

Southern Oregon University

Guidelines for Oral Graduate Examinations

I. Administration of the Examination

- A. No oral examination will be conducted until the advisor is satisfied with the thesis, project, or comprehensive examination presented by the student.
- B. The examining committee should consist of at least three persons from the disciplines involved in the content of the degree plus an outside faculty member representing the Graduate Council. The outside faculty member will be appointed by the Graduate Program Coordinator, and may be from an unrelated discipline. The candidate's primary advisor serves as chairperson of the examining committee. The chairperson is responsible for bringing all needed paperwork, e.g., signature pages, to the examination, and returning the signed papers to the Graduate Coordinator. The Oral Exam Committee Checksheet is to be forwarded to the appropriate Division Director by the Graduate Council Representative after he/she has filled it out.
- C. The chairperson (primary advisor) is responsible for setting the time and location of the oral examination, in consultation with the candidate, the Graduate Coordinator, and the members of the committee. At least one and one-half hours should be scheduled. The room where the examination is to take place should be comfortable, well-lighted, and free from distractions and potential disturbances, e.g., no telephone calls, no interruptions from faculty members seeking coffee from the departmental pot. Chairs gathered around a conference table are preferred to either classroom or lounge environments.
- D. Each member of the examining committee will be provided with all necessary information or materials at least one week prior to the examination. These materials include (1) the candidate's academic record, to be provided by the Graduate Coordinator, and, (2) as appropriate, (a) a copy of any thesis or other written project provided by the candidate, or ample opportunity to examine any other kind of project materials (canvasses, prints, slides, video tapes, video disks, multi-media exhibits, questionnaires, etc.) arranged by the candidate, or (b) a copy of any written comprehensive examination questions and answers, provided by the primary advisor. Failure to provide any of these materials in a timely fashion may result in postponement of the examination, *even if this means delay of graduation to a subsequent term.*
- E. Before the candidate is invited into the examination room, the chairperson will remind the committee members of their responsibilities to the student and to the academic standards of the institution. The chairperson should outline the procedures to be followed in the examination, to insure that all members of the committee understand them. The representative of the Graduate Council, who is a participating and voting member of the committee, should briefly explain his or her role, which is to monitor examination standards and to insure fairness.

- F. The chairperson should make any introductions necessary, remembering that the Graduate Council Representative may not be acquainted with all members of the committee, and will often not be acquainted with the candidate.
- G. If the oral examination is over a thesis or project, the examination may properly begin by asking the candidate to summarize the work done in the thesis or project and to discuss the relationships of the coursework of the degree to it.

If the oral examination follows a written comprehensive (which the committee members, including the Graduate Council Representative, will have reviewed), the examination may appropriately begin by asking the candidate to describe the theme or rationale behind his or her course of studies.

Questions from the committee might follow from either beginning. These questions should be designed to establish the candidate's knowledge of the discipline(s), assess his or her analytic, interpretive, and synthetic skills, and assess his or her mental acuity and verbal ability. Candidates should be given opportunities to amplify, qualify, and defend their responses. (See *Content and Performance Standards*, below.)

- H. When all questions have been asked, the candidate will be excused temporarily while the committee discusses his or her performance. Each member of the committee should express an opinion about the quality of the candidate's performance, and passing or failing shall be determined by a majority vote. A tie vote is failing. Once the vote has been completed, the candidate will be invited to return to be congratulated or, in case of failure, counseled on next steps. Again, the chairperson is responsible for obtaining committee signatures and returning the proper papers to the Graduate Coordinator.

II. Content and Performance Standards

The oral examination (where used) should be viewed as a culminating experience for the student, a final opportunity to demonstrate the competencies and knowledge gained during the course of studies. Failure to provide that opportunity in a challenging manner detracts from the value of the degree. While the possibility of the student's failure in this final exercise cannot be discounted, we reasonably expect any faculty advisor not to permit a candidate to present himself or herself to a committee before the candidate's preparation gives adequate assurance of success. The faculty member having these responsibilities; therefore, the presumptions in favor of the candidate achieving that success.

To assist examiners in assuring that this final exercise is real and challenging (and to help them reject candidates who in fact do not meet the standards to which we aspire), the Graduate Council recommends that the following criteria be applied in appropriate manners.

A. Knowledge of Disciplines and Ability to Integrate

Examiners should not presume any specific knowledge or competence on the basis of the candidate's course reports or academic record, but should use the examination to test the candidate's knowledge of the subject matter of his or her degree, and his or her ability to integrate and synthesize material from the various disciplines. Examiners should not lose sight of the fact that our degrees are area and interdisciplinary programs, not single-field specializations. They should be careful not to go beyond levels that the candidate might reasonably be expected to master. Questions should require facts and acquaintance with basic theories in the field(s), but should also emphasize concepts and the capacity to analyze, generalize from, and interpret those facts and theories in a coherent manner. The ability to develop effective analogies and contrasts and propose reasonable hypotheses should be assessed.

B. Ability to Communicate Effectively

All candidates (indeed, all graduates) should be expected to discuss the material of their field(s) with reasonable ease, using a broad vocabulary, including the vocabulary of the disciplines, without lapsing into jargon. At the master's level, their answers should be clear and well developed, and their descriptions complete and adequately detailed. Candidates should be able to represent and, if necessary, defend, their points of view coherently and precisely. Effective communication should be expected of every candidate.

**Southern Oregon University
Division of Graduate Studies
Report of the Examining Committee**

**Complete this form following the comprehensive exam(s), obtain signatures,
and return the form to the graduate program office.**

Name of Candidate _____
Last First MI

Master's Degree in:

Date of Written Examination: _____ Action: _____

Date of Oral Exam or Defense: _____ Action: _____

Comments

Signatures of Committee Members

Chair

Graduate Council Representative (Orals Only)

ORAL EXAM COMMITTEE

Name of Student

SOU Student ID

Date of Exam

Please complete the following checksheet and return it to the Director of Graduate Studies no later than three school days following the oral examination. This evaluation of the oral exam serves several purposes: it provides a systematic means of evaluating the examination process; it promotes uniform standards and procedures across disciplines; and it enables the Graduate Council and the Graduate Office to see that standards are maintained.

EVALUATION OF EXAMINING COMMITTEE PROCEDURES	Adequate	Inadequate	Not Applicable
DESIGNATED COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT			
LEAD-TIME FOR COMMITTEE REVIEW OF MATERIALS			
PRE-EXAM COMMITTEE BRIEFING /EXPLANATIONS			
INTRODUCTIONS AND COMMITTEE PROTOCOLS			
TIME ALLOWED FOR QUESTIONING CANDIDATE			
PARTICIPATION OF EACH COMMITTEE MEMBER IN QUESTIONING			
DISTRACTION-FREE ENVIRONMENT FOR EXAM			
OPPORTUNITY AT END OF EXAM FOR EACH MEMBER TO EXPRESS JUDGMENT OF STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE			
PROCEDURE USED BY COMMITTEE TO ADDRESS MARGINAL PERFORMANCE BY CANDIDATE			
REQUIRED PAPERWORK AVAILABLE FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO SIGN			
EVALUATION OF EXAMINATION FAIRNESS			
FAIRNESS OF QUESTIONS			
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY OF QUESTIONS			
INFORMED NATURE OF QUESTIONS			
CLARITY OF QUESTIONS			
PURPOSE AND DIRECTION OF QUESTIONS			
MEMBERS' EFFORTS TO KEEP ANSWERS ON TRACK			
OTHER INTERVENTIONS BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS			
EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS			
COMMITTEE MEMBERS UPHELD ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMENSURATE WITH MASTER 'S LEVEL WORK			
QUESTIONS PROBED BREADTH AND DEPTH OF SUBJECT MATTER KNOWLEDGE			
QUESTIONS REQUIRED HIGHER LEVEL THINKING SKILLS (CONCEPTUALIZING, SYNTHESIZING, ANALYZING, INTEGRATING, INTERPRETING, HYPOTHESIZING)			
USE OF QUESTIONS TO REVEAL CANDIDATE'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES			
CONSIDERATION OF CANDIDATE'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES TO DETERMINE EXAM OUTCOME			

IF YOU HAVE MARKED ANYTHING INADEQUATE, PLEASE EXPLAIN ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS PAGE.

GRADUATE COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

REV. 8/2016