Faculty of Languages

In response to the questions that have arisen about conducting doctoral defences in the current circumstances, given the restrictions on travel and meetings, we would like to make the following clarifications and recommendations:

The Higher Education Ordinance (Chapter 6, Sections 33-35) sets the following requirements:

- A doctoral thesis must be presented and defended orally in public.
- A faculty examiner (external reviewer) must participate in the public defence of a doctoral thesis.
- At least one of those participating in the grading of a doctoral thesis must be a person who does not work at the higher education institution awarding the degree.

In addition to this, the University’s Guidelines for Third-cycle Education (UFV 2009/1993) state that:

- Doctoral dissertations must be available at the University Library in the number of copies necessary to allow satisfactory review of the dissertation at least three weeks prior to its public defence. [...] Shorter periods of availability for the complete printed doctoral dissertation and the digital version of the announcement sheet and the framing summary of portfolio dissertations may be granted by the dean or a supradepartmental body only if extraordinary circumstances obtain.
- A grading committee must be specially appointed for each individual dissertation.
- The majority of the members of a grading committee, which is to consist of 3 or 5 members, must come from outside the department to which the doctoral candidate belongs.
- The grading committee has a quorum when all members are present.

The University’s Admission and grading regulations for third-cycle (doctoral) courses and study programmes (UFV 2012:2057) provide no further guidance.

The minimum requirements for conducting a public defence of a doctoral thesis are therefore the following arrangements:

- An author, a faculty examiner and a grading committee who are able to communicate with one another, but do not necessarily have to be present at the same physical location.
- A time and place determined three weeks in advance that is accessible to the public, where they can examine the printed thesis and observe its public defence, and where individual members of the public have an opportunity to ask questions after the ordinary discussion and examination of the thesis has been completed. It also seems appropriate that someone should chair the proceedings at this location, even if there is no formal requirement to appoint a chair.

A doctoral defence therefore can be conducted in which the author, the faculty examiner and one or more members of the examining committee participate via a link. However, if the faculty examiner, the author of the thesis or any of the members of the examining committee lose their connection, the defence cannot be completed. We therefore recommend that at least two reserve members be
appointed, at least one of whom should not work at Uppsala University. If necessary, one of these stand-in members can take on the role of faculty examiner.

The Faculty of Arts recently conducted a public defence of a doctoral thesis in which the faculty examiner and all members of the examining committee participated via a link (Zoom). Judging by that experience, there is no reason to postpone defences that have already been decided on because of concerns about quality.

At defences with remote participation, we recommend venues with equipment for videoconferences, such as the lecture halls in the University Main Building or Ihresalen. Technicians should be present in good time before the defence to test connections, etc., and should be available throughout the proceedings. To enable the discussion to proceed as smoothly as possible, we recommend that all participants in the discussion be connected by link to their own computer, including those who are present at the designated venue in Uppsala.

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