

Conducting scientific defences at the Faculty V of the TU Berlin during limited presence due to the pandemic

Background Information

On the basis of the letter from the TU Berlin crisis management team dated 14.05.2020, scientific defences at the TU Berlin can take place from 18.05.2020 onwards in partial presence in sufficiently large rooms, depending on the respective faculty.

The following regulations for the conduct of academic defences relate to the fact that the physical meeting of members of the PhD Committee, doctoral candidate and the university public in one room at the TU Berlin is currently not possible and that the defence must represent a compromise between reduced physical presence and the greatest possible legal certainty. The basis for this is the President's letter of 12.03.20, in which the faculties are assigned responsibility for conducting video-based defences and the video-based activation of commission members is considered possible in principle for individual cases.

When conducting the scientific defence, the pandemic-related ordinances of the State of Berlin, the letters of the crisis management team of the TU Berlin in particular, the applicable hygiene and protection measures and the recommendations of the Robert Koch Institute must be observed in principle. All precautionary measures to combat a pandemic always have priority.

Basic requirements for scientific defences in partial presence with parallel video conference

- The chairperson of the PhD Committee is responsible for the proper organisation and implementation
- Preliminary declaration of the doctoral candidate to the Faculty Service Centre (FSC, promotionen@vm.tu-berlin.de), explaining the urgent need for scientific debate at this point in time.
- Preliminary declarations by the doctoral candidate and all members of the doctoral committee need to be send to the FSC (promotionen@vm.tu-berlin.de) before sending the invitation:
 - Consent to the performance of the scientific discussion in the chosen form. In the case of external reviewers, if applicable, declaration that physical presence is not possible.
 - Confirmation that the necessary IT equipment (hardware, software, internet connection, etc.) is available.
 - Confirmation that the conference tool and its operation is familiar.
 - Agreement that, if the technical conditions do not allow it, the scientific defence will be interrupted and repeated.
- At least the doctoral candidate, the chairperson of the doctoral committee and the evaluator of the TU Berlin as well as, as a rule, the other evaluators are located in a sufficiently large room at the TU Berlin, which offers the technical requirements for video conferencing. Hygiene and protective measures must be observed. The university public is only connected digitally.
- Only TUB-compliant video conference software should be used. Currently the only usable meeting tools are WebEx in the locally hosted version [tubmeeting.tu-berlin.de](https://www.tu-berlin.de/asv/menue/datenschutz/) (see <https://www.tu-berlin.de/asv/menue/datenschutz/>) and [Zoom with end-to-end encryption](#), which in the information letter of the Vice President for Teaching, Digitalization and Sustainability of the TU Berlin dated 3rd March 2021 was also permitted for scientific defences. The prerequisite for E2E encryption is the use of the locally installed client software. In this mode, however, telephone dial-in and breakout rooms are not possible with Zoom.
- Doctoral candidates and members of the doctoral committee have to familiarize themselves in advance with the use of the tool (setting of presentation, parts of the screen, etc.)
- If external evaluators are not physically present, the doctoral candidate and all physically present members of the PhD Committee also participate directly in the video conference. If the doctoral candidate and all the members of the PhD Committee are physically present, a simplified form of

video conferencing can be chosen, which allows the university public to follow the presentation and discussion in all parts.

- The type of academic pronunciation chosen by the doctoral candidate, i.e. the means of presentation used during this period, must be transferable by video conference.
- If the scientific defence cannot be conducted without disturbance, the session shall be interrupted and the defence repeated. In this case, a new invitation must be issued, and the time limits and modalities of the invitation must again be observed.
- The scientific defence is divided into three sections. Depending on the members of the PhD Committee present at the venue, separate digital meeting rooms will be set up for the respective sections and participants will be informed in good time of their access. (For details see implementation)
- External doctoral students and external evaluators will be granted access to the building where the academic debate takes place upon presentation of the invitation.

Implementation

Invitation:

The invitation will refer to the special format of the scientific defence. In addition to the date of the scientific debate, the invitation also contains the date by which guests can register to participate. The chairperson of the PhD Committee will inform the FSC of the access date and e-mail address. The invitation will be sent as usual by the FSC. The deadline for sending it is extended to at least 15 days before the date of the scientific defence. Doctoral thesis and written assessments can be accessed in the FSC by those entitled in accordance with § 8 Paragraph 1 of the doctoral regulations, subject to compliance with the hygiene rules. Please arrange an appointment with promotionen@vm.tu-berlin.de at least 3 working days in advance.

Participants are to be informed that recording of the debate is prohibited.

Participation of the university public (guests):

The university public has 14 days to register their interest in participating in the defence with the PhD Chairperson at the e-mail address mentioned in the invitation. Only the TUB Berlin e-mail address can be used for this purpose. Registration is possible until 09:00 a.m. of the day preceding the scientific defence. If the defence takes place on a Monday, registration must be made by 9 a.m. of the Friday immediately preceding the defence.

The chairperson of the PhD Committee shall notify the guests of the access information by e-mail by 5 p.m. on the day preceding the scientific defence at the latest. If the defence takes place on a Monday, this notification shall be made by 5 p.m. of the immediately preceding Friday.

Conduct of the scientific defence and the subsequent meeting of the PhD Committee:

It is divided into the following three sections:

1: Scientific defence

Participants: doctoral candidates, members of the doctoral committee, university public

2: Voting of the members of the PhD Committee on the result of the PhD

Participants: Members of the PhD Committee

3rd Communication Result

Participants: PhD students, members of the PhD Committee

If only the doctoral candidate, the chairperson of the doctoral committee and the TU-evaluator are present at the TU Berlin, it is necessary to set up separate digital conference rooms for each section. In

the event that all members of the PhD Committee are present, a digital conference room must be set up for the first section only, if guests have registered. If no guests register and the doctoral candidate and all members of the PhD Committee are physically present, a video conference will not be necessary.

Below are the resulting options in case video conferencing is necessary:

A) Doctoral candidate, chairperson of the doctoral committee and evaluator of the TU Berlin are present

- Separate video conference for section 1
- Separate video conference for section 2
- Separate video conference for section 3

B) Doctoral candidate and all members of the doctoral committee are present; guests have registered

- Videoconference for section 1
- On-site vote on the result
- Communication of the result on the spot

The chairperson of the PhD Committee will provide all participants with the relevant access information no later than 5 p.m. on the day preceding the scientific defence. If the defence takes place on a Monday, the notification shall be made by 5 p.m. of the immediately preceding Friday.

A stable Internet connection must be available throughout the scientific defence. The doctoral candidate and the members of the PhD Committee must always be connected by video and audio link. At the beginning of the first part of the defence, all participants will be called by name and the list of participants will be drawn up on this basis. In order to improve the quality of the transmission, the guests should be connected only by audio link if necessary.

Technical and practical information:

Experience shows that the following measures lead to an improvement of the digital connection: The use of headphones improves intelligibility. To minimize background noise, it is recommended to mute your microphone as long as you do not want to speak yourself ("mute"). In case of connection problems, guests should switch to the audio-only connection.

Protocol:

The doctoral candidate's ability to be examined, the technical conditions and any technical malfunctions / interruptions are noted. The members of the PhD Committee assure in the protocol that they were able to follow the discussion in full. The authenticity of the protocol, including the guest list, is confirmed by the PhD Committee Chair via electronic signatures, e-mail confirmations from institutional e-mail addresses or via the original signature on a printout sent by post to the FSC.

Special case: absence of the PhD students

In addition to the procedure laid down in the faculty council decision to conduct scientific debates during the limited attendance due to the pandemic, scientific debates are also possible in exceptional cases, which must be justified in particular, by connecting the PhD student via video conference. The same regulations apply as for external reviewers who are not physically present. All members of the PhD Committee must agree to this procedure in advance. During the discussion, the PhD student will be alone in a room and will only use tools that are visible within the video conference or that have been agreed upon with the PhD Committee. This has to be confirmed in writing by the doctoral candidate afterwards.

Special case: fully digital scientific defences in pandemic times

Meanwhile, the faculty council has approved the new regulations proposed by the GKoEPO committee with regard to the facilitation of defences using digital media. The reason given by the GKoEPO for the necessity of the new regulations is the need for regulation in extreme crisis situations such as the current pandemic. The legal term "higher power" is cited in this context. The faculty council sees the pandemic as an extreme crisis situation or equates it with "higher power". In addition to the procedure for conducting scientific defences during the Covid 19 pandemic in partial presence, which was established by the decisions of the Faculty Council, it is decided that the scientific defence during the Covid 19 pandemic can also take place in fully digital form. This requires the consent of the doctoral candidate and all members of the PhD Committee in advance of the discussion as well as the declarations already required.