

**BEST PRACTICES
FACULTY ADVISING ON ORAL EXAMS AND THE PROSPECTUS**

ORALS:

1. **Remember that orals examine a student's preparation to teach in their first area field.** (Students may opt to prepare questions in their second field as well.) Orals reading lists should help students identify major debates and topics in their field for a range of time-periods (ancient/early modern/modern, etc.) Reading lists should be broadly tailored rather than narrowly focused on one country, time-period, or topic. Orals are not meant to specially prepare the student for dissertation research, although of course there may be overlap.
2. **Carefully consider the timing/date for the oral exam:** Students are required to finish orals (and the prospectus colloquia) by the end of the third year. Extensions may be granted by GPC or the Department Chair. If you feel an extension is warranted, be sure to check your student's funding package to ensure that he/she will have support for any prolongation of the program. It is rarely in a student's interest to postpone orals into the fourth year.

Keep in mind the dissertation "clock." Once a student has passed the oral exam, the university considers them "advanced to candidacy." The first quarter after the oral exam counts toward the total number of quarters allowed for a student to finish the dissertation before incurring financial and logistical burdens. After orals, students who are California residents have 12 quarters (not counting summers) to file their dissertation; international students have 9 quarters (not counting summers). After these time-limits, the student is considered "2DocA" and is ineligible for most campus funding and receives lowest priority for teaching jobs. *International students who are "2DocA" must pay non-resident tuition to remain enrolled at UCI and/or to file the dissertation. It is the advisor's job to help prevent this.*

3. **Advise your student on the selection of exam committee members.** The oral exam requires a committee of five faculty. Four faculty are examiners. One faculty (who must be from outside the History Department) serves as a referee on fairness. Of the four examiners, two must be full-Senate members of the History Department. The other two may come from outside History, usually other UCI faculty. By exception, one examiner may be a non-Senate UCI faculty member. Up to one examiner may come from outside UCI and must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member of that institution.
4. **Advise your student on how to form reading lists.** Students usually develop a reading list for each of the four examiners. The four reading lists

are often divided by temporal period (ancient/early modern/19th century/20th century, etc.) and/or may also include a list on a thematic field. (Gender & Sexuality; World History, etc.). The organization of lists varies depending on how you, as the faculty advisor, feel it is best for the student to approach the field. But in all cases, the orals lists as a whole should encourage the student's broad preparation to teach in a field on multiple time-periods.

5. **Help your student compile reasonably sized reading lists.** Students normally spend six to eight months maximum reading for orals. They do so while working 20 hours a week as Teaching Assistants. The total number of books/articles on all four lists should not exceed what is reasonable for a student to read in a six to eight month period during which the student has approximately 20 hours a week to devote to orals. Students are also writing the dissertation prospectus during the third year, which takes additional time. *GPC recommends a maximum of 160 new books for all four lists combined, or a maximum of 120 books and 40 articles for all four lists combined. (That is 30-40 new books per list, in addition to what the student has read prior to orals preparation.)*
6. **Coordinate the size and scope of reading lists with other examiners.** It is the advisor's job to help support the student in compiling reasonably sized lists for all examiners. Ask your student to give you copies of all four lists early in the third year. Speak or email with colleagues about concerns regarding the appropriate reading load and planned themes for the examination.
7. **Set clear expectations for students regarding content.** Advise students how to approach their readings list(s). What key questions, debates, topics, etc. should the student be considering while reading your particular list? What issues are most important for students to keep in mind? What are likely questions to be asked during the exam? Some faculty find it useful to issue "sample questions" for students to prepare (which may or may not be the same questions actually asked in the exam). Others provide lists of topics and debates. Whatever your style, give the student clear direction on how you want them to approach the particular part of the field you will examine.
8. **Ensure that the student has completed all requirements prior to the exam date.** Students must complete all language requirements as well as field course work and research seminars prior to taking the oral exam. Make sure your student is eligible to take the exam and completes appropriate paper-work. [Form-I Advancement to Candidacy and the Advancement to Candidacy Requirement Check-list.]
9. **Set the exam format:** Normally the two-hour period of the oral exam is divided evenly among the four examiners to ask the student questions. The

student's principle advisor determines the order of the examiners and moderates discussion to ensure roughly equal time for each examiner.

DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS:

1. **Advise on the composition of the dissertation committee.** Dissertation committees usually have three faculty members but may have four. Two committee members, including the committee chair/advisor, must be full-Senate members of the History Department. Other committee members may be full-Senate members of other UCI departments. With the advisor's permission, one member may be from outside UC Irvine or may be a non-Senate member of the UCI faculty.
2. **Keep in mind the Graduate Program description of the dissertation prospectus (quoted from the Ph.D. Handbook):** *"The prospectus is a concise discussion of the student's planned project of research. The prose section should be no more than 15 pages, double-spaced, or slightly longer than a grant proposal. The size of the bibliography may vary. The prose should identify the major themes and question the project will engage, briefly discuss existing historiography and other research on this topic, and explain why this is a valuable project of study. A good prospectus usually includes brief discussion of planned chapters, available primary sources, and planned archival and field research."*

Where possible, the prospectus should closely resemble a good grant application since it will serve as the basis of future grant proposals written by the student. Usually the prospectus has more literature review than is recommended for a grant proposal; however, the prospectus should not have overly long discussions of historiography. The prospectus is a discussion of what the student plans to research, planned questions, chapters, and arguments for why this is important.
3. **Timing the prospectus with the oral exam:** Students are required to hold the prospectus colloquia (formal vetting by the dissertation committee) no longer than one quarter after orals. However, given that the student's dissertation clock begins the quarter after orals and regardless of whether the prospectus is completed, *it is in the student's interest to hold the prospectus colloquia immediately following orals.* (Or, in other words, it is in the student's interest to take orals only when he/she is also prepared to defend the prospectus.) Department policy requires students to finish both orals and the prospectus by the end of spring term of the third year. Exceptions may be granted by GPC or the Department Chair.
4. **Advise students to begin drafting the prospectus in the fall of the third year.** *Students should not wait until after orals to begin writing the prospectus.* (The dissertation clock begins ticking after orals, not the prospectus.) The sooner student begins writing the prospectus, the quicker

they will consolidate their ideas and be able to write a final prospectus. Third year students who take History 298-“Intensive Readings for Orals and the Prospectus” are required to submit rough drafts of the prospectus at the end of fall term and subsequent drafts in winter term. This is strongly advised for all students.

5. **Ensure that your student circulates drafts of the prospectus for feedback from committee members prior to the colloquia.** All committee members should give feed-back on the prospectus before the formal colloquia. Ideally, the final prospectus will be strong enough that it will pass the colloquia without needing to be re-vetted.
6. **Decide the format for the prospectus colloquia.** The advisor determines the format for the colloquia. Usually students make a short oral presentation, followed by individual feedback by each committee member and a general discussion. The format may vary according to what you feel will be most useful to the student.
7. **Remind students to bring required paper-work to the colloquia for committee members to sign.** [Dissertation Prospectus Notification form.]