

Haverford College  
Department of History

### Thesis Defenses

Dear Senior Thesis Writers:

As you are aware, the writing of the senior thesis culminates in the thesis defense. The thesis defense is an oral examination conducted by your first and second readers. The readers will subject your argument to professional scrutiny, so come prepared to defend all aspects of your scholarship. Possible areas to be questioned might include the nature of your sources and evidence, the consistency and logic of your argument and conclusions, and the significance of your work in terms of the existing literature. We might also ask you to situate your thesis within your overall study of history at Haverford College, thus you should come prepared to answer comparative questions as well as those pertaining directly to your thesis.

To prepare for your thesis defense, we suggest reading your thesis one last time. Then you might wish to review the syllabi, course notes, papers and exams you have from the courses you have taken while at Haverford College. Think about why you were drawn to your thesis topic and what you learned over the course of the year. Then reflect on how this process relates to your overall career as a history major at Haverford College. We expect to provide a rigorous evaluation of your work and look forward to your responses.

While this may seem a somewhat nerve-wracking process, it is best to think of it as a chance to talk with knowledgeable people about the project you have been immersed in for over a year. Once the initial jitters wear away, many find the oral defense an intellectually stimulating and even enjoyable exercise. Our vision is that this will be something like a Ph.D. defense in a minor key. In general, the oral exam will confirm the written grade of your thesis. However, an excellent or superb exam can raise your overall grade, while a sloppy or unprepared exam can lower it.

This is a professional exercise so please dress appropriately in what is sometimes called “business casual” or better. This means no sandals, jeans, cut-offs or tee shirts. Good luck!