

## ***Some Guidelines for a Successful Thesis Defense***

- **Thesis Format:** Your thesis should be pre-approved as to formatting and so forth by the Grad School. You should obtain that approval well in advance of the defense.
- **Presentation Materials:** Prepare in advance a PowerPoint (or handout if tech is not available) for a presentation of no more than 15 minutes. It should incorporate the entire thesis, but the great weight should be on the research questions, the findings, and the implications/conclusions. You can assume everyone on the committee will have read the thesis draft. The presentation need not spend much time on the statement of the problem, the literature review, the conceptualization, or the details of the design - cover those in a slide or two each. Barring any interruptions, you should be moving into the findings no later than five minutes into your presentation.
- **Practicing the Presentation:** It's always good to go through your presentation in front of a mirror or a friend in advance. At first, talk it through thoroughly, not worrying about timing – that helps you develop a flow and anticipate questions people might ask about your main points. After refining appropriately, begin to time your talk, bearing in mind that it's easy in the actual meeting to find yourself elaborating on prepared text and taking more time than you did in the practice sessions.
- **Meeting Protocol:** We ask students to step out of the room twice: before the presentation and after the whole thing is done. Those two sessions are set aside for faculty discussion. In the first session, we orient and organize ourselves. In the second, we vote and discuss next steps.
- **Faculty/Student Interactions in the Meeting:** Your tone in the meeting should be open and professional. Importantly, we value thoughtful, scholarly responses from students, rather than wandering, "talking out loud" answers or personal anecdotes or asides. Also, you shouldn't get defensive about the questions or criticisms that might arise. Our job as faculty is to make this the best thesis possible, and we do that by raising critical scholarly questions about your work, by making suggestions for improvement, and so forth. It's alright to say things like "I hadn't considered that..." or "I don't know..." or "Good point..." It's alright also to tactfully correct or resist a faculty member's comment, of course, when that's appropriate. Ideally, over an hour or so, we'll have a productive, collegial discussion on how your product can be made better.
- **The Major Professor's Role:** Your major professor is not your champion in the meeting – the MP can ask critical questions and challenge you on issues. At the same time, though, you have come to this point only after the approval of your thesis draft by your major professor. The MP stands behind your being there, and won't send you into the meeting if there are serious doubts about the thesis being ready to defend.
- **Note Taking:** Your major professor will be taking notes on the discussion the entire way, so there's no need for you to be jotting down the suggestions and comments along the way, unless you really want to. The two of you will review those notes after the defense.
- **Afterwards:** Most thesis defenses end with a vote of "pass with revisions." If that's the case with you, it means that you'll have changes to make in the days following the defense. Usually, these are not major (if they were, you wouldn't have received the passing vote), but you do need to be prepared to set aside time to make the suggested changes. Most likely, you won't need to run the revised version by the full committee - rather, your major professor will be the only final reviewer for you. After the defense, you and your MP can map out the revision process.