



THESIS QUICK SHEET #5: THE THESIS DEFENSE

SCHEDULING YOUR DEFENSE

The Thesis Defense frequently (though not always) takes place during a student's final term of attendance. Ideally, students complete the Thesis Draft one month before their scheduled oral Thesis Defense; this practice allows for effective revisions prior to the defense.

The student is responsible for scheduling his/her Thesis Defense with his/her committee members and securing a room reservation for the defense. After the student schedules his/her Thesis Defense with his/her Thesis Committee members, the student notifies the Academic and Thesis Programs Manager about the Thesis Defense date, time, and location. This information is updated in the database that is maintained by the Academic and Thesis Programs Manager.

*****Students are to secure the agreement of a CHC faculty member to sit on the Thesis Defense Committee as the CHC Representative prior to completing HC 477H Thesis Prospectus, and a Second Reader by Week 5 of the term before the defense term..** Once a CHC Representative and a Second Reader agrees to sit on the student's committee, the student notifies the Academic and Thesis Programs Manager (Miriam Jordan, mjordan@uoregon.edu) of this agreement, and the data is entered in the database.

Deadlines: Schedule your thesis defense **no later than ten calendar days** into the term of the proposed defense (*earlier is always better*). Only schedule a defense after confirming the date, time (allow 1.5 hours), and location with all three members of your Thesis Defense Committee. ***The last date for defenses each term is the Friday of Week 9.***

Location: Your Primary Thesis Advisor can let you know about availability of conference rooms in his/her department. Check for availability through the department of your Major. Also consider the [Knight Library](#). If a room cannot be found, notify the Academic and Thesis Programs Manager, and she will assist in locating a room.

THESIS DEFENSE PROCEDURE OVERVIEW

- The CHC Representative convenes the thesis committee. Should the Primary Thesis Advisor wish, s/he presides over the defense. Should the Primary Thesis Advisor prefer it, the CHC Representative presides.
- The presider introduces the student (and other members of the Thesis Defense Committee) and gives a brief overview of the defense procedure. The defense room should be reserved for 1.5 hours, though the defense itself will take approximately one hour or slightly longer.
- Set-up (as necessary) occurs in the first 10-15 minutes.
- The student then presents for approximately 20 minutes. However, in appropriate circumstances, the length of the presentation may be extended or shortened by prior consent of the committee.
- Questions posed by the Thesis Defense Committee follow for 20-30 minutes. (Time permitting, and at the discretion of the presider, the presider invites questions from the audience.)

- After the defense, the presider excuses the student and audience to allow the committee members to deliberate and evaluate the thesis (5-10 minutes). Evaluation categories and guidelines will be provided by the CHC Representative.
- The Primary Thesis Advisor calls the student back into the room and informs him or her of the committee's decision. The student then receives a reminder about where to find the thesis formatting guidelines from the CHC Representative (5-10 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of putting the room back in order, as necessary).
- After the defense, the student makes final revisions to the thesis as requested by the committee and prepares the Final Electronic Archival Copy of the Thesis for submission via email to the Academic and Thesis Programs Manager (mjordan@uoregon.edu).
 - **Deadline: before noon on the Thursday of Week 10.**
- See **Thesis Quick Sheet #6: Post-Defense Thesis Formatting Procedures** for further details on preparing the Final Electronic Archival Copy of the Thesis.

NARRATIVE OUTLINE OF THESIS DEFENSE

A typical defense lasts about an hour (or slightly longer), though technology set-up and removal, as well as the committee's post-defense deliberations, will add to that time, so **students should reserve the defense room for 1.5 hours**. Defenders are advised to allow for set-up time so that a defense begins promptly, and to have a back-up plan to mitigate technology failures. (NB: Technology is *not* a required component of a CHC thesis defense.)

The formal presentation of a Clark Honors College thesis is akin to the presentation of a conference paper. The defender gives a presentation of about 20 minutes that summarizes the thesis and results. The presentation both distills the thesis for an audience who hasn't read it and engages the committee who has. The formal presentation identifies a thesis's most important parts—analysis, arguments, and conclusions—and "teaches" them to the audience. Meeting this challenge indicates true mastery of the project.

The subsequent Question and Answer period usually takes between 20 and 30 minutes, and questions often move to a conversation about the ramifications of the project. The primary advisor usually takes the lead on questioning. The audience will be invited to ask questions, at the committee's discretion and in light of time constraints.

At the end of the Q&A, the professorial committee remains in the room to deliberate the thesis's "grade"—all others leave, but remain close by to await the committee's decision. The student will be invited back into the room for the primary advisor's announcement of the committee's decision. The committee will provide information on any necessary revisions, which the primary advisor will detail for the student either at that moment or in a subsequent appointment.

Other than the professorial committee's required attendance, guests are invited to the defense at the student's discretion. Friends and family in any number may attend a defense. Both the size of the audience and the provision of refreshment are at the student's choice, within constraints imposed by space and building limitations. Note that a defense *is* public, and anyone may attend, including students preparing for their own defenses. As a matter of courtesy, however, the Clark Honors College asks any student planning to attend a defense, whom the defender has not invited to the defense, to contact the defender and ask permission—*and to honor, please, the defender's wishes*.

After defending, the student produces an absolutely final electronic version of the thesis (along with

one copy of the abstract page, printed on special paper and signed by the Primary Thesis Advisor) that will be bound and archived in the CHC and UO libraries. The special formatting requirements and deadlines are detailed in **Thesis Quick Sheet #6: Post-Defense Thesis Formatting Procedures**.

THESIS EVALUATION

After a thesis defense, Clark Honors College thesis committee members evaluate the quality of the overall thesis project. The evaluations are

- Pass with Distinction
- Pass with Honors
- Pass
- Decision Withheld (Pass with Honors or Pass only), pending revisions (time limit should be set for completion of revisions)
- Fail

The evaluation must reflect the student's performance in the following five areas:

- **Initiative and Self-Direction:** independence and initiative to conceive and see a project through to completion; evidence of strong problem-solving skills; productive, proactive, and effective communication with an advisor, committee members, and CHC staff member
- **Relevance and Originality of Research Questions and Topic:** ability to conceive of a research topic that is highly relevant within the discipline and for society more broadly; poses a research problem that exhibits critical analysis and interpretation; asks relevant research questions that build on four years of study within a specific major and within a particular research area
- **Research Quality and Mastery:** demonstrates adequate research skills and practices to thoroughly and effectively investigate a research topic using standards of the major discipline; shows mastery of the relevant content, data, secondary literature, and research material; logically and clearly articulates the research questions, thesis arguments, and conclusions; shows mastery of information related to the particular research topic, field, and discipline; concrete evidence of critical analysis and interpretation
- **Writing Quality:** ability to conceive, frame, and convey arguments eloquently and with compelling evidence; demonstrates one's own intellectual contributions and conclusions that are accurate and compelling to one's intellectual peers; ability to organize a large document with sophisticated ideas in a clear, well-organized, structured, accessible way; the writing adheres to discipline-specific styles while also speaking across disciplines and audiences; clear and concise writing that is free of errors and uses correct citation style for the discipline
- **Oral Defense Quality:** gives a well-organized, engaging, and polished presentation with information that is accurate and compelling; ability to communicate orally one's research questions, arguments, results, and broader conclusions; ability to convey complex and difficult concepts clearly to both specialists and a broad audience; demonstrates capacity to think on one's feet and respond effectively to questions from the thesis committee and audience

Pass with Distinction is granted only to those candidates whose performance is *superior in every area* listed above and if the draft presented at the defense requires only minimal revision.

Additional guidelines that might be helpful are:

- The thesis is publishable, in part or whole (depending on the traditions of the disciplinary press).
- The thesis is comparable to competent graduate work at the M.A. or M.S. level.
- The primary thesis advisor would be willing to write a recommendation letter on the student's behalf for one of the CHC's thesis awards presented at the honors college commencement ceremony.

Pass with Honors should be awarded to students whose thesis work is *very good* in all of the above five areas. A thesis that is outstanding in a few of the categories, but not in most or all, should be awarded *Pass with Honors* rather than *Pass with Distinction*.

Pass is awarded to those theses that are *satisfactory*. This includes theses that may be good in a few of the five areas but only adequate in the others. Theses that need significant revisions, which must be approved by the primary thesis advisor, may earn a *Pass*.

Fail is for work that is *unacceptable* in most or all of the five areas. Very few Clark Honors College theses are failed, not only because of the general high quality of the work turned in by Clark Honors College students, but also because thesis committee members should discourage students from standing for oral examination if they are not fully prepared and the committee members have not read and approved of the thesis, at least conditionally.