Thank you for agreeing to preside at the upcoming oral examination. The following guide walks you chronologically through the steps you will take as a presider.

1. Prior to the Defense

GSEHD virtual doctoral dissertation defenses will be conducted virtually using WebEx. As presider, you will be given host privileges and editing privileges before and during the WebEx meeting, and will be asked to monitor participants’ audio, video, and access.

If you are unfamiliar with WebEx, we recommend you familiarize yourself with the platform in advance of the defense; you can begin with WebEx video tutorials here: https://help.webex.com/en-us/8bzter/Cisco-Webex-Meetings-Video-Tutorials.

a. At least two weeks prior to the defense, GSEHD Student Services (docgsehd@gwu.edu) will create the WebEx for the dissertation defense, invite all committee members and external readers, and designate you and the chair as hosts of the event to allow you to make edits.

b. You and the candidate should make any necessary additions to the attendee list prior to the defense; this will entail inviting any guests to the event and forwarding them the WebEx information (the WebEx will be set for public access and will not require a separate password).

c. If you require technical support during the defense, the GW IT Department is available at 202-994-4948. If you would like technical support prior to the defense, the IT department can also schedule and facilitate test runs on WebEx and provide individualized training to you; please schedule an appointment with them by visiting their website at https://it.gwu.edu/support.

2. During the Defense – Overall Duties

a. During the defense, you will lead the discussion by following the guidelines set forth in the rest of the document. You can use the quoted statements in sections 3 and 4 verbatim while presiding over the defense.
b. As presider, you will be responsible for ensuring the technology is running smoothly and is not disrupting the flow of the defense.

Considerations for managing technology include:

i. The WebEx event will be set to begin 10 minutes before the scheduled start time of the defense. You and all other committee members should log on at the beginning of the WebEx event (10 minutes before the defense starts) to ensure that everyone’s technology is working properly and that the defense is able to start promptly as scheduled. During these 10 minutes, please test that everyone’s audio and video is working properly and ensure that participants understand the procedures for an online defense. You will also want to facilitate introductions during this period. If you require technical support during this setup period, the GW IT Department is available 24 hours a day at 202-994-4948.

ii. Committee members may call in using the phone number provided on the WebEx meeting invitation if they are unable to get their video to work; however, to preserve the gravitas, no more than two committee members may use the audio-only option, and the candidate may not use the audio-only option. If either the candidate or more than two committee members is unable to participate using video, the defense must be rescheduled. Please email Student Services at docgsehd@gwu.edu in the event that you have to reschedule the defense for technical reasons.

iii. As presider, you will have the ability to mute and unmute all other participants using the participant list on the right side of your screen. During the defense, please ensure that everyone is muted except for the person who is speaking, to avoid distractions to the candidate from external noise. You can find instructions for muting and unmuting participants here: https://help.webex.com/en-us/r2cdv1/Mute-or-Unmute-Others-as-a-Host-in-the-Cisco-Webex-Meetings-Suite.

iv. You may wish to lock the WebEx room at the beginning of the defense to ensure that no guests can enter partway through, which might pose a distraction to the student. If you lock the WebEx room, please do so directly before beginning the Opening of Session below. You can unlock a meeting at any time should the need arise. To lock a meeting, select **Meeting → Lock Meeting** along the top taskbar.
3. During the defense – Opening of Session

You may use the quoted statements below verbatim, except where names are bracketed.

a. Open by saying:

“This the final examination for the degree of [DEGREE] for [STUDENT].”

“If there are noncommittee guests present] All noncommittee guests should turn off their video and microphones now and leave them off for the duration of the examination. If you choose to ask a question later, click the “raise hand” icon next to your name in the Participants bar, and I will manually unmute you.”

“As a reminder, the candidate and all guests will be placed in a separate breakout room during the deliberation period following the defense, to allow the committee to meet in private. [CANDIDATE NAME], your chair will invite you to re-enter the main WebEx room once the deliberation period has ended.”

“The purpose of the examination is to determine 1) whether the dissertation is acceptable, and 2) whether the candidate satisfactorily defends it. That decision will be made at the conclusion of the examination by the four examiners. (The chair is present but does not participate in the examination or the decision.)”

“Since a decision to accept the dissertation stipulates that all errors of an editorial or typographical nature will be corrected before the final copy of the dissertation are submitted, it is not necessary to question the candidate concerning matters of this sort. The candidate and chairperson will appreciate receiving notes on these errors, either in the text, or separately. Therefore the examiners can address their questions to matters of substance.”

“Each examiner will be given an opportunity to introduce questions. Once a question has been introduced, any other examiner who is interested in the same general area may feel free to enter the questioning at that point. It is hoped that the initial questioning will proceed expeditiously enough that there will be an opportunity for a second round, in which examiners may introduce questions they have
been reserving, or which may have occurred to them in the course of the examination.”

b. Ask the Chairperson to present the candidate to the examiners. As a reminder, you will need to unmute the person you are calling on (the Chair) and ensure everyone else is muted, if they have not already done so.

"Dr. [NAME], could you present the candidate to the examiners please?"

c. Permit the candidate to make a brief introductory statement. As a reminder, you will need to unmute the candidate and ensure everyone else is muted.

"[NAME], you now have the opportunity to make a brief introductory statement. I would suggest that it is not necessary to summarize the content of the dissertation. Rather, you may tell the examiners anything that may be helpful to them in understanding the research, your background, or the relationship between the two. You should plan to keep your statement to about 5 minutes.”

4. During the Defense – Examination Period

a. Call on examiners, in turn. As a reminder, you will need to unmute the person you are calling on and ensure everyone else is muted. You should remind participants that follow-up questions are allowed, even if they did not ask the original question, and instruct them to wave or raise their hand to signal that they would like to be un-muted for a follow-up question.

“As is our custom, I usually begin with a committee member, and then alternate between committee members and outside examiners for purposes of examining the candidate. The questioning will begin with [NAME] examining the candidate.”

[Note: If helpful, you may use the guide below to keep track of questions.]

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<tr>
<th>Examiner</th>
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4. b. If there is time, call on examiners again. In general, you should aim to complete all questions within about 1½ hours from the start, but stretching this period to 1¾ hours is fine.

c. Ask if anyone has any final questions, and unmute participants as necessary.

d. Ask if any observers want to ask questions, and unmute observers as necessary.

5. During the Defense – Decision Period

a. During this part of the defense, you should ensure the candidate and all observers do not have access to the main WebEx room, in order to enable a private discussion among the committee members. Most commonly, committees accomplish this by creating and entering a Breakout room, allowing the committee to discuss privately in the Breakout room while the candidate and any guests remain in the main WebEx room. For guidelines on how to create and manage Breakout rooms, please see: https://help.webex.com/en-us/article/nft9foq/Webex-Meetings-%7C-Create-breakout-sessions.

b. If you would prefer not to create a breakout room, you can also ask the candidate and all observers to exit the WebEx meeting altogether in order to enable a private discussion. In this scenario, the chair should make advance plans for how to contact the candidate (e.g. via phone call, text, or email) to invite him or her to re-join the meeting once a decision has been reached.

c. Consider the acceptability of the dissertation document. Please ask for a motion and a second to that motion, discuss the defense and the motion, and then call a formal vote. Two negative votes defeat a motion.

Possible decisions:
- Accept: All errors will be corrected, and recommendations which had consensus in the course of the examination will be incorporated. The examiners delegate to the Chairperson the responsibility for seeing that this is done.
• Accept conditionally: Any examiner who cares to do so may withhold his or her signature until the revised document has been submitted to him or her and is approved. Please notify Student Services (docgsehd@gwu.edu) if an examiner has made this decision.

• Reject conditionally: The examiners establish conditions under which the dissertation may be reconsidered and accepted. This may or may not include another oral.

• Reject: The dissertation is judged totally unacceptable. The candidate has no alternative except to produce a new study, if permitted to continue.

d. Consider the acceptability of the oral defense:

Possible decisions: Accept or not accept. If not accepted, a second oral is called for. Please call for a motion and a second to the motion to finalize the decision.

6. After Decision is Made

a. The committee will exit the breakout room and return to the main WebEx room, or the chair will invite the candidate back into the room. Once the candidate and committee are back in the same room, the chair will make the formal announcement of the committee’s decision and the group can celebrate virtually with the candidate as appropriate.

b. Notify Student Services of the result at docgsehd@gwu.edu; Student Services will then reach out to the student and chair with final instructions for the submission of the document to ProQuest. If the committee’s decision is unanimous, please confirm that with Student Services. If the decision is not unanimous, please provide the name of the committee member who wishes to dissent or withhold his/her signature, so Student Services can follow up with them during the graduation clearance process.

7. Note: Conditions Necessitating Rescheduling

In order to ensure a robust virtual defense experience, if any of the following situations occur, the defense must be stopped and rescheduled for a different date:
a. If the candidate or more than two committee members cannot use video for the defense. (Up to two committee members are allowed to participate using the audio-only option.)
b. If there are technical issues on the side of either the candidate or the presider that disrupt the flow of the defense.
c. If any member of the committee cannot fully participate for any reason, including technical difficulties.

Please contact Student Services at docgsehd@gwu.edu to reschedule if necessary.