conversion Examination. Students whose conversion is not approved remain in the MSc program; they are not be eligible to reapply for conversion.

Examination for conversion to the PhD program

Purpose

The purpose of the examination is to evaluate a student's suitability to enter the PhD program. The basis of the evaluation is an examination not only of the major ideas of the research proposal submitted with the petition for conversion (see above), but also of the broader philosophical, methodological, and substantive issues which define the intellectual content of the student's future research activities. Hence, the student is expected to demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the literature and subject areas crucial to the proposed research, and a command of underlying fundamental scientific principles related to the project.

Components

The examination will consist of the following two components:

(1) Proposal

A research proposal submitted to the Examining Committee, which is comprised of - the Supervisor - a member of the PhD Supervisory Committee (selected by the Director) - two members of ENLS faculty not on the student's Supervisory Committee (selected by the Director and/or from a list suggested by the Supervisor) - the Director or delegate, who chairs the exam. The proposal will adhere to the following format: 10-15 pages in length (plus a summary of less than 300 words and literature cited), double-spaced with 2.5 cm margins and 12-point font. The proposal should include a title and describe the rationale for the project; background, including relevant literature, objectives, hypothesis, and predictions; methods, including a time line; and anticipated significance.

Applicants whose research program departs significantly from the research proposal submitted must discuss such changes with the PhD Supervisory Committee, and a written statement of modification must be provided to the Director at least 4 weeks prior to the examination.

(2) Oral examination

An oral examination will be scheduled within 6 weeks of submission of a coherent and defensible proposal, as deemed by the Examining Committee. The oral exam will be held in camera and normally be limited to 3 hours in duration. The student must attend in person. The exam will begin with a brief (15-20 minute) presentation by the student on the proposed PhD program giving an overview of his/her research proposal. This will be followed by questions from the Examining Committee, focusing on both the student's background preparation and the proposal. Two rounds of questions will follow from the Examining Committee beginning with the non-supervisory committee members, followed by the supervisory committee member, and finally the supervisor. Each questioner will be allowed approximately 15 minutes. When the student has answered the questions to the satisfaction of the committee, the student will leave the room giving time for the committee's decision. The student is then asked in and informed of the outcome of the deliberation. Upon successful completion of the Candidacy Examination, a PhD student will be known as a "PhD candidate".

Exam Procedures

The scope of the oral portion of the exam will be defined by the Examining Committee and forwarded to the student (via the Director) within 2 weeks of the submission of the proposal. Thus, the student should have a list of suggested readings and topics to be covered in the examination 4 weeks prior to the scheduled oral examination.

The process by which the Examining Committee is to be formed and the examination topics are determined is as follows:

1. The Program establishes an Examining Committee to be comprised of the Supervisor, one member of the Supervisory Committee (or the co-Supervisor), plus two additional members of the Program. The Supervisor(s) will provide the Program with a list of suitable Examiners.
2. The Program contacts the supervisor(s) to determine any priority areas to be covered during the examination.
3. The Program contacts the Examiners to inform them of the priority areas and to identify any other areas to be examined. At the same time, Examiners indicate the areas in which they are able to examine the student.
4. The Examining Committee agrees on a list of areas to be covered in the examination. One of the priority areas identified by the Supervisor must be included in this list. If not, the Supervisor will select one of the priority areas and be responsible for assigning readings in this area.
5. Based on the list of priority (and other) areas that each Examiner has selected, the Program compiles a final list of examination areas and assigns one area to each Examiner. The Program notifies the Examining committee of the final list of topics and Examiner assignments.
6. Examiners select a (set of) reading(s) for their assigned area and inform the Program of their selection(s).
7. This process is expected to occur quickly, with no more than one week between the initial contact between the Program and the supervisor and the compilation of an assigned list of subject areas.

Outcomes of the conversion examination

Outcomes of the examination, which will be based on both the written proposal and the oral examination, will be either:

Transfer to PhD

A recommendation will be forwarded to the Office of Graduate Studies by the Director that the student be allowed to enroll in the PhD program. The committee may also suggest modifications to the proposed PhD research that are to be recorded in the Chair's examination report (see below), and which should be considered by the student and the Supervisory Committee. The Conversion Examination will substitute the requirements of the PhD Candidacy Examination (ENLS 6100h). In particular, in the report from the Chair of the Examining Committee to the Program Director, the Chair

will note (1) that the Committee recommends that the student be transferred to the PhD Program and (2) that the student's performance during the Conversion exam was sufficient to substitute the PhD Candidacy Exam.

Remain in MSc program

The student remains in the MSc program. Two "remain" votes from the examination committee constitutes a failure to convert to the PhD and the student remains enrolled in the MSc program.

Students admitted to the PhD program may not revert to the MSc program. In exceptional circumstances, the student may, after withdrawal from the PhD program, seek readmission to another graduate program through the normal application procedures.

The Examining Committee Chair

The Chair of the Examining Committee will be responsible for preparing a written report setting out the detailed recommendations of the Examining Committee. In the case of "Remain in MSc", this report will be circulated to the other members of the committee for comment within 3 weeks of the examination, and then given to the student. Regardless of the outcome, a copy of the report will be placed in the student's file.

Requirements and support for converted students

Converted students will be required to complete course work, thesis, and other components of the PhD program. Course work requirements will be decided in consultation with the Supervisory Committee. Converted students must complete 1 full course credit during their entire graduate program.

Initial registration as a PhD student is normally the first date of admission (i.e., 1 January, 1 May, or 1 September) following successful outcome of the Conversion Exam.