Instructions for conducting digital public defences of a doctoral thesis at UiT

The outbreak of COVID-19 has major consequences for all activities at UiT, including the Ph.D. education's trial lectures and public defence (doctoral degree). The Ph.D. Regulations sections 34 and 35 regulates public defences of doctoral thesis held at UiT. Until further notice, all public defences of the doctoral thesis will be conducted at UiT as planned but on a digital platform. Planning and implementation are changed to meet the challenges posed by the orders given by the authorities to limit the spread of infection.

This instruction is designed by the Digital taskforce, which is part of the pandemic preparedness at UiT. See also en.uit.no/corona and en.uit.no/digitallectures.

Guidelines
The following applies to the completion of the doctoral degree:

• The doctoral examination is conducted with the digital measures required.
• The taskforce has made clear a set of quality assured solutions offered, but the taskforce will go as far as possible to meet further needs.
• The digital taskforce coordinates with the faculty's contact person(s) to clarify necessary measures. The main purpose is to find the technical solution that best addresses the accessibility aspect that a digital public defence of a doctoral degree requires. Following special requirements are set
  o Opposition ex auditorio; The audience must be able to oppose, even from digital surfaces.
  o That the leader of the defence should be able to carry out their management duties as usual in a digital setting.
• It should - as far as possible - be arranged for the public to be able to follow the defence via video streaming (public access requirements).
• Strengthened presence: a technical representative from the digital taskforce must be present at the start of both the trial lecture and the public defence, be readily available during implementation, and a backup will be identified for this person.

Tasks that are the faculties responsibility, but may require some facilitation from the digital taskforce
• The faculty informs about the public defence as per usual. The information should link to a digital version of the dissertation.
• The faculty will conduct a Skype/Teams meeting with the opponents prior to the technical test to unveil any technical issues on the opponent's side as early as possible.
• The Ph.D. regulations do not state that the trial lecture must be public. Nevertheless, it is customary that this is open to the public. The audience must be able to follow a trial lecture via video stream, and information regarding this must be given to the academic community and other interested parties with links to the video transfer (streaming).
• Information must be given in advance about how opposition ex auditorio can be done via email. The information is issued along with a link to the stream.

Technical arrangement
Cecilie Svendsen coordinates the work and keeps in touch with the faculties until the completion date. A person responsible for the technical implementation will be appointed who will be the faculty's contact until the day of the examination. A backup will also be appointed.

The digital taskforce's technical framework looks like this:

• Technical support is two-sided; one technical support resource is involved at the start and is readily available throughout the disputation, and another is responsible for monitoring Mediasite stream and recording.
• All associated rooms have been reviewed and cleared by ITA's AV-team.
• The faculty must call the opponents before the technical test.
• We agree and conduct a mandatory technical test with the candidate, leader, opponents and others who wish, no later than the day before the examination.
  o The technical test has its own meeting invitation.
  o A user guide for the selected video calling tool (Skype fB/ eams) should be sent out.
  o The technical test should also include Meeting Decorum: mute microphone when not in dialogue, placement in the room, interference, lighting conditions and the like.
• The public defence of a doctoral thesis is organized with both Skype/Team's two-way communication and Mediasite streaming.
  o Relevant participants to the event are invited by the faculty. The invite is set up with Skype for Business/Teams links.
  o The online meeting is arranged in the usual way in the auditorium or from home, with outside callers.
  o The public defence of a doctoral thesis (ie the web meeting) is streamed live using Mediasite. The feed will be accessible via a link made open to anyone who clicks it (one-way).
  o The recording of the defence is planned at the time of booking the room.
  o The stream is recorded and stored in Mediasite. The expiration date of the recording is determined by the respective academic community.
• Those who wish to oppose ex auditorio will have the opportunity to do so by sending an e-mail to the leader of the public defence or the committee chair. This must be clearly stated in the invitation/notice.
• In addition, the taskforce has responsibility for local hygiene measures, such as antibacterial napkins and the like.
• All front doors are currently closed and require a 24-hour access card.
When discussing in a digital room, it is important to be aware of the risk of technical interruption, unnecessary noise and outside attempts of sabotage. The taskforce coordinates with the committee chair and the leader of the defence in advance to have clarified whether the trial lecture/defence can be temporarily halted due to such circumstances.

These special arrangements for digital communication will apply as long as the infection situation requires it. The university management and the taskforce will keep in touch with the faculties about experiences with these arrangements, and invite to digital meetings to evaluate and adjust the arrangements as needed.

Questions about the guideline can be directed to Cecilie Svendsen or group leader Marte K. Skadsem.

Relevant resources
Instruction for conducting fully digital public defences of doctoral thesis, Universitets-og høgskolerådet (in Norwegian only)
Meeting Decorum at UiT

Best regards,

Jan Ketil Petersen
Project leader, Department of Information Technology
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jan.k.petersen@uit.no
48087254