

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

- ***Presentation Materials:*** Prepare in advance a PowerPoint (or handout) for a presentation of no more than 10 minutes. It should incorporate the statement of the problem, the relevant literature, your conceptualization and research questions, your research design, and the potential implications. You can assume everyone on the committee will have read the proposal.
- ***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 discussion 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 plan possible, and we do that by raising critical scholarly questions about your proposed 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, debate, 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 planned dissertation can be made better.
- ***The Major Professor's Role:*** Your major professor is not your champion in the meeting – your MP can ask critical questions and challenge you on issues. At the same time, though, this meeting takes place only after the approval of your proposal by your major professor, who stands behind your being there. By allowing you to schedule the meeting, your major professor is signaling a belief that the proposal is strong enough to merit a defense before your committee.
- ***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.