

Toronto School of Theology, Graduate Center for Theological Studies
Guidelines for the Involvement of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers at Final Oral Exams

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Introduction

First Nations House and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) have collaborated to prepare a set of guidelines at the University of Toronto (UofT) to assist UofT doctoral candidates who wish to have an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper participate in the Final Oral Examination. The following adapts the UofT language for Toronto School of Theology Conjoint PhD students.

1. Background

The Final Oral Examination is the defense of the written thesis before an Examination committee consisting of members of the supervisory committee, faculty external to the thesis and an external appraiser. At the Toronto School of Theology, the Final Oral Examination is not a public event. The GCTS recognizes that some of its doctoral candidates, including Indigenous students and students whose research involves Indigenous populations, may wish to include a Knowledge Keeper at the Final Oral Examination. In fact, in some cases this may be someone who has already accompanied the student unofficially throughout their program. This document outlines the processes by which a Knowledge Keeper may be included at the Final Oral Examination as either a qualified observer or as a voting member the Examination Committee.

It may be beneficial and applicable to a doctoral candidate's research to have a Knowledge keeper participate in the Final Oral Examination. A doctoral candidate who wishes to have a Knowledge Keeper participate in the Final Oral Examination should do so in consultation with the Supervisory Committee. The doctoral candidate should begin preparations for the presence of a Knowledge Keeper at the Final Oral Examination well in advance of the submission of their thesis under C11 in the GCTS Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook.

Knowledge keepers (sometimes called Elders) play vital roles in Indigenous communities as leaders, teachers and mentors. Information about Elder Protocols is available at:

<https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/fnh/elders>.

2. Knowledge Keeper as Qualified Observer at the Final Oral Examination

With the permission of the Associate Director, Graduate Programs of the TST, an Knowledge Keeper may attend the Final Oral Examination as a qualified observer. A qualified observer is someone associated with the research but not a member of the graduate faculty of the Toronto School of Theology. Both the doctoral candidate and the supervisor must agree to the presence of the qualified observer. A qualified observer may attend the Final Oral Examination, and with the permission of the Chair of the Examination and within the allocated timeframe, may ask questions of the candidate but must withdraw before the Examination Committee's deliberations. The supervisor must receive approval for the attendance of a qualified observer in writing from the Associate Director, Graduate Programs of the TST, in advance of the Final Oral Examination.

3. Knowledge Keeper as Voting Member of the Examination Committee

In order for a Knowledge Keeper to act as a voting member of the Examination Committee (Nos. 1- 4 of C11.2 of the GCTS Conjoint Degree Handbook), the individual must hold either a faculty appointment at the University of Toronto with SGS Graduate Faculty Membership or have the appropriate graduate status with the GCTS to fulfill the role. In order to fulfill the role of external examiner on the defense (No. 5 of C11.2 in the GCTS Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook), the Knowledge Keeper shall meet the same restrictions on external examiners as in C11.2.3 of the GCTS Graduate Conjoint Degree Handbook.