

The Oral Honors Examination Structure and Evaluation of Honors Candidates

The Oral Honors Examination covers the Written Honors Examination and the Honors Project. It is held at a specified time 1-2 weeks after the submission of the completed Honors Project and before the semester's final exam period. Prior to the Oral Honors Examination, each examiner has had access to the Candidate's Honors Project (or been present at an Honors art exhibit or performance) and has read the Candidate's Written Honors Examination (questions and answers).

The Oral Honors Examination is meant to assess the Honors Candidate's degree of mastery of the Honors Project. It is NOT a "defense of thesis" as examiners may remember from graduate school. The examiners may call upon the Honors Candidate to explicate the thesis and conclusions, speak to issues raised in the Written Honors Examination and make clear how the Honors Project relates to the larger body of scholarship of which it is a part.

When the Oral Honors Examination takes place in the room or gallery where the Candidate's artwork is on exhibit, or directly after a theatre or music performance, the orderliness of the Oral Honors Examination must be maintained. Student peers may not attend the Oral Honors Examination. Ordinarily, only persons who hold a Bachelor degree in the Arts or Sciences may attend; all requests for exceptions are to be directed to the Honors Program Committee.

The Candidate's Individual Honors Examination Committee must decide by vote whether to award Honors or not. When deciding this, all THREE aspects of the Candidate's Honors work that has been completed over the two semesters must be considered. When evaluating Honors work, a useful guideline is to weigh the Honors Project 50%, and the Written Honors Examination and the Oral Honors Examination 25% each. In evaluating the Honors Project, originality or creativity is a high priority, although other assets such as clarity of intention, thoroughness and accuracy of execution must also be considered. The Field Examiner is often the key figure in evaluating Honors work since this examiner is likely to have had more experience than the other two examiners with practices and previous Honors work in the major.

A conditional award of Honors may be made if the Candidate's written work, which is otherwise satisfactory, is hindered by an unacceptable number of errors in spelling, grammar or typing. In that situation, the Honors Candidate must correct the errors within three days (on the original copy of the Honors paper), replacing pages if necessary. The revised version must be approved by the Field Examiner, who reports favorably or not on each of the four copies of the **Record of Honors Achievement** that the Honors Faculty Adviser has turned in to the Honors Secretary directly after the Oral Honors Examination.

The formal structure of the Oral Honors Examination may NOT be altered. The Oral Honors Examination should be conducted without break. Except in unusual circumstances, the length should be between 60 and 90 minutes:

Procedure for the Oral Honors Examination

The Honors Faculty Adviser convenes the Oral Honors Examination, introduces the Candidate to the examiners, acts as chair, formally opening the examination with the traditional formula: "This is the Oral Honors Examination of _____. The field is _____. The topic of the Honors Project is _____. The Outside Examiner is _____. The Field Examiner is _____. The Faculty Examiner is _____."

The Honors Faculty Adviser then specifies the order in which the examiners will question and the amount of time allotted to each. If the examination is scheduled to be one hour, the Outside Examiner, the Field Examiner and the Faculty Examiner (in that order) are given 20, 10, and 10 minutes respectively. If the examination is scheduled to be 90 minutes, the examiners are given 30, 20, and 20 minutes respectively. In the remaining time, there is a second round of questioning of 10, 5, and 5 minutes.

After having explained the structure of the examination, the Honors Faculty Adviser asks the first question, which is known to the Honors Candidate. Thereafter the Honors Faculty Adviser refrains from comments, clarifications, etc. However, it is important that the Honors Faculty Adviser tactfully keep attention fixed on the Honors Candidate if examiners succumb to the temptation of engaging in discussion among themselves or discourse at length.

At the end of the Oral Honors Examination, the Honors Faculty Adviser and the Honors Candidate leave the room. The Field Examiner acts as the chair of the Candidate's Individual Honors Examination Committee in their deliberations. The committee decides whether or not the Candidate should receive Honors. Examiners should try to reach a consensus; if they fail to do so, then the majority decides with each examiner having one vote. As soon as this is determined, the Honors Faculty Adviser and the Candidate are called back into the room and informed that Honors have or have not been awarded.

Before the examiners disband, the Honors Faculty Adviser requests them to sign (in quadruplicate) the form **Record of Honors Achievement**, which has been sent in advance to the Honors Faculty Adviser from the Honors Secretary. The four copies of the form must be returned to the Honors Secretary immediately after the conclusion of the Oral Honors Examination. (This important responsibility is sometimes taken too lightly.)