**BEST PRACTICES FOR FACULTY AND M.A. STUDENTS FOR THESIS / EXAM**

The culmination of each M.A. student’s course of study is the thesis or comprehensive exam. (For details on each of these options, see the respective sections of the Graduate Handbook.) For most students, this is their first experience with such a large research or reading endeavor. To facilitate this process for both the student and the faculty involved in the project, the following best practices regarding their respective responsibilities are suggested:

**The student:**

Has the right:

* To select (and change, if necessary) the faculty on his/her thesis or exam committee.

Has the responsibility:

* To contact the Director of Graduate Studies to file the necessary paperwork to make the thesis / exam committee official.
* To notify all faculty involved (including anyone who is being replaced on the committee) as well as the Director of Graduate Studies of any change in the composition of the thesis / exam committee.
* During the historiography seminar, to inform all faculty on the committee of the proposed research project (whether for a thesis or seminar paper) and, if relevant, to draft a preliminary reading list for each of the three comprehensive exam fields.
* To establish, toward the end of the historiography seminar and no later than the beginning of the writing seminar, in conjunction with his/her main advisor, **a mutually agreed upon calendar** for completion of the necessary steps—including drafts, readings, and/or meetings to discuss them—to arrive at the thesis or exam defense in time for the student’s desired graduation date.
* To circulate a written version of this calendar to all committee members.
* To make the agreed-upon deadlines, **communicating in a regular and timely fashion with all committee members** about his/her progress and any necessary alterations to the initial schedule.
* To provide the final draft of the thesis to the committee at least two weeks before the oral defense; or to complete the three written exams at least one week before the oral defense.

**The faculty advisor:**

Has the right:

* To see a proposal for the thesis / exam before agreeing to serve as the student’s advisor.

Has the responsibility:

* To the extent of his/her expertise, to guide the student to relevant readings and sources for the thesis / exam.
* To read thoroughly multiple drafts of each step of the student’s thesis project or research paper--beginning with the proposal in the historiography seminar and the first draft chapter / paper in the writing seminar--and provide **timely and substantive written feedback**, in accordance with the calendar agreed upon with the student.
* To meet with the student upon request or as needed. If the student is taking the exam, the advisor should meet with him/her on several occasions, first, to determine the list of readings for his/her major field and, then, to discuss the content and significance of those readings, to prepare the student for the exam.
* To decide when the student’s work is ready to circulate to the other committee members, in the case of the thesis.
* To schedule the defense, in the case of both the thesis and the exam. To facilitate the scheduling of the defense, the faculty advisor should write to the other committee members as well as the department administrative assistant, to fix the date, time, and room, at least two weeks in advance.
* To lead the questioning of the student during the defense, then (after the student leaves the room) assigns, in consultation with the other committee members, a grade for the thesis / exam.
* To report the final grade for the thesis / exam work to the Director of Graduate Studies.

**The other committee members:**

Have the right to:

* To see a proposal for the thesis / exam before agreeing to serve as the student’s advisor.

Have the responsibility to:

* To the extent of their expertise, guide the student to relevant readings and sources for the thesis / exam.
* To read thoroughly the penultimate draft of the thesis, at a minimum, and provide timely and substantive written feedback.
* To meet with the student upon request or as needed; with students preparing for the exam, at least twice—once, to finalize a list of about ten books and articles for each minor field and, then, to discuss the readings with the student.
* To respond as promptly and cooperatively as possible, when the advisor initiates the scheduling of the defense.
* To prepare for the defense by carefully reading the thesis or exam and developing specific questions about the student’s work.