

THE MA ESSAY/PROJECT ORAL EXAMINATION

The Oral Examination (or “Defense”) of your Master’s Essay or Project takes place, at a minimum, 15 working days after you have submitted the final, approved copy of your Essay or Project to the Graduate Secretary.

During the Oral Examination, you will deliver a brief presentation on your work (15 minutes max), and your Supervisory Committee will ask you questions about your work. After you finish your presentation, questions are asked in the following order: 1) External Examiner, 2) Department Member, 3) Supervisor. Two rounds of questions in this order are permitted. A faculty member who is not part of your Supervisory Committee will serve as Chair of the Examination; it is the Chair’s responsibility to administer the exam according to FGS and Department policy and keep everyone on time. After the Supervisory Committee’s questions, if time permits, the Chair may ask you questions or permit audience questions. Following the question period, the Chair will ask you and anyone other than the Supervisory Committee to leave the room so that the Committee may discuss your Examination. After they have consulted and reached a decision, the Committee will call you back into the room to give you the results of your Examination.

THE ORAL PRESENTATION

Your 15-minute presentation is one thing in your Oral Examination over which you have complete control. In that time, you should focus on the larger framework and outcomes of your project. Avoid simply reiterating the content of your Essay or Project. Remember that your Supervisory Committee will have just read your work very thoroughly and so do not need simple reiteration, and any other audience member will be interested in a broader overview and perspective as well.

The following four components make a good presentation at an Oral Examination:

- 1) An overview of what your research is, perhaps with the story of how you became interested in your topic and what larger questions started your research. (2-3 mins)
- 2) The main arguments and/or outcomes of your research (5 mins)
- 3) 1-3 specific examples of the most important part of your argument(s) (5 mins)
- 4) A conclusion that considers the implications of your work and how it might be expanded in the future (by you or other scholars) (2 mins)

If you use presentation slides, keep them simple. A few key images may be appropriate, perhaps a clear and simple list of your main arguments, and/or the text/image/table associated with your key example(s). Aim for 5-6 slides max.

You may also choose to provide a handout. If you do, keep it to a single page.

You may also choose to talk without any visual aids or handouts. This is fine.

In advance of your Oral Examination, schedule a meeting with your Supervisor to discuss your presentation plans and possible questions and answers to consider in preparation. Your Supervisor, who has seen your research progress and read your Department Member’s feedback, will have the best sense of what questions are most likely to be asked during the Oral Examination. Your Supervisor will be able to provide the best advice on preparation appropriate to your field, your Supervisory Committee, and your Project or Essay.