Senior Thesis Defense: What to Expect

The Senior Honors Thesis defense may take a variety of forms based on the kind of project you completed. Usually, the student presents the results of his or her thesis, then the committee asks questions. The student should also be prepared to ask questions to fine-tune the thesis if he or she seeks publication or intends to pursue the project further in graduate school.

- Fine Arts and Creative Projects: usually a presentation or performance
- Natural Sciences and Engineering: usually a PowerPoint presentation
- Social Sciences: usually a PowerPoint presentation
- Humanities: usually a discussion

Be Prepared to Answer These Kinds of Questions:

- In one sentence, what is the main point, claim, or argument of your thesis?
- Specific questions about the content, argument, and audience of your thesis:
  - Why did you rely on Scholar X as opposed to Scholar Y?
  - Why did you decide to omit Theory Z?
  - How did bringing together these two different disciplines enrich or limit your analysis?
  - Please clarify what you mean by this statement on page 32 . . . .
- How does this project contribute to work in your field?
- How has your conception of this project changed over the past year?
- By completing this project, what have you learned about conducting research in your field?
- Were you unable to accomplish any aspects of this project as you originally conceived it? Why?
- What part of the thesis process did you most enjoy? What part was most difficult?
- What have you learned from doing a long-term independent project?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- Do you plan to continue this project/research, and if so, how? (In other words, do you aim to publish it, turn it into a master's thesis, compete for a Fulbright, . . . ?)

Some Tips for Preparing for the Defense:

Remember: It's your thesis, and the defense is your last chance to get professional feedback about your work and your writing. So, plan the defense (as best you can) to meet your needs and interests.

Re-read your thesis. Make any minor corrections. (Usually, you will have time after the defense to prepare the final manuscript for archives). Anticipate the sections of your thesis that may raise
questions from your committee. Jot down any questions or concerns about your thesis that you can ask your committee at the defense.

**Practice your presentation:** If you will give a talk, do a PowerPoint presentation, demonstration, performance, reading, or poster session at your defense, prepare for it thoroughly. Create professional-looking visual aids. Practice your presentation so that you do not go over the amount of time allotted (ask you committee how much time you will have). Do a dress-rehearsal for a small group of friends or with a graduate tutor who can critique your performance and help you improve it.

**Arrange a "mock defense,"** with your friends playing the role of your committee members. Practice giving a presentation from notes or prepared text so that you can read confidently and make eye contact. After your presentation, your friends should ask questions about your thesis so you get used to responding in a professional and mature manner.

**Visualize success:** Spend some time in the room where your defense will be held: arrange the chairs as you'd like them to be; sit or stand and practice speaking aloud; visualize the defense situation and the kind of exchange you want to have with your committee.

**Get a good night's sleep** the night before.

**What to bring to your Thesis Defense:**

1. **Your Thesis:** It is very important to bring a **hard-copy** of your thesis to the defense. Everyone at the defense should have a copy of the thesis. Your readers may ask you questions about specific passages, so you will need to be on the same page for the discussion.

2. **Notebook and pen or pencil:** Your readers have some final suggestions for revisions to your thesis manuscript, so you will need to take detailed notes.

3. **Water or other beverages:** You will be doing a lot of talking, so bring water or something else to quench your thirst. If you wish, you may arrange to bring a pot of coffee or tea to share with the committee. Some students have brought cookies to the defense (but make sure this is OK with your thesis advisor).

**After the defense:**

Make sure your advisor completes and signs the “Recommendation for Thesis Honors Form” and submits it to Dowling Hall by 5:00 PM on the first day of final exams.

Remember to upload your final, completed, corrected manuscript to Tufts Digital Collections and Archives.
Celebrate! You've earned some fun.