

## **Master's Thesis defense and State Exam:**

### **General information:**

The defense and the State Exam are both oral and they take place on the same day. The schedule is announced by the Department at least two weeks prior to the start of the State Exam, and you'll find it on the Department's website and on a noticeboard on the wall next to the Department's office (Building G, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor). It takes approximately an hour: fifteen minutes for the defense and 45 minutes for the exam. There is a committee consisting of a Committee Chair and at least two members, but there may be more members: we try to include both the supervisor and the reviewer in the committee. The result is announced immediately after the exam.

The defense and the exam is public, which means audience may be present. Members of the public cannot participate in the discussion unless they are allowed to by the Committee Chair.

The defense is documented, which means that a brief summary of the defense proceeding is noted down and uploaded to the IS. This document is then made available to the public in the IS (the minutes from the exam are not available to the public, but they are also archived).

### **The defense and the state exam consists of these parts:**

- 1) The Defense (approximately 15 minutes):
  - The student briefly introduces the thesis, its main objectives, methods, contents, and findings (approximately 3-5 minutes).
  - The supervisor's and reviewer's comments and questions. Based on their reviews, both the supervisor and the reviewer ask questions about the thesis. The student then responds to these comments and questions (5-10 minutes).
  - A general discussion about the thesis and/or the previous parts of the defense may follow (0-5 minutes).
- 2) The State Exam (approximately 45 minutes):
  - The main examiner (typically, the Supervisor) asks the students question regarding the five books that the student had pre-selected from the list of state exam books. Typically, all five books are covered, each for 5-10 minutes.
  - The student may be asked a wide range of questions that will make sure that the student has read and understood the book. The questions may be about the general argument of the book, a more detailed overview of a specific chapter, or even a passing mention of a concept used in the book.
- 3) Evaluation (1-2 minutes):
  - After the time is up, the student leaves the room. The committee discusses the defense and the exam and takes a vote.
  - The student returns to the room to hear the announcement of the result, which is Pass, Pass with Excellent Results, or Fail.

### **Before the defense:**

- Make sure to re-familiarize yourself with your thesis, and prepare for a short overview of it, which should take about 3-5 minutes.
- Read reviews of your thesis and prepare (brief) answers to the questions raised. If there are any doubt about serious issues such as plagiarism, methodological deficiencies, and flawed

argumentation, the student must give these issues the utmost priority.

There are two evaluative reports written about each thesis: A Supervisor's report and a Reviewer's report. These reports are required to be in the IS at least 5 working days before the defense. They typically include a general summary of and commentary about the thesis, commentary about its strong and weak points, and suggestions for a discussion. A review may also include questions that the supervisor/reviewer considers necessary to address during the defense. There are four areas that are evaluated separately: 1. The central idea, thesis, focus and purpose; 2. The organization, logic and arrangement, 3. The topic development, support and evidence, and 4. The language, style, standard usage, citation and bibliographic standards. The final recommended grade is NOT an arithmetic average of the individual evaluations. A failure in one category may result in a recommended Fail of the whole thesis. You will have to use strong arguments to convince the committee not to fail your thesis as a whole if a Fail is suggested in any of evaluated areas or the thesis as a whole.

#### **Before the state exam:**

- Make sure you study and understand all the five books that you have picked from the list of state exam books.
- Focus on the general argument. Make sure you can discuss partial arguments and examples used in the book, throughout. Familiarize yourself with concepts used in the books, including details about the theories and theorists introduced and/or referred to in the books.

#### **On the day of the state exam:**

- Come on time.
- A committee member will ask you to come in. Please, wait in the corridor and do not disturb the committee.
- There will be a spot for your personal belongings, such as a coat and a bag. Do not leave your personal items in the corridor for security reasons. Sit on the chair designated for the defender, facing the committee.
- There will be a cup of fresh water for you in the room, but you may bring your own drink. No food is allowed, but there are cookies in case you need to spike your blood sugar level.
- Then, the defense and the state exam begins (see above).

#### **FAQs:**

Can I have notes at the defense?

Yes, you can bring your notes to the defense. Make sure they are brief, such as a list of bullet points or quotations from your thesis. You will be asked to speak, rather than read from a ready-made text. Please, bring your notes on paper, as the use of electronic devices is not permitted.

Can I have the reviews at the defense?

Yes, you can bring the reviews, where you may highlight the questions or points you wish to address.

Can I have a presentation at the defense?

No, this is an oral defense. Presentations are not permitted.

What if I fail the defense?

There are several possibilities:

- 1) You may be asked to do the defense again. This means that your performance at the defense was unsatisfactory and you have to take it again (for example, you didn't prepare any answers to the reviewer's questions, or they were unsatisfactory).
- 2) You may be asked to rewrite and resubmit the essay. This is in case that the thesis itself suffers from such defects that it is not defensible in its current state (i.e., it is generally of a low quality in one or more of its aspects).
- 3) You may be asked to write a new thesis and defend that thesis. This happens when your thesis is fundamentally flawed, such as dealing with irrelevant material, showing a complete lack of methodological awareness, or being so badly written that it is beyond repair.

You will then need to defend the thesis. If you pass the rest of the state exam, you will not need to repeat the state exam parts if you fail your defense.

Can I have notes at the state exam?

No, notes at the state exam are not permitted in any form.

What if I fail the state exam?

Your studies will be interrupted and you will have to sit the state exam next semester. If you defended your thesis successfully, you will only sit the state exam again.