

Recommendations for implementing the current doctoral examination procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic

Last updated: 20.05.2020

At the present time, pursuant to the 5th SARS-CoV-2 Control Ordinance of the State of Saxony-Anhalt dated 02.05.2020, the continuation of which beyond 27.05.2020 is anticipated albeit in slightly modified form, **face-to-face examinations** may take place in universities, provided general protection and hygiene measures, contact minimizing measures, and distance rules are adhered to (cf. § 1 para. 6 of the 5th SARS-CoV-2 Control Ordinance):

- **individuals with recognizable symptoms** of a COVID-19 infection or cold symptoms of any kind must be **excluded** from participation,
- those persons present will be recorded in an **attendance list** containing at least their first and last name, full address and telephone number,
- the attendance list must be kept for a period of four weeks after completion of the examination as an event and if necessary surrendered to the responsible health authority on request; however, at the latest two months after completion of the examination this data must be deleted.

In the absence of separate regulations, doctoral degree defenses are to be treated as “examinations” in the above sense. The applicable doctoral degree regulations of OVGU assume the physical presence of the candidates and examination committee members and that the colloquium takes place in public.

Proceedings that commenced in the 2020 summer semester may be continued by the Faculties in accordance with the following **options**:

1. The disputation may be postponed to the time after the contact restrictions are lifted pursuant to the SARS-CoV-2 Control Ordinance in force at that time; it shall be held in accordance with the current doctoral degree regulations.
2. The disputation will be held in the normal way (in a larger room in which minimum distances can be adhered to).

Members of the general public will be admitted by video conference or, depending on the applicable regulations, admitted with restrictions or excluded by resolution of the Faculty Council. Only the candidate, the members of the doctoral committee/reviewers who must be in attendance in accordance with the regulations, and the degree supervisor may be in the room.

External reviewers may take part by video conference, provided that the candidate has indicated that they agree with this course of action, which differs from the regulations currently in force, by issuing a separate declaration, cf. [proposed text](#).

3. The disputation may be held wholly or partly as a video conference. This option is only possible if all participants in the disputation pursuant to the doctoral degree regulations have agreed to it being held by video conference in advance (must be documented in writing).

In relation to the participation of the candidate, the following additional conditions also apply:

In order to guarantee immediate communication and interaction between the candidate and committee, it must be ensured that the means of transmission is subject to the minimum time delay and that it benefits from a high data throughput. In particular it is essential that the candidate is able to see all of the members of the doctoral committee/reviewers required by the regulations and the degree supervisor at all times (and not just the person currently asking questions) and that all of the aforementioned can see the candidate. All of this demands a stable, reliable and professional video conferencing system.

The absent candidate shall be required to seek an institution that is able to offer video conferencing infrastructure that meets this standard. Examples include:

- Goethe Institutes
- (foreign) universities
- German schools abroad
- German consulates
- German embassies.

During the disputation, the candidate must be supervised by a reliable and appropriate person. The following are considered to be appropriate supervisors:

- full-time (German-speaking) employees of the aforementioned institutions
- (German-speaking) professors or scientists at (foreign) universities.

The role of the supervisor is to ensure that the proper procedures are followed in respect of the participation of the candidate. After completion of the disputation, the supervisor must confirm this in writing. In particular, compliance with the proper procedures means that no impermissible aids were used and that no malfunctions affected the transmission of images and sound.

For data protection reasons, a secure video conferencing tool must be used.

- Documenting the outcome of the examination

A two-stage procedure, that in any case is incorporated in the majority of doctoral degree examinations, is suggested. After the verbal consultation of the committee by video conference, the candidate will be notified of the conditional examination result. The votes will be sent to the Faculty.

- Access to expert reports before the defense

This can be facilitated through a video conference between the candidate and a representative of the Faculty, in that the report is displayed on the screen in such a way that it can be read but that no copy may be made. Alternatively, the report may be read out over the telephone.

If pursuing **option 1**, an assessment should be made of the hardship represented for the candidate by the potentially considerable amount of time taken by the process. This applies particularly if completing the process is a requirement for the candidate's next professional steps. Failing to complete any doctoral degree processes during 2020 is to be avoided.

For this reason, during the pandemic, wherever possible option 2 should be used.

There is no entitlement to complete the disputation according to option 2 or 3 as these options are not currently provided for in the doctoral degree regulations.

Due to the global travel restrictions, situations may arise in which option 3 should be used; this should be the absolute exception.

Proposed text for the declaration by the doctoral student

Declaration of Consent

to the amended procedure for completion of the doctoral degree defense

on DD.MM.YYYY, place

Subject:

I (last name, first name, born on DD.MM.YYYY) hereby declare that I am in agreement that the external reviewers, as members of the doctoral committee, (last name/first name of each), shall, due to the current travel restrictions resulting from the SARS CoV-2 pandemic, participate, not in person, but instead by video chat/conference, in the colloquium.

Based on the applicable regulations of Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg in general and taking into account the applicable state legal restrictions, furthermore I hereby agree that the participation of additional members of the public – excluding the members of the doctoral committee – by derogation from § xy of the doctoral degree regulations that apply to me, will not be permitted and that the colloquium in this respect *will not be held in public*, even if no timely resolution to this effect has been passed by the Faculty Council.

Place, date

Signature