Forming Your Ph.D. Committee

Appointing the Doctoral Supervisory Committee, including the Graduate School Representative (GSR)

In order to allow time to identify a suitable Graduate School Representative (GSR), it is suggested that the doctoral supervisory committee be established at least four months prior to the intended date of the General Examination. The appointment of a committee is initiated by the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) after consultation with appropriate Graduate Faculty members in the student's field and with the student. The GPC recommends members of the supervisory committee to the Dean of The Graduate School by entering this information into MyGradProgram (MGP).

The doctoral supervisory committee consists of a minimum of four members, at least three of whom (including the Chair and the GSR) must be members of the Graduate Faculty with an endorsement to chair doctoral committees. A majority of the members must be members of the Graduate Faculty. The GSR must be a productive scholar in his or her own research area that may differ from that of the student's dissertation project. The remaining members must be identified by the student's appointing department or program as productive scholars in the student's major field and/or subfields. The Chair(s) of a committee must be able and willing to assume principal responsibility for advising the student. In addition, the Chair(s) should have adequate time available for this work and should expect to be accessible to the student. Emeritus/a and affiliate faculty may serve as a Chair if the above conditions are met. Co-Chairs may be appointed when both serve with equal importance on a student's supervisory committee and equally share the responsibility for the student's progress.

The GSR represents the broad concerns of the Graduate School with respect to high standards of scholarly performance, ensuring that the student's mastery of the subject matter is broad and comprehensive. The GSR is a voting member of the committee and must attest to the validity of examinations, must indicate approval of the process by which examinations are conducted, must ensure that the student is treated in an unbiased manner, and must represent The Graduate School in ensuring university-wide standards of scholarly performance. The GSR's signature on the warrant affirming the decision of the committee communicates to the Dean of the Graduate School that these responsibilities have been met. As a full voting member of the dissertation supervisory committee, the GSR provides an important service function to The Graduate School and the University.

As with all doctoral supervisory committee members, the GSR is proposed to the Graduate School by the Graduate Program Coordinator in the student's degree-offering unit and must be a member of the Graduate Faculty with an
endorsement to Chair. Faculty members with primary, joint, or affiliate appointments in the student’s degree-offering unit or the committee chair’s department are not eligible to serve as the GSR. It is vital that a conflict of interest in the selection of the GSR be avoided. Budgetary relationships, personal relationships, or research and/or publication relationships between the GSR and either the student or the committee chair are examples of possible conflicts of interest. (See GSR Eligibility for more information.) The GSR is responsible for ensuring that no such conflicts of interest, or appearance of conflicts of interest, exist, and must attest to this upon request.

Functions of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee

Doctoral supervisory committee member responsibilities include the approval of a course of study which will fulfill the general course requirements of the student’s major and supporting fields, conducting the student's General Examination and, when appropriate, recommending advancement to Candidacy. The doctoral supervisory committee approves the Candidate’s dissertation proposal and guides the student in carrying out appropriate research for the dissertation. The Graduate School does not stipulate the content of the dissertation; guidance on the dissertation is the responsibility of the supervisory committee. At least four members of the committee (including the Chair(s), GSR, and one additional Graduate Faculty member) must be present at both the General and Final Examinations.

After the General Examination, the Graduate Program Coordinator informs the Dean of The Graduate School of at least three members of the supervisory committee who will serve on the reading committee. At least one of the members of the reading committee must hold an endorsement to chair doctoral committees. The reading committee is appointed to read and approve the dissertation.

When the reading committee has read a draft of the entire dissertation and the members of the doctoral supervisory committee agree that the Candidate is prepared to take the Final Examination, all members of the doctoral supervisory committee must give the student approval to schedule the Final Examination. At the Final Examination the dissertation is evaluated and, if a majority of the supervisory committee members in attendance agree that the evaluation is positive, the recommendation is made to the Dean of the Graduate School (via the warrant) that the degree be awarded. If members of the doctoral supervisory committee do not agree with the majority recommendation concerning the examination, the minority report portion of the warrant must be used.

Questions concerning the appointment and functions of supervisory committees for master’s or doctoral students may be directed to the Graduate School’s Graduate Enrollment Management Services office.

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