



Graduate School  
for Cellular and  
Biomedical Sciences



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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

## GCB PhD Thesis Defense & Degree

### Doctoral Candidate's Guide to the Process



Photo of Mittlestrasse 43, 3012 Bern, GCB offices of the University of Bern: © Universität Bern

# GCB Thesis Defense Overview

The thesis must be submitted no later than one year after finishing experimental work or end of contract i.e., within 4 years. Doctoral candidates must contact the GCB administrative staff ([info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch)) well in advance of the end of the 3rd, latest the 4th year to discuss the procedure.

## I. Submission Details

1. Inform the GCB by email to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch) of the following: (1) your schedule, (2) planned thesis defense date, and (3) title page. This must be done **latest 11 weeks prior** to your oral thesis defense date. Calculate the timeline using the Excel template tool available for download from the GCB101 module, [Thesis Defense](#), on the ILIAS platform or from the GCB Website, [PhD Thesis Defense & Degree page](#).
2. Provide the GCB with a copy of your written thesis **no later than 10 weeks** prior to the scheduled oral thesis defense. Include the **PhD Degree form** with the thesis. The plagiarism check can be performed after receipt of these two documents.
3. The GCB will send your written thesis to your external co-referee for assessment.
4. Provide your supervisor with a copy of your written thesis no later than 10 weeks prior to the scheduled oral thesis defense.
5. Submit to the GCB office **all** PhD documents the very latest four (4) weeks prior to the specified date of the thesis defense. Send these documents in electronic form to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch).
6. Request that your supervisor send their assessment directly to the GCB coordinator with a copy to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch) at least 4 weeks prior to the oral thesis defense date. The assessment must be written in English.
7. Upload your electronic thesis defense documents via SWITCHfilesender and address them to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch).

Login on SWITCHfilesender with your campus account (username & password).

Name files using the following naming convention: «LastName\_FirstName\_PhD\_DegreeForm» and «LastName\_FirstName\_PhDThesis».

If your email program permits it, you may also send the files directly as a pdf to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch). PhD thesis files **must be 100 MB** or less. Larger files cannot be processed.

Furthermore, no changes to the title page of the

thesis (including title of the thesis and PhD title) are allowed after submission to the GCB. Especially not for the final version.

### Vetsuisse Zurich Candidates ONLY

Vetsuisse Zurich students, matriculated at the University of Zurich, please follow the instructions in the document:



[Guidelines for GCB candidates of Vetsuisse ZH](#) (found on the GCB Website PhD Thesis Defense and Degree page).

### Pro Tips

1. There are many options for compressing files on the www. However, the GCB will not recommend a specific program. You must vet the program yourself.
2. Please note: the title of the thesis must be exactly the same as in the PhD Degree form **and** in your final doctoral agreement.
3. No changes to the thesis title page (including thesis and PhD titles) are accepted after submission to the GCB.

## II. PhD Degree Application Requirements

1. All mandatory ECTS earned are reflected in the signed doctoral agreement and accounted for in CTS/KSL.
2. Scientific Integrity successfully completed.
3. Mid-term Evaluation successfully passed.
4. At least one, first author paper published or accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.
5. Minimum sufficient graded thesis assessment received from supervisor.
6. Minimum sufficient graded thesis assessment received from external co-referee.



### III. PhD Thesis

Components of the written PhD thesis format are specified. The parts of the document not specifically discussed here are determined by the individual candidate.

#### Pro Tip

It is essential that you carefully follow the instructions below and on the Front Page template. Avoid mandatory corrections, it is highly recommended that you submit the Front Page of your thesis to the [GCB Administration](#) for review 10-12 weeks ahead of your planned oral thesis defense.

1. The thesis in A4 format must have been approved by the supervisor. The following sections must be included (You will find any templates on the GCB Website [PhD Thesis Defense & Degree](#) page) and the GCB101 ILIAS module, Thesis Defense.

(a) Front Page Find the Title Page Document.



- (b) Abstract.
- (c) Comprehensive introduction into the field.
- (d) Hypothesis and aim of the thesis.
- (e) Results may be added as published or submitted manuscripts (an example of how to format this can be found on the GCB Website [PhD Thesis Defense & Degree](#) page, as well as on the [GCB101](#) page in ILIAS in the Thesis Defense module). The document is labelled *Author Contributions*.
- (f) If you choose to include submitted manuscripts, you must insert a separate page in front of each manuscript in your thesis. This page will include the following information: a manuscript title and a short description, stating

clearly the type of your own contribution to the manuscript, (e.g., which experiments you conducted, and which figures you created).

(g) Overall discussion and outlook or perspective.

(h) Curriculum vitae and list of publications.

(i) Declaration of Originality.

This document must be dated, signed and included in the electronic copy of the thesis. You may use an electronic signature. Neither paper nor electronic copies of theses can be accepted without your signature.

### IV. Assessments by supervisor and external co-referee

The thesis is independently assessed by the supervisor and by the external co-referee.

1. The supervisor evaluates the experimental work and the written thesis. The report, written on official letter paper, must contain a grade and follow the *Guidelines\_Supervisor*.



The report must be sent in PDF format, addressed to the GCB coordinator at [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch). You will find the document on the GCB Website [PhD Thesis Defense & Degree](#) page, as well as on the [GCB101](#) page in ILIAS in the Thesis Defense module.



# GCB Thesis Defense Overview

## IV. Assessments by Supervisor and External Co-referee (continued)

2. The external co-referee evaluates the written thesis. The assessment, written on the official *GCB External Co-referee Thesis Assessment Form*, must contain a grade and follow the guidelines on the form. The assessment must be sent directly addressed to the GCB coordinator at [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch), at least 4 weeks before the date of the planned thesis defense. The assessment must be in English.

## V. Application for the PhD Degree

**Latest, 10 weeks prior to the oral thesis defense date**, the candidate should submit the following document to the GCB office:

1. One electronic, dated & signed PDF copy of the thesis should be uploaded on SWITCHfile-sender and addressed to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch).
2. Completed **PhD Degree Form**, four (4) pages. Fill in the form and then save it on your computer (File → «Print as PDF» → save on computer). Type the date and your name in the box **signature** (or use an electronic signature) for the electronic copy.



**No later than four (4) weeks before the thesis defense date**, the candidate must submit the following documents to the GCB office:

3. Provide written information on **date, time and venue** (room and exact address) of your thesis defense.  
Include **current official registration** confirmation from the Admissions Office of the University of Bern. You can print this from [www.self-service.unibe.ch](http://www.self-service.unibe.ch).
4. Provide **proof of payment of examination fee** of CHF 500.– (paid to the bank details provided on the GCB Website, [Thesis defense and Degree](#) page or by GCB Administration should you request the information from them at [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch)).
5. Include your study sheet from CTS/KSL - this is a pdf form you print from your CTS/KSL planning view.

## VI. PhD Document Processing GCB Office "Behind the Scenes"

1. The PhD Degree Form, the supervisor and the external co-referee assessments will be forwarded by the GCB to the members of the thesis committee and the respective GCB expert committee. The members of the expert committee have until no later than one week prior to the specified thesis defense date to voice objections to the planned defense. When no objections are voiced, the thesis is accepted and the PhD thesis committee is informed and reminded of the thesis defense date. Also, the student will be informed to proceed with the thesis defense.
2. An electronic copy of the thesis (PDF) can be made available for review, on request from the GCB expert committee members.
3. Additionally, the GCB provides the mentor with an electronic version of the PhD Degree Form, the submitted thesis, and with appropriate instructions and forms concerning the format of the thesis defense.
4. The assessment of the external co-referee will be sent to the student from the GCB coordinator.
5. The supervisor is expected to discuss the assessment with and give feedback directly to the student.
6. The GCB provides the co-advisor with a copy of the thesis so they may prepare for the oral defense.



## VII. Thesis Defense and Final Assessment format

Examiners are your PhD Thesis Team plus the external co-referee:

- (1) supervisor,
- (2) co-advisor,
- (3) external co-referee, and
- (3) mentor, who is also chairing the thesis defense

The grades are recorded on the Thesis Defense Record and submitted to the GCB office by the mentor. Furthermore, a protocol of the closed 60-minute discussion is written and submitted to the GCB office by the mentor.

The final grade is summarized on the Graduation Record and is obtained as defined in the «Rules» of the GCB («Promotionsreglement»), consisting of your:

- (a) supervisor's assessment of the thesis
- (b) external co-referee's assessment of the thesis
- (c) examiners' assessment of the thesis defense (mean of examiners' individual grades).

## VIII. Deposit Copies of the PhD Thesis at GCB Office

No later than 2 weeks after the thesis defense, the candidate must submit the following to the GCB office:

1. Three A4, paper-bound (*not* spiral-bound) copies of your final thesis version (required corrections completed) must be delivered to the GCB or sent via postal service.
2. If you have made changes to the text after your PhD Degree Application: One new dated and signed electronic copy of the final version of the thesis, is to be uploaded on SWITCHfile-sender and addressed to [info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch).

## IX. Award PhD Degree

1. The PhD Degree is jointly awarded by the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Science, and the Vetsuisse Faculty (Faculty of Veterinary Medicine) upon the proposal of the PhD Committee of the GCB. The PhD documents are only issued *after* the signed thesis record and protocol have been received. Then, the documents are only issued upon receipt of the additional deposit copies and the electronic PDF copy of the final version of the PhD thesis. You are entitled to bear the PhD title after having received the PhD Diploma and Diploma Supplement.
2. Once you have completed your studies or if you no longer want to continue studying, you must remove yourself from the student registry (this does not take place automatically). You may de-register online [www.selfservice.unibe.ch](http://www.selfservice.unibe.ch). The de-registration form is available from May 20 to August 31 for the Fall semester and from December 15 to January 31 for the Spring

semester.

3. You may attend the Graduation Ceremony of the faculty with which you were affiliated during your PhD. Information on date, time and venue will be announced by the appropriate faculty's Office of the Dean.

Note:

An official "confirmation of successful thesis defense" to use in the interim between your successful defense and receipt of your official, signed diploma can be issued when the following requirements have been fulfilled:

1. You deposit the three printed and bound copies of your written thesis at the GCB office.
2. Your mentor submits the signed Thesis Defense Record and the signed transcript.

You may not officially use your new PhD title until the diploma has been issued and signed by all three faculty deans. However, you may use the confirmation letter to apply for employment, as well as for SNSF grants.



Further Note:

The Graduate School for Cellular and Biomedical Sciences (GCB) of the University of Bern, jointly is administered by the Faculties of Medicine, Science and Vetsuisse. As such, all three faculty deans personally sign each diploma individually. Therefore, the GCB arranges "diploma tours" every two to three months, during which the diplomas are carried to the Offices of the Deans of the respective faculties for signature. The final signature from the University rector is obtained at the end of each tour.

This process can be time-consuming and can take up to five months to complete.

Universität Bern  
Graduate School for Cellular and Biomedical Sciences (GCB)  
Mittelstrasse 43  
3012 Bern

Telefon +41 31 684 53 77  
[info.gcb@unibe.ch](mailto:info.gcb@unibe.ch)