



Nutritional Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Temerty  
Medicine

**GUIDELINES FOR  
RECLASSIFICATION  
M.Sc. to Ph.D.**

Updated September 2023

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## **A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RECLASSIFICATION IN THE DEPARTMENT**

The reclassification procedure offers a near-equivalent path to the direct entry PhD for the student who enters the M.Sc. program with a strong academic background who is certain that they want to complete the Ph.D. This option is available also to the student who has established outstanding merit in their current M.Sc. program whether or not the original intent at entry into the Department had been to complete the Ph.D. Most students would be expected to complete the M.Sc. before proceeding to the Ph.D.

The normal procedure is for the student to apply for reclassification within the first year of enrolment in the M.Sc. In that circumstance, the student would retain full credit for residence time and courses completed. The student no longer retains full residence credit, rather, residence is credited only on the basis of when the reclassification should have occurred (one year maximum credit). The Department will consider but does not encourage applications filed after the first year of the M.Sc. program.

Before proceeding to recommend reclassification, the Department must be satisfied that the student is eligible for admission to the Ph.D. Reclassification is not a route into the Ph.D. for a student who does not have the basic academic qualifications at the time of first entry into the Department. Since outstanding performance is expected to justify reclassification prior to completion of the M.Sc., the normal departmental expectation is an average of at least A- in graduate courses as well as a strong undergraduate record. The evidence of course work performance in the M.Sc. program is complemented by evaluations of research performance submitted by the Student Advisory Committee and Supervisor. It is required by the School of Graduate Studies that all Departmental recommendations be based upon a reclassification interview/assessment.

For a student who is reclassified from the M.Sc. to the Ph.D., the intent is that all requirements of the normal M.Sc. (except the thesis) plus all requirements of the Ph.D. shall be completed. There is no *priori* reduction of course requirements and no expectation that the course requirements to be completed in the Ph.D. will be any different than would hold if the student completed the M.Sc. and then enrolled in the Ph.D.

## **B. PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

A decision to *apply* for reclassification must be decision by the student. Obviously, it must be supported by the supervisor, who must agree to supervise the student and financially support the research as well as extend their assurance of personal funding for the student in accord with policies of the Department and the Faculty of Medicine. The M.Sc. Student Advisory Committee may or may not be continued as the Student's Advisory Committee of the Ph.D., but it should be involved in the assessment of the student, of thesis progress, and of the viability and suitability of plans for a Ph.D. thesis research project.

It follows from the above that while a proposal to reclassify could originate from the student, the supervisor or the Student Advisory Committee, it must have the support of all three before a formal application is made to the Department (the application form, Appendix B, requires all signatures).

The first formal step in reclassification is for the student and supervisor to prepare a tentative plan for the Ph.D. program (courses) and research. This should be reviewed by the Student Advisory Committee. That committee may recommend changes in the tentative plan. When the student, supervisor and advisory committee are satisfied with the proposed program and with the student's qualifications to proceed into the Ph.D. then formal application should be made to the Department. This must be accompanied by a stated plan for the Ph.D. program that would be followed if reclassification is granted (program of course work, thesis title, statement of research hypothesis, general outline of proposed research, assurance of availability of required resources and a statement of time expected to completion of thesis, including allowance for time required to complete other Ph.D. requirements). Proposed membership of the new Advisory Committee should be indicated. A letter of recommendation from the supervisor must be included with the application. This should include an assessment of the student's research ability and scholarly potential. There must also be a statement from the supervisor that they are willing to supervise the student in the Ph.D. program and that they have access to funds (or reasonable expectation of access to funds) that will support the costs of the research planned and that will meet the Department's and Faculty of Medicine's policies on assured financial support of the student.

On receipt of the application (submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator), the Department will (a) review the student's file and status of the M.Sc. program to assess the status of academic qualifications for reclassification, and (b) approve the Reclassification Assessment Committee composition. The Assessment Committee will be concerned first with the academic qualifications and suitability of the candidate for reclassification (includes consideration of both academic work before and during the M.Sc. and also demonstrated research ability and scholarly potential), and second, but equally important, the feasibility and suitability of the planned Ph.D. program including expected time to completion. The Assessment Committee can ask for revisions of the plans or attach a qualification to its recommendation to the Department concerning revision of the proposed Ph.D. program. It can also recommend that the application not be endorsed (with reasons given).

### **C. CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTANCE OF APPLICATION**

The normal criteria for departmental acceptance of an application for reclassification are:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Academic Record:</b>                      | A- or better standing at admission to the M.Sc. |
| <b>Assessed Research Ability:</b>            | A- or better standing in graduate courses       |
| <b>Thesis Proposal and Associated Plans:</b> | Strong  |

### **D. COMPOSITION OF RECLASSIFICATION ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE**

Based initially on SGS guidelines, the Reclassification Assessment Committee will have the following composition:

- Chair (non-voting) - Candidate's M.Sc. Supervisor
- 4 Voting Members - Graduate Department Chair or designate (not on student's committee)
- At least one member from another department (does not include cross-

- appointed staff) who is not a member of the existing M.Sc. Student Advisory Committee and holds an Associate/Full graduate appointment.
- Two other members who hold an Associate/ Full graduate appointment in this or other departments of SGS (this can include members of the M.Sc. Student Advisory Committee).

Provided that the Supervisor has signed the affirmations required, and the candidate has met the declared requirements of academic standing, a simple majority vote of the Assessment Committee will constitute a decision, recommendation for reclassification.

#### **E. Ph.D. PROGRAM PLANNING**

As stated above, the Ph.D. program for the reclassified student must meet **all** of the requirements set for normal M.Sc. programs (except the thesis preparation and defense) **and** must meet all of the requirements set for the normal Ph.D. started after a M.Sc.

#### **F. CONTINUATION IN THE M.Sc.**

If a student chooses not to pursue reclassification even though they may have declared that intent at the time of original entry, or if a student's application for reclassification is not accepted by the Department, their M.Sc. program will continue without prejudice to its normal completion in accord with Departmental policy. This does not affect in any way the student's privilege to apply for admission to a Ph.D. program on completion of the M.Sc. and should not prejudice decision on such an application.

#### **G. CHANGE OF SUPERVISORS**

It would only be under extremely unusual circumstances that the Department would consider a change in supervisor in association with a reclassification. Such a change implies also a change in research area and that is inconsistent with the intent of the reclassification. If a change in supervision is contemplated, the normal and appropriate procedure would be first complete the MSc. and to then initiate a new Ph.D. program.

It is quite acceptable, and often very appropriate, to change the composition of the Advisory Committee in part or in total as a part of the reclassification procedure.

#### **H. DATE OF APPLICATION FOR RECLASSIFICATION**

The reclassification examination is to be held between 12 to 18 months of registration in the M.Sc. program.

#### **I. FORMS AND GUIDELINES**

Attached is a guideline for preparation of the thesis proposal (Appendix A) and a set of sample forms for use in applications for reclassification (Appendices B, C and D).

## **J. APPEAL PROCEDURE**

In the event that the Department declines to endorse and forward an application for reclassification, the student may appeal the decision. The normal procedure would be to first discuss the decision and perceived basis of appeal with the Associate Chair (Graduate Education), obtaining such clarifications of rules and procedures as may be necessary. An actual appeal should be directed to the Chair of the Graduate Department and should specify the actual grounds on which the appeal has been put forward (usually appeals would relate to perceived irregularities of procedure, bias on the part of those making decisions, or misinterpretation of evidence presented. An appeal based on the student's or supervisor's opinion as contrasted to the opinion of the Assessment Committee is unlikely to be acted upon). Further appeals may be made (after Departmental appeals have been considered) to the School of Graduate Studies.

## **GUIDELINE FOR PREPARATION OF Ph.D. THESIS PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION IN RECLASSIFICATION**

The thesis proposal is a formal document that, if approved, will be submitted to the School of Graduate studies in support of a recommendation for reclassification. It should be prepared with this in mind. While there are no firm “rules” for its format, the following guidelines are offered:

- The proposal should contain sufficient background and data to convince the Reclassification Assessment Committee that there is a good Ph.D. thesis opportunity in the work proposed.
- It should provide sufficient description of planned studies to convince the committee that the work is feasible and that the time required for its completion is reasonable if all goes well.

The proposal should include the following elements:

- A concise literature review with sufficient discussion to provide committee members adequate background to assess the merit of the proposed work. [Should set up the question/hypothesis and provide indication of where it will fit in the field.]
- A clear statement of the hypothesis to be tested (or specific question to be addressed) and the objectives of the proposed research.
- A description of the analytical methods, treatments, source of subjects (if human studies) and planned procedures of statistical analyses. [Interest here is in the research design and in the state of existing preparation for the planned research.]
- A description of work completed (by the applicant) to date and as detailed an account as possible of the work remaining to be done. [Together, work done and work to be done should relate to the total Ph.D. thesis research as specified by the hypothesis and objectives above.]
- A brief discussion of the anticipated outcome, the significance of the planned work to the field, and the relative originality of the planned research.
- An estimate of the time required to complete the planned research, together with indication of factors that might affect that projected time line.

Although the above is structured in the general configuration of a thesis, it is not expected that it would carry the usual depth of a thesis (e.g. in the literature review). The maximum length of the document is 20 double-spaced pages (not including references, tables, figures, and/or appendices).

APPENDIX A-2



## **GUIDELINE FOR ORAL PRESENTATION AND DEFENSE OF Ph.D. THESIS PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION IN RECLASSIFICATION**

The examination of the student will last approximately 2hr; the student will make a 15-20 min oral presentation of their thesis proposal followed by questions from the Committee. The questioning will be led by the external reviewer (from outside the department), followed by the Graduate Chair (or designate), followed by the committee members. In their questioning, the examiners will probe the student's ability to discuss and defend the thesis proposal. This will include examination of i) how well the student is able to situate their research in the field more broadly; ii) the logic underlying the specific research objectives and hypotheses proposed (e.g., why choose this particular focus?); iii) the reasoning behind the proposed study methods (including sample size, study design, analytic methods, etc.); iv) the student's ability to contrast the proposed methods to alternative approaches and defend their decisions; and v) the perceived significance of the proposed research.

When questioning has been completed, the candidate will be requested to leave the room and the committee will be asked to address two questions: 1) Should the student be permitted to reclassify? 2) Are the proposal and academic plan acceptable as submitted or do they require modification? In evaluating the student's performance, the examiners will consider the criteria outlined in the Checklist for the Assessment Committee that was circulated prior to the exam, including adequacy of background preparation, demonstrated research ability and potential, and maturity and suitability of the student for the PhD program. In evaluating the written thesis proposal, the examiners will consider the quality of the submitted document, the scope and depth of the proposal in relation to the expectations of a PhD program, the feasibility of the project in terms of expectations of the student and the timeline of the PhD program, and the adequacy of available funding for the project. A student will be deemed to have passed the examination if at least 3 members of the Examination Committee vote that the student has passed. If the recommendation is to reclassify, the Examination Committee will determine whether the research proposal and academic plan as submitted are acceptable or require modification.

**APPLICATION FOR RECLASSIFICATION**

**\*\*\*\*To be Completed by Student\*\*\*\***

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby apply for reclassification from the M.Sc. program in which I am enrolled to a Ph.D. program. I provide the attached description of the proposal Ph.D. research and an award of the proposed Ph.D. program outlined below. I recognize also that if my application is accepted, I cannot return to the M.Sc.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*\*To be Completed by M.Sc. Advisory Committee and Supervisor\*\*\***

**Existing M.Sc. Thesis Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Entry Into M.Sc. Program** (if more than one year has passed from date of entry, add explanatory note concerning reason for delay in reclassification recommendation): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Proposed Ph.D. Program**

**Thesis Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Course Work** (include courses already completed marked with \*): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Proposed Supervisor** (add explanatory note if different from existing supervisor): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Proposed Ph.D. Advisory Committee:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cont'd. Over

We have reviewed the above Ph.D. program proposal and the attached thesis research proposal and recommend to the Department of Nutritional Sciences that the applicant be assessed for reclassification into the Ph.D. program.

**M.Sc. Advisory Committee**

**Name:**

**Signature:  
(Indicating Concurrence)**

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| _____ <b>Supervisor</b> | _____ |
| _____ <b>Member</b>     | _____ |
| _____ <b>Member</b>     | _____ |
| _____ <b>Member</b>     | _____ |
| _____ <b>Member</b>     | _____ |
| _____ <b>Member</b>     | _____ |

**\*\*\*To be Completed by Supervisor\*\*\***

If this student is reclassified into the Ph.D. program, I agree to accept the responsibilities of supervision including the responsibility to provide space and financial support for the research described in the attached proposal and the obligations toward personal funding through the Ph.D. program as stipulated in the policies of the Department and the Faculty of Medicine on assured funding.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note: The supervisor should not sign and submit this form until all documentation is ready. In addition to the thesis proposal and this recommendation form, the documentation should include a brief C.V. of the student.**

**Recommended Composition of  
RECLASSIFICATION Assessment Committee**

**Graduate Appointment**

|   | Full  | Associate |
|---|-------|-----------|
| <b>Chair (non-voting) – M.Sc. Supervisor:</b> _____ | _____ | _____     |
| <b>Members:</b>                                     |       |           |
| <b>Department Rep./Designate:</b> _____             | _____ | _____     |
| <b>Outside Department: *</b> _____                  | _____ | _____     |
| <b>Others:</b> _____                                | _____ | _____     |
| _____   | _____ | _____     |
| _____   | _____ | _____     |

**Proposed Date and Time: (In-Person or Hybrid, Appox. 2 hours)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**I certify that the proposed examiners have agreed to serve and are available on the proposed date and time.**

|   |                           |                      |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|
| _____<br><b>Student</b>                                 | _____<br><b>Signature</b> | _____<br><b>Date</b> |
| _____<br><b>Supervisor</b>                              | _____<br><b>Signature</b> | _____<br><b>Date</b> |
| _____<br><b>Associate Chair,<br/>Graduate Education</b> | _____<br><b>Signature</b> | _____<br><b>Date</b> |

**\* Not cross-appointed or member of M.Sc. Advisory Committee**

**\*\*\*For Departmental Use\*\*\***

**Departmental Comment of Proposal:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Qualifications of Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Suitability of Thesis:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Assessment Meeting Scheduled for:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Or other action taken:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Assessment Committee Members:**

|                                  | <b>Dept.</b> | <b>SGS<br/>Status*</b> | <b>Signature</b> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Chair (non-voting):</b> _____ | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| <b>Members:</b> _____            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| _____                            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| _____                            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| _____                            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| _____                            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |
| _____                            | _____        | _____                  | _____            |

\* F = Full Member  
A = Associate Member

\* F = Full Member  
A = Associate Member  
C = M.Sc. Advisory Committee Member

## CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

This list is intended to assist members in systematically assessing the eligibility of an applicant for reclassification.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Student**

|   |                 |       |
|---|-----------------|-------|
| Adequacy of background preparation and grade Achievement (undergraduate and graduate) | <b>Strong</b>   | _____ |
|   | <b>Adequate</b> | _____ |
|   | <b>Inadeq.</b>  | _____ |

|   |                      |       |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| <i>Demonstrated</i> Research ability and potential (including the Understanding of research planning and research design) | <b>Strong</b>        | _____ |
|   | <b>Adequate</b>      | _____ |
|   | <b>Not yet Shown</b> | _____ |

|   |                            |       |
|---|----------------------------|-------|
| Overall maturity and suitability for the Ph.D. program at the time. Do you <i>judge</i> this student to be a good candidate for the Ph.D., aware of implications and commitments involved, and seriously interested in pursuit of research? | <b>Ready for Ph.D. Now</b> | _____ |
|   | <b>Premature</b>           | _____ |

**Comments:**

**Cont'd Over**



## 2. Ph.D. Program Proposal Research Plan

Has an outline of the proposal research been submitted and reviewed? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \* \_\_\_\_\_

Is the proposed research an extension of the M.Sc. project or a new area? M.Sc. \_\_\_\_\_ New \_\_\_\_\_

Is the research as proposed likely to be adequate in scope and depth to meet the Ph.D. expectation that the final thesis will make "an original contribution to knowledge"? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

Is the proposed research reasonable in terms of the expectations placed upon the student and is it reasonable in terms of likely time required for completion? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a reasonable assured source of funds and other resources (including access to subjects in clinical work) to support the research? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Academic Program Plan

Has a proposal for course work and other program components to be completed been submitted and reviewed? (It should have a time schedule as well as course identifiers.) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\* \_\_\_\_\_

Are the proposals consistent with Departmental and School of Graduate Studies *requirements*? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

Are the proposals consistent with the student's background and needs? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

### Comments:

\* If no proposal was offered, the Assessment Committee must either reject the application or adjourn without decision.

\*\* If there is doubt about any of these, the assessors should probe the suggested solutions before reaching a recommendation on reclassification and should comment on these in the final report.