

M.A. Sustainable Communities  
Guidelines for Your Oral Defense

1. Before you set your defense date, your committee chair must contact the SUS director via e-mail or phone to report that you are ready to defend.
2. You are responsible for finding a room for the defense and notifying the SUS office of the place, time, and date of defense. Remember that the last day to defend is usually two weeks before the day of graduation in that semester. Check with the SUS office to verify the date.
3. Your Thesis Chair is responsible for bringing the necessary forms to the defense. Forms can be accessed by faculty on the [Graduate College website](#).
4. Prepare to speak for 20-30 minutes, addressing the following:
  - a. Offer a brief summary of your project. What did you do? Why did you do it?
  - b. Explain how your project is related to the SUS program theme. Explain how it is interdisciplinary. Address its connection with the theme of community.
  - c. Talk about the philosophy/theory that informs your project and your approach.
  - d. Explain your method (how you did your project).
  - e. Explain your project results and discuss the significance of your work for the wider community. Give examples.
  - f. Reflective element: talk about what brought you to this project and what you've learned from it.
  - g. **Contact the chair of your thesis/final project committee to see if she/he wants you to address anything else in your presentation.**
5. Following your presentation, your committee will ask you questions about your work. They may ask you to clarify or elaborate on some ideas. They may ask you for more detail or examples. Be prepared to engage in a discussion with your committee and to address your project's overall significance and implications.

You will then be asked to leave the room while your committee evaluates your defense and your thesis/final project. They will decide during this time whether you have successfully defended your work and whether the thesis is complete. They will very likely ask for a few additional changes or corrections in the final draft.

Your committee chair will ask you back into the room and they will let you know what they have decided. Again, it is likely that they will want you to refine certain aspects of your work. But they may still sign off on the signature page of the thesis/project, though your committee chair will probably wait to sign until you have submitted final changes and they have been accepted.