

Susan questioned whether supervisors must agree to the clause in the Supervisor’s Declaration section (“I agree to an eight-week parental accommodation period for the student named above.”). Do they have to agree? Isn’t the accommodation period a student’s right? Philip said supervisors are supposed to be responsible and flexible. Max added that the form also indicates to supervisors that their students are requesting a parental accommodation period—they might not otherwise know. Susan suggested the clause state “I’m aware of…” as opposed to “I agree to…”; the committee agreed the clause should capture awareness instead of consent. Philip will adjust the document accordingly.

b. Embargo period for theses

The general topic, continued from the last meeting, was Archiving and Public Dissemination of Graduate Student Research. Philip circulated a draft rubric for discussion. The first point he made related to the Archiving section of the handout. The document reads, “Copies of all UBC theses are held in cIRcle,” and Philip said he is confident the committee can defend that portion of the policy. The “held in” part means a thesis can be stored in cIRcle without being publically accessible.

Philip reminded the committee that embargoes block the public from seeing anything other than the title, author and submission date. Every embargo has a specific expiry date, and when that date passes the work is made public. Setting the criteria for that expiry date is the committee’s responsibility. What is at stake is the career development of a graduating student. If an embargo will help students publish or patent their work, UBC should support that. Additionally, if releasing the information could undermine an ongoing research project, or if the thesis will have major public impact that would require further reflection, then embargoes may be necessary.

Under Embargoes—Roles and Responsibilities, the draft puts the onus on the student: the student has to request an embargo in the first place, and if an embargo's expiry date passes without any word from the student then the thesis will be made public.

Under Embargoes—Categories and Limitations, the draft shows six possible cases in which embargoes may be appropriate. They are as follows:

1. Patent Application
2. Approved Non-Disclosure Agreement
3. Journal or Conference Publication
4. Extended Scholarly Publication
5. Commercialization
6. Other

The handout also provides details on what type of information is released for embargoed theses, and how an individual can go about requesting a copy of one that is under embargo.

Currently, students can request embargoes for six and twelve months (there is a form; the requirements differ based on embargo length), and the embargoes may be renewable for, at most, two years. Patent Application and Journal Publication are as listed as reasons for embargo on the form.

Jamie noted the “held in” status for theses (referred to under Archiving on the handout) seemed new. He asked whether the cIRcle database could leak, thereby affecting IP. Philip said that is a technical question, but in principle the database should not leak.

Philip estimates he reviews two embargo requests each week, however they are requests for renewals, not the routine granting of first-time embargos.

Preliminary consultations were sought from people in the Sciences (Chemistry was satisfied with a two year embargo) and in the Creative Performing Arts (may need an extended embargo if the thesis will be made into a film, for example).

Jamie and Susan both raised their concerns regarding what appears to be a large number of new rules for theses embargoes. Philip countered that UBC needs some sort of policy. Jamie suggested that the six scenarios be posted on a website for information purposes (more firm than guidelines, less firm than a policy). Beth said the more specific the scenarios get the greater chance for legal issues to arise.

Doug supports the general direction of the rubric, although he is concerned that long embargo periods (60 months) become the expectation. He said the driving statement of the policy should be that research produced at UBC is publicized as soon and as widely as possible, when appropriate. In terms of simplifying the rubric, he suggested that Patent Application and Commercialization could be combined into one category, as could Extended Scholarly Publication and Journal or Conference Publication.

Beth suggested new PhD students should give informed consent that their research will be made public at the beginning of their programs. Philip and Jamie supported this idea. Brent said the agreement should be endorsed by both students and supervisors, given the engagement of industrial partners in some student research.

Jenny wondered if there is enough value in stating the maximum embargo times when each scenario is assessed case-by-case. The extension criteria are clear and helpful for students who apply for an extension, so why include the maximums?

Clive suggested it may be helpful for students and supervisors to discuss the expectation that research conducted at UBC is publicized upon completion. The discussion should be in an early stage to proactively address potential embargo issues. Susan said she is accumulating best practice forms for research committee meetings, and Clive's suggestion could be included.

Philip will revise the draft to account for these comments and continue consultations with faculty groups over the summer, aiming to bring a well-supported revision back to the September meeting.

c. Manuscript-based theses

The committee will revisit this issue at the next meeting in September 2012.

d. Doctorate-to-Masters transfers

The committee returned to the discussion surrounding doctorate-to-masters transfers. Philip said these transfers are highly unusual. They must officially be requested by the program rather than the student. The program applies to FoGS and FoGS then requires a solid rationale from the student and the Graduate Advisor. The master's requirements have to be fulfilled and the student must be able to finish the degree in the time allowed had the student enrolled in the master's program in the first place. Beth suggested that the supervisor should also submit a written request to FoGS.

The corresponding draft document that was circulated states that students who have achieved Candidacy are not eligible to transfer to a master's program. Clive suggested that the candidacy exam may actually be the appropriate place to gauge a student's suitability for the PhD. Philip in turn suggested that students who pass their comprehensive exams and have their thesis proposals approved should be committed to completing their doctoral program.

Beth is concerned about students who encounter issues that are out of their control (a terminal illness, for example) and are therefore unable to complete their doctoral program. She would support the transfer in this case. She is less sympathetic towards students who do not have similar circumstances.

Doug said the policy on transfers should preserve the integrity of the master's and doctoral programs as its overall goal. Furthermore, it should address the rare circumstances in which a doctoral student is granted a master's degree—it should not be seen as an escape route. Susan clarified that students are not granted the master's degrees; they must still complete the requirements to earn them.

Brent asked about the role of the research committee. Sometimes there is an issue between the supervisor and the student and perhaps the issue could be resolved in consultation with the research committee. Where/how does the research committee factor into the process? Susan asked if that could be the Grad Advisor's responsibility.

Susan said in most of the Sciences it is the norm to go from a bachelor's degree, temporarily through the master's stream, and then into a PhD program. In these cases students would revert back to the master's level.

Susan expressed concern that there are too many rules for something that is case-by-case. Max said the problem with assessing something case-by-case is that the parties involved often look for guidelines.

Jamie said he likes the requirement for written request to transfer because it engages the student's supervisor and department in the process. He also likes that students cannot go back to the doctoral stream if they choose to complete a master's degree instead.

Susan advocated for the removal of a time limit for when students can transfer to a master's program. She also mentioned these transfers may raise funding issues (with four-year fellowships, for example).

Jenny asked about the cases where doctoral students have been judged to fail. She noted there are three different reasons why a student would want to transfer from a doctoral degree to a master's: 1. life circumstance; 2. decide not to finish; 3. unsuccessful at doctoral level. She asked the committee that regardless of the reason, should there still be the option to transfer?

Taraneh said when there are life circumstances that are out of the student's control there should be no timeline for transferring, but the same should not apply for students who decide late in their doctoral program that they want to transfer to a master's program. Susan then asked about supervisors who may request that students transfer. Brent noted that this might be a way for supervisors to push students out of their programs.

Jamie said he thinks the second scenario Jenny suggested does not exist—if you dig deeper it is often one of the other two reasons. Rachel said that the second reason does in fact exist.

