Virtual doctoral examination (in times of Corona)

Due to current developments and restrictions in public life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some questions also arise on the subject of doctoral examinations. Wherever possible, doctoral examinations should take place only virtually during this period. This document summarizes best practices and recommendations of the faculties with regard to virtual doctoral exams.

Basically, it can be stated that under the present circumstances (prevention of infection with the coronavirus and the implementation of home office, as well as the suspension of all public events at the University of Basel, as of March 2020), doctoral examinations should be conducted digitally, which is both reasonable and legally justifiable. In any case, a public thesis defense in an auditorium must be avoided. Should the doctoral committee insist on a public defense for academic reasons, the doctoral examination must be postponed.

Furthermore:

a) Postponement of the doctoral examination is possible if the doctoral candidate wishes to do so.

b) Depending on the doctoral regulations, the doctoral board of the faculty must give its opinion on the possibility of conducting the doctoral examination virtually.

In order to ensure that the doctoral examination can be conducted without any problems via digital channels, a test must be carried out before the examination takes place. Discontinuation and assessment based on the part that has been completed up to the time the exam is abandoned is only possible if the successfully completed part of the exam is sufficient for an assessment (e.g. if the discontinuation of the disputation occurred relatively late).

If an assessment is not possible, the exam must be repeated and does not count as a failed attempt. Even under these difficult circumstances, there is no right to take an exam without assessment. The examination commission should clarify/decide beforehand under what circumstances (worst case) an exam would have to be repeated (e.g. if the discontinuation does not allow for/make a discussion possible after the lecture).

Recommendations:

- Responsibilities should be clearly defined.
- In addition to video conferencing programs (e.g. Zoom - see instructions below), a working telephone connection should be available and the telephone numbers of all participants should be exchanged in advance.
- Each member of the examinations committee will confidentially provide the chairperson with three questions in advance so that he/she can continue the examination if necessary, even if a member has connection issues.
- It is advisable to schedule an additional 15-30 minutes for unforeseen technical difficulties or problems with the setup.
- The online session should be password protected and access should only be possible by invitation of the chairperson.
The group of participants should be coordinated in advance by the examinations committee through its chair.

The documents should be sent electronically in advance.

The examination report and any signatures will be sent electronically.

In subjects and areas in which a type of examination is required that cannot be transferred one-to-one to the virtual space, adaptations of the procedure, tasks and form of examination etc. may have to be considered and approved by the faculty, so that a virtual examination can take place.

Online Tool Zoom:

The University has acquired a license for Zoom, a tool that can also be used for the conduction of digital doctoral examinations (streaming/recording). Zoom is the solution that could be set up quickly for this exceptional situation, but it is only a temporary solution. Another tool will be implemented and offered in the near future.

- A Guide to online meetings with Zoom can be found on this website.
- The website https://unibas.zoom.us offers the possibility to start or join an online conference. To start an online conference of unlimited duration with up to 300 participants, an @unibas.ch e-mail address is required.
- Participants who are invited to zoom events/online conferences do not need a zoom account. Participants can join a meeting by phone, desktop, mobile phone or tablet either via invitation link or at https://unibas.zoom.us.
- A desktop application and browser plug-ins can also be downloaded for zoom: https://zoom.us/download#client_4meetingt.
- With a remote connection to university computers, initial experience has shown that there may be problems with the microphone. These do not occur without the remote connection (which is not necessary for this purpose).

Despite the challenging times, we wish you the best possible success and a lot of energy during the doctoral examination.

With best regards,

Your Graduate Center Team