Portfolio Review Meeting

Master of Arts in Theology
Master of Theological Studies
Master of Arts in Ministry and Theology

Based on the Critical Response Process
developed by Choreographer Liz Lerman
https://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process/
Examples and tips created by Dr. Christy Lang Hearlson

ROLES

ROLE 1: STUDENT: Offers samples of their work (some of which may be “in-progress”) for review. Comes prepared to question that work in a dialogue with the review board.

ROLE 2: REVIEW BOARD: Engages in dialogue with the student, with a commitment to the student’s intent to make excellent work.

ROLE 3: FACILITATOR: Initiates each step, keeps the process on track, and works to help the student and the review board members use the process to frame useful questions and responses.

STEPS. Total length of Review Meeting: 50 Minutes

STEP 1. PRESENTATION (10 MINUTES)

The Presentation focuses on the student’s Integrative Essay. It provides context and explicates the choices a student has made in writing the essay, briefly summarizes the main points, illustrates its implication(s) and concludes with the questions the student has for their Review Board Members.

The following constructive conversation probes the extent to which students meet the Learning Goals of the Review and serves as an occasion for the further development of the thoughts a student has formulated in their Reflective Vocational and Integrative Essays.

STEP 2. STATEMENTS OF MEANING (5 MINUTES)

Board Members state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, and/or striking in the work they have reviewed in preparation for the review and in the presentation they have just witnessed.

Example 1: [A board member might say] “I was struck by the argument you made in this paper about the development of Catholic ecclesiology in the early modern period. Your analysis of the assumptions inherent in Miller’s thesis especially illuminated the topic for me.”

Example 2: [A board member might say] “I found your research on religious aspects of dentistry utterly fascinating and can’t wait to hear more from you on this.”

Tips to Board Members: Be as specific as possible. Avoid “I liked” language. Say why something mattered to you. Be careful to avoid tacking criticism on to your affirmation or giving backhanded compliments.

Tips to Student: Say thank you. Ask for clarification if you don’t understand the comment. You may express why a comment is meaningful to you.
STEP 3. STUDENT AS QUESTIONER (10 MINUTES)

The student asks questions about the work presented in the portfolio. In answering, board members stay on topic with the question and may express opinions in direct response to the student’s questions.

Example 1: [The student might say] “In this project I was grappling with the theological implications of the incarnation for prison-based education, and I drew mostly on Aquinas, but I’m not sure he’s the right conversation partner about this. Who else should I engage as I deal with this topic?”

Example 2: [The student might say] “I’m aware I have multiple working theses in this essay on women’s leadership in 12th-century French monasteries. Looking at this essay, what stands out as most important or fresh to you? That is, what in the essay should I build on in order to refine my thoughts?

Tips to Student: Come prepared with a list of questions to ask your committee about your portfolio essays or your presentation. You might ask about the portfolio as a whole or specific projects. You can ask for critique, affirmation, guidance, or general feedback. Ask specific, clear questions. Avoid yes-no questions.

Tips to Board Members: Stay focused on the student’s desire to improve in a particular area. Be honest in your answers. Answer only the question asked.

STEP 4. BOARD AS QUESTIONER (25 MINUTES)

Board members ask the students questions about their essays and presentation that help them to further develop their ideas, and provide constructive critique. Board members employ neutral, open-ended questions that do not have an opinion couched in them and promote constructive conversation.

Example 1: “As you look at the whole portfolio, I’m curious how you see your interests evolving over time. How do you see your focus shifting through your time in this program?”

Example 2: “You argue in this essay that justice should be addressed in all theology. In this other essay, you don’t mention justice. So granting your first argument, that justice should always be addressed, how would you bring justice into the other topic?

Example 3: “How do you think Augustine would respond to this argument?”

Example 4: “I wondered as I read this how you defined these terms that are often used interchangeably. What, in your mind, is the difference between guilt and blame, and how is that difference significant for your work?

Tips to Board Members: Begin the conversation with questions and formulate them in a way that motivate students to think more deeply and develop their own ideas and perspectives. Don’t begin with, “Have you considered?” or “What if you tried...?” or “Don’t you think...?” Those aren’t neutral questions, but opinions. Offer constructive critique designed to improve the arguments. Recognize that something is always left out of any project. Don’t insist students do what you would have done.