Graduate Committee

Committee Membership

An advisory committee should be selected by the student upon enrollment by consulting the major professor and department/program head or chair. The advisory committee is responsible for developing the student's Program of Study and conducting the preliminary/comprehensive exam(s) and the final defense, if applicable. A completed committee request form must be submitted to the Graduate School. This form should be submitted no later than the semester in which the student plans to graduate for Master's and Educational Specialist students and no later than the semester in which either the defense or the comprehensive exam is scheduled for doctoral students, as appropriate.

Committee Meeting Procedure

It is expected that thesis-based masters and doctoral students will meet regularly with their committee to discuss progress in their program of study. At a minimum, the full committee and the students will meet in a proposal meeting and a final defense. Doctoral programs may also require a comprehensive exam. The structure of these meetings will be program specific. Programs may have additional requirements for committee meetings and the timing of those meetings. It is expected that the first committee meeting will occur as early as possible within the program of study. Students are expected to set regular meetings with their committee to discuss research ideas and directions to ensure timely progress towards degree completion.

For Master's or Educational Specialist students:

- A committee consists of a minimum of three members. One member may be a minor professor, if the student has a minor program.
- The major professor is chair of the committee and must be from the student’s major department/program. At least one other member must be from the student's major department/program.
- At least 50% of the master's committee members must hold a Graduate Faculty appointment. The decision regarding the qualifications of a Non-Graduate Faculty member to serve on a master's degree committee will be determined by the program/college.
- A Non-Graduate Faculty committee member cannot serve as a major professor or committee chair.
- A Non-Graduate Faculty committee member can direct the thesis research.

A student in a non-thesis program with no variation in Program of Study and/or with standardized examinations are not required to have committees.

For Doctoral students:

- A committee consists of a minimum of four members. If the student has a minor, the committee will be composed of at least five members, with one member being from the minor program area.
- The chair and at least one other committee member must be from the student's major department/program.
- At least 50% of the doctoral committee members must hold a Graduate Faculty appointment. The decision regarding the qualifications of a Non-Graduate Faculty member to serve on a doctoral degree committee will be determined by the program/college.
- A Non-Graduate Faculty committee member cannot serve as a major professor or committee chair.
- A Non-Graduate Faculty committee member can serve as dissertation director.

If a student experiences a problem concerning committee membership, he or she should follow the academic appeal procedure outlined in the Graduate Student Academic Grievance Procedure (AOP 12.37).

MSU Graduate Faculty Committee Members

Within *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools’ Commission on Colleges, the following statement concerning faculty appears.

> *The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty.* (Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1, December 2008)

With the approval of the Academic Dean, each department offering graduate programs will determine procedures for handling recommendations or appeals concerning Graduate Faculty appointments or changes of membership status. The criteria and procedures set by the department and/or the college must be consistent with the qualifications and responsibilities outlined below, but may be more restrictive.

MSU Graduate Faculty members are full-time employees of Mississippi State University. Other criteria for holding as MSU Graduate Faculty appointment follow:

- have an earned terminal degree (highest degree awarded in the discipline) in or related to the faculty member's discipline;
- be a full-time employee of Mississippi State University, holding the rank of assistant professor, assistant research professor, assistant extension professor, assistant teaching professor, assistant professor of practice, or assistant clinical professor or higher without any qualifying designations such as "visiting," "emeritus," or "adjunct"; and
- have demonstrated and maintained noteworthy accomplishments in research and/or creative achievement, as defined in the Faculty handbook (6.1.2)

Government affiliates embedded in the University may be considered MSU Graduate Faculty by agreement.

Faculty holding the title of Instructor may serve as the program coordinator and advisory to students in a non-thesis master's program for which they can affirm when program requirements are met for graduation. If instructors have the appropriate terminal degree in a discipline, they may also serve on graduate committees but not in the capacity as a major professor or director of thesis/dissertation.

MSU Graduate Faculty may:

- teach graduate-level courses in each field of specialization if the individual meets all requirements outlined in AOP 13.09, Credentials for Teaching;
- serve as members of doctoral and Master's/Educational Specialist committees within or outside the Department/Program of appointment; and
- serve as a chair of doctoral, Master's, or Educational Specialist committees and may serve as the director of thesis and dissertation research within the faculty member's area of graduate responsibility.

Graduate Faculty members are appointed through submission of the Application to Graduate Faculty form, which is approved by the Department Head and Academic Dean. Reappointment to the Graduate Faculty is not required as long as the faculty member remains full-time faculty (as descried in the second bullet under Graduate Faculty qualifications of Mississippi State University) and remains affiliated with an academic program. Removal of a faculty member from the Graduate Faculty is at the discretion of the Department Head, Academic Dean, and Graduate School Dean.

MSU Graduate Faculty members are listed by college/department in this *Catalog*.

Major Professor Designation

Effective on the resignation date, any faculty member that is not employed full-time at MSU is no longer eligible to serve or sign as Major Professor or co-Major Professor at any point in the process, but they may serve as thesis/dissertation director.

Non-Graduate Faculty Committee Members

At least 50% of the committee members must be members of the Graduate Faculty. A Non-Graduate Faculty member is anyone external to Mississippi State University or Mississippi State employees who are not Graduate Faculty. Non-Graduate Faculty committee members are expected to have a graduate degree or commensurate expertise in the field of study. The decision of whether or not Non-Graduate Faculty members are qualified to serve on a thesis or dissertation committee is determined by the program/college.

If a Non-Graduate Faculty committee member serves as director of the research, it is expected that the individual will have education and research expertise commensurate with the Graduate Faculty.

Thesis/Dissertation Director

A thesis/dissertation director is the individual primarily responsible for providing oversight for a Master's, Educational Specialist, or Doctoral student's research. Any member of a student's graduate committee may be designated as the thesis/dissertation director on the committee request form. Typically, the major professor serves in this role. In the rare case when the thesis/dissertation director is not the major professor, then coordination between the thesis/dissertation director and the major professor is required. The major professor will be primarily responsible for academic advising and ensuring the student meets all the programmatic requirements for the degree.

Committee Membership Changes

Committee membership changes are submitted to the Graduate School on the Request for Change of Committee Members form. The new committee member(s), student, Major Professor, Graduate Coordinator and Department Head must sign the form. If a student's request to remove a member of the graduate committee is not approved, the student may appeal the decision using the Graduate Appeals Process. All decisions will be provided in writing to the student, committee member(s), Major Professor, Graduate Coordinator, and Department Head if applicable. Faculty may appeal removal from a student's committee using the Faculty Grievance Procedures (AOP 13.05).