



# Standard Administrative Policy and Procedure

**Subject:** Graduate Committee Formation

**Number:**

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## I. PURPOSE

This policy and its procedures designate the standards applicable to graduate committee formation to ensure conformity with University of Wyoming Regulations and Policies.

Each graduate student, in consultation with their major professor/chair, constructs a graduate committee to guide their degree progress. The committee functions to guide all aspects of the student's degree completion in an advisory capacity for the student's coursework and research programs and must approve the official program of study. The committee will also determine the outcome of required preliminary examinations, the thesis/dissertation, project report or creative activity, and will conduct the final defense examination. All committee members hold full voting rights in preliminary and final examinations.

## II. DEFINITIONS

**Department Head Role:** The Department Head, in consultation with the faculty, provides guidance to ensure disciplinary flexibility, academic rigor and supportive atmospheres for graduate students and their faculty mentors. In providing oversight of Graduate Committees, the Department Head holds responsibility for ensuring the effective delivery of graduate degrees and in approving exceptions in committee formation. They provide guidance to clarify policy and assist the faculty and students in forming strong graduate committees. The policies below may be refined by individual departments to support degree-specific needs (see section III.D.f, "Exception Requests," below). Department Heads, with support of their faculty, are empowered to define degree-specific committee formation procedures that further restrict the general policies described below. Degree programs that develop more restrictive standards must report their guidelines to Academic Affairs for implementation. Thus, students should always consult with their department early to learn of any degree-specific requirements for completing their graduate degree.

### **III. POLICY**

#### **A. Forming a Graduate Committee**

##### **1. Committee Assignment Form**

Students, in consultation with their major professor/committee chair, nominate a graduate committee by completing the Committee Assignment Form, which identifies the roles of academic personnel who will serve on the student's committee. Once enrolled, graduate students should file their Committee Assignment Form as early in their program as is consistent with their specific degree program expectations. In general, graduate committees should be assigned within the first academic year to assist the student in understanding and documenting the progression to their degree. Early committee formation allows the student to see a clear path for their graduate program by conferring with their graduate committee members. Once formed, committee members will help the student develop their Program of Study. Note that the Registrar will not accept a Program of Study form until the Committee Assignment form has been approved in Academic Affairs and is recorded with the Registrar. All Graduate forms are available online at the link above.

Committee members, in signing the Committee Assignment Form, agree to: protect the student from unreasonable expectations, protect the integrity of the degree program by providing sufficient rigor for the student, and disclose any conflicts of interest that may appear to compromise these responsibilities. Once signed by the student and all members, Committee Assignment Forms must be approved by: 1) the relevant Department Head/Interdisciplinary Program Director, 2) College Dean (or Academic Affairs in the case of interdisciplinary programs), and 3) Academic Affairs. Once the student has received signatures from all committee members, the Department Head and the College Dean, the committee assignment form should be submitted directly to Academic Affairs, Associate Vice President for Graduate Education. After final approval by Academic Affairs, the Committee Assignment form will be recorded and forwarded to the Registrar by Academic Affairs (or the student may request to pick the form up and deliver it directly to the Registrar). If forms require revision, the student and committee chair will be notified by email.

##### **2. General committee requirements**

The majority of members on a master's committee must be UW academic personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair said committee. For doctoral committees, the majority and no fewer than four members must be UW academic personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair said committee. Academic Professionals can serve on committees in roles as clarified below based on their appointment (extended term vs. non-extended term), degree (terminal vs. non-terminal), and approval

within their home department. In no case can the number of non-extended term, non-terminal degree, visiting, and External committee members represent the majority of members on a graduate committee. Annually appointed academic personnel as defined by UW Regulation 2-1 (e.g., temporary and visiting faculty, research professor, clinical professor, and professor of practice) should not generally be assigned to chair graduate committees. If membership exceptions are approved, not more than one annually appointed individual should serve as a required member on a committee.

Committee formation policy specific to Master's and Doctoral committees (provided below) apply to all UW graduate committees; however, some degree programs may provide more detailed committee requirements. Exceptions (see "Exception Requests" below) are also available for unique circumstances. The requirements stated here should be considered the minimum university requirements and departments, Colleges and Interdisciplinary programs may elect to establish higher standard requirements for their particular degree programs. Students must consult with their department for degree-specific guidance.

## **B. Degree-Specific Committee Formation**

### **1. Master's Committees**

Master's committees consist of a minimum of three required members, including a Chair from the appropriate department/division, and an Outside Member whose academic home (as defined by tenure/promotion decisions) is in an academic unit different than the unit offering the student's degree program. Academic personnel can serve in each committee role as described in Table 1. In addition, all Master's committees must conform to the following general committee requirements: 1) The majority of members on a master's committee must be UW Academic Personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair a master's committee; and 2) In no case can the number of non-extended term, non-terminal degree, visiting, and External committee members constitute a majority of members.

### **2. Doctoral Committees**

Doctoral committees consist of at minimum, five members (Table 2), including a Chair from the appropriate department/division, and an Outside Member whose academic home (as defined by tenure/promotion decisions) is in an academic unit other than the unit offering the student's degree. Academic personnel who can serve in each committee role appear in Table 2. In addition, all doctoral committees must conform to the following general committee requirements: 1) No less than four members and the majority of members on a doctoral committee must be UW academic personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair doctoral committees; and 2) In no case can non-

extended term, non-terminal degree, visiting, and External committee members outnumber required members.

## **C. Roles and Responsibilities of Graduate Committee Members**

### **1. Committee Chair**

The role of committee Chair is to serve in primary direction of the student's research or creative activities. The committee Chair should be the primary resource for the student. The Chair must also see that all steps of the student's graduate program proceed in a timely fashion including committee formation itself. The Chair oversees required committee meetings and exams as dictated by University and Departmental requirements. Any tenure-track faculty, extended term academic professionals with terminal degrees, emeritus faculty or UW faculty employed via cooperative agreements in the degree-granting department may chair a student's committee (Table 1).

*A decision to serve as committee chair implies the following commitment: "I agree to take primary responsibility for guiding the student in all aspects of degree completion, and to provide professional and personal support. I will ensure that the student schedules regular meetings with, and communicates clearly to, all committee members, and will ensure that the committee communicates clear expectations to the student. It is my responsibility to ensure that the student progresses towards degree completion in a timely manner for as long as the student meets degree program requirements and committee expectations."*

### **2. Outside Committee Member**

The Outside committee member serves as the broader audience and is tasked with balancing academic rigor with fairness during the student's graduate program (to balance scholastic challenge with realistic program expectations). The role of the Outside committee member, in consultation with the Committee Chair and Department Head, is critical for fairness with which UW treats its graduate students and ensuring institutional academic integrity. The role of the Outside member to challenge the rigor and fairness of the process is therefore essential. Their role protects the student, faculty mentors and the institutional graduate process and places priority on these duties above need for a particular disciplinary expertise related to the student project. Consequently, the requirements for service as Outside member are necessarily the most rigorous of all committee membership. As such, the Outside member should be a tenured UW faculty member with demonstrated experience in mentoring graduate students *at the University of Wyoming*. Tenure allows the Outside member the standing to actively engage the Chair, other committee members and the student with the academic freedom that is indispensable to the success of the institution—a freedom not enjoyed by untenured faculty and academic professionals.

Untenured tenure-track UW faculty may serve as the Outside member if two criteria are met: 1) the faculty member has demonstrated experience mentoring graduate students as certified by the faculty member's unit head and 2) the committee Chair has no role in evaluating the untenured faculty member for reappointment and/or tenure (e.g., the committee Chair does not serve on a college or university tenure & promotion committee that would review the untenured faculty member). Selection of an Outside member requires that experience, standing, lack of conflicts of interest, and ability to represent institutional interests take precedence over expertise particular to the degree. The Outside member brings a new perspective to the graduate process, ensuring that the research communicates effectively to a broader audience.

The Outside committee member must come from an academic home (as defined by tenure/promotion decisions) that differs from the academic unit offering the student's degree program (usually a different department). In the case of *interdisciplinary programs* (e.g., PiE), a student's committee, by necessity, comes from a variety of academic units. Thus, in the case of interdisciplinary degrees, the Outside member is selected from faculty whose academic home differs from the academic home of the committee Chair. In the case of combined/joint departments with multiple graduate degree programs or when UW academic personnel hold adjunct appointments in other departments, departmental faculty and the Head should meet to decide who may or may not serve as Outside members for particular graduate degrees. Decisions should include consideration of whether an individual in one graduate degree could reasonably Chair a student in another graduate degree in the same department (or a department where that faculty may hold adjunct status). If so, it is clear that the faculty should not be considered an Outside member. In no case should faculty who could chair a committee for that degree be considered able to serve the role of Outside member. Faculty holding annual appointments may not serve as an Outside member.

In addition to the majority of committee members, both the Committee Chair and Outside member must enter a positive vote in order for a student to pass their defense. In the case of any tied vote, the Outside member and the committee Chair will deliberate and come to agreement to resolve the final outcome of the student's exam. In most cases a tied vote raises enough concern that it would be advisable for the student to repeat the defense.

A faculty's agreement to serve as the Outside member implies the following commitment: *"I agree, in addition to providing academic assistance to the student, to monitor this graduate committee to ensure its adherence to all University policies, that the student is treated fairly, and that the student meets University standards of academic achievement worthy of the degree being pursued."*

### **3. Other Required Members**

In addition to the Chair and Outside members, other required committee members must be included to meet the required minimum number of total committee members (five [5] for doctoral committees and three [3] for master's committees). The primary role of the other required committee members is to provide academic and research/creative project support to the student. Restrictions on who can serve as a required committee member are few (see Tables 1 and 2). In general, all tenure, tenure track and Emeritus faculty, and extended term academic professionals with terminal degrees can serve as required committee members without exception.

### **4. External Committee Members**

External committee members are non-UW personnel who serve on the committee to facilitate the student's research or creative activity. An external committee member can be a faculty member at a peer institution or an individual holding professional expertise that will contribute to the committee and the student's research. Such an appointment pertains exclusively to work on the committee and assumes that the external member would be able to participate fully in the essential components of the degree-granting process. External members must sign committee forms as indicated and are full voting members of committees. In no case can the number of external members on a committee out-number the UW academic personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair the committee in question. Inclusion of non-UW personnel can potentially reduce the number of UW academic personal required on the committee (see Tables 1 and 2), but cannot replace either the committee chair or the outside committee member.

The inclusion of an External member does not require exception requests as long as their service and credentials conform to guidelines in the tables.

## **D. Other Considerations in Graduate Committee Membership**

### **1. Retired UW faculty**

Emeritus faculty, having been tenured and awarded emeritus status at UW, retain their designation as UW faculty and their eligibility to serve on graduate committees in the same fashion as they did prior to retirement-given department/unit approval. Board Retired faculty (UW Regulation 5-2(VI)) can serve as additional or external members after retirement.

### **2. UW committee members that leave the university before the student finishes**

When the departing faculty member is chairing a graduate committee, the

Department Head should appoint another UW faculty member to chair the committee, so that the graduate process continues smoothly for the student. This appointment should follow consultation with the graduate student and the existing committee members to obtain effective congruity in membership. Such changes are reported to Academic Affairs via the Committee Change Form.

Normally, faculty serving in required roles on graduate committees who leave the university should be replaced within a semester of their departure. In unusual cases where the student is near completion, and the required member plans to leave the university, a committee change may not be needed (e.g., a committee member leaving in May when the defense is scheduled before the end of the summer session). This allowance applies when the student is almost finished. If the student is more than a semester away from the defense, it will be necessary for the student to identify a replacement for any departing required member. The departing faculty may remain active on the committee as an external member. These changes should be recorded with Academic Affairs via a Committee Change Form. Exceptions to these guidelines require both a written request from the faculty, in consultation with the graduate student and a letter of support from the Department Head. The request should be submitted in the semester prior to the intended defense date. In this case, the documents must clarify how the needs of the student will continue to be met without undue cost or added difficulty for the student.

UW faculty in appointments that are not extended term appointments, such as visiting scholars, and annually appointed positions such as Professor of Practice may serve on committees as additional members. Annually appointed individuals may serve with the recommendation of the Department Head or Unit Director. However, their service on committees should be carefully considered to protect the student from dependence on members who may not be available for the entire term of the student's program.

### **3. Conflicts of Interest on Graduate Committees**

When forming graduate committees, the Department Head and committee members should consider known potential conflicts of interest and conflicts of commitment in order to protect the student and committee members from allegations of misconduct. Guidance on conflicts of interest, nepotism and research misconduct are provided by General Counsel and the Office of Research and Economic Development. Additional guidance is found in UW Regulation 5-2.

Conflicts of interest on graduate committees arise when potential professional or financial gains, or personal relationships could be perceived to influence the behavior or voting of committee members.

Graduate committees may contain members whose relationships may appear to

lend credibility to challenges if disclosed. Ideally, such relationships should be disclosed voluntarily to the Department Head, student and committee Chair and documented. Voluntary disclosure to the student and the other committee members can be held as sealed documents by the Dept. Head. Additional caution might be taken by adding a committee member to balance conflicted member voting potential (for example, adding a committee member to a master's committee that contains voluntary disclosures so that conflicted votes are balanced by other members). Finally, for consistency with UW Regulation 5-2, academic personnel should not serve on the graduate committee of their own relatives (spouses or domestic partners, children, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles/aunts, nephew/nieces, and first cousins).

#### **4. Other Factors Influencing Committee Function**

In any case where committee function is compromised by disagreements, perceptions of poor student guidance, or possible inequities, the Chair and Outside Committee members serve as the initial reporting level. Usually a graduate student can consult with their committee chair to resolve any mismatched member perceptions. Occasionally students or the Chair decide to revise the committee appointments using the Change in Committee form when irreconcilable differences appear. However, unanticipated and difficult conflicts or discrepancies in committee performance may arise late in a student's program, say at the final exam, when changing the committee seems inappropriate. Any committee member who believes the committee is not functioning properly, can engage the Chair, Outside member or the Department Head in a discussion. If such discussion does not resolve the issue, the concerns should be brought to the attention of the Dean. Members may choose to report directly to Academic Affairs only after appropriate steps have been pursued within the academic unit to resolve the issue. Graduate students who feel they are not given fair consideration within an academic unit should first meet with their Chair, Outside member, Department Head, or the College Dean (in that order) to express their concerns. Academic Affairs can become involved in direct consultation with a graduate student who has exhausted other reasonable options. Students may also petition for an appeal of Committee or Departmental decisions. Appeals are considered by the Graduate Council (see "Guidelines for Graduate Student Appeals"). Academic Affairs can provide guidance at the request of the Committee Chair, Department Head, or Dean.

#### **5. Adjunct Academic Personnel**

Adjunct appointments are made to allow persons from outside the university to provide services on a limited or part-time basis (UW Regulation 2-1). Such individuals can serve on committees as outlined in this document on a case-by-case basis via the External member role.

## 6. Exception Requests

Department heads, with the approval of College Dean and Academic Affairs, retain the ability to override policies on graduate committee membership when student- or degree-specific needs warrant. Such exceptions can take the form of case-by-case exceptions or term exceptions as described below. College Deans and Academic Affairs retain the authority to deny exception requests if they believe the proposed exception will impede the committee's ability to serve the student's or university's interests.

### a. Case-by-case exceptions for service on a single committee

Case-by-case exceptions that allow individuals to serve for a single committee can provide flexibility in committee formation. For example, a visiting faculty may offer special expertise useful for service to a specific student. *Attach to the Committee Assignment or change form:* Director or Department Head should 1) nominate the potential committee member, 2) include their CV and 3) a brief explanation of the nominee's expertise. The College Dean will forward the request to the Office of Academic Affairs. Supporting documents should clarify the reasons that an exception is warranted and identify any safeguards set in place. Such exceptions must be supported by the Department Head or Program Director and the College Dean before they will be considered by Academic Affairs.

### b. Term exceptions: allowing for departmental or faculty designations

In some cases, departments may need to identify individuals or degrees for which special circumstances allow for unique formation of committees. The faculty of a department, with support of the department Head and Dean, can request exceptions with greater longevity (the term of their appointment) in support of a particular degree program. In such cases, it is preferable to obtain a degree-specific and individual-specific exception (rather than repeatedly requesting case-by-case exceptions for each committee). For example, a particular master's degree program may allow for the third member to be a non-terminal degree Academic Professional who holds unique experiential skills appropriate to that particular degree. Such exceptions could be granted to an individual faculty for that degree under the following process. A letter from the Department Head and support from the Dean that identifies: 1) the degree, 2) the reason that students would be expected to regularly seek the committee formation exception, 3) the CV of the academic personnel (if the request applies to a specific individual), and 4) documented support from the department faculty (e.g., vote of the faculty) in support of the exception. The materials should be submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Council and copied to the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education for consideration. If approved, the term will be approved for a period of 3 years, subject to renewal with

reappointment of individual faculty or 5 years for degree exceptions. Renewal requests require reapplication to allow for consideration of changing faculty membership and trajectory of degree offerings and departments. Term exceptions should allow departments to form discipline- and degree-specific graduate committees.

**Responsible Division/Unit:** Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Source:** None

**Links:** <http://www.uwyo.edu/regs-policies>; <http://www.uwyo.edu/uwgrad/index.html>;  
[http://www.uwyo.edu/registrar/students/graduate\\_student\\_forms.html](http://www.uwyo.edu/registrar/students/graduate_student_forms.html)

**Associated Regulations, Policies, and Forms:** University Catalog: Graduate Student Regulations and Policies; Committee Assignment Form

**Approved:** 10/29/2018

**Table 1. Master’s Degree (MA/MS/MFA/MPA) Committee Member Roles as Reflected on the Committee Assignment Form<sup>1</sup>**

Role on Committee	Academic Personnel Description	Required / Optional
Chair	<p>a. Tenured and tenure-track faculty.</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals with terminal degree and a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student’s degree.</p> <p>c. Emeritus faculty.</p> <p>d. UW faculty employed via cooperative agreements with state and federal agencies (e.g., Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, USGS, etc.) who hold terminal degrees and have a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student’s degree.</p>	Required, all committees
Co-Chair	<p>a. Individuals as described in ‘Chair’ above (a-d as above) and</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals <i>without</i> a terminal degree but who hold a degree higher than or equal to the student’s anticipated degree and have a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student’s degree.</p>	Optional
Outside Member	Tenured or emeritus faculty whose tenure/promotion home lies outside the degree program being pursued by the student. Cannot be an adjunct or jointly-appointed faculty within the degree program of the student (except in interdisciplinary degree programs-see text). Nontenured, tenure-track faculty may serve if: 1) she/he has demonstrated experience mentoring graduate students (as certified by the faculty member’s unit head) and 2) the committee Chair has no role in evaluating the untenured faculty member for reappointment and/or tenure.	Required, all committees
Required Member	<p>a. Same as ‘Chair’ above (a-d listed for chair) and</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals <i>without</i> a terminal degree but who hold a degree higher than or equal to the student’s anticipated degree and have a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student’s degree.</p>	Required, all committees <i>unless</i> a co-chair serves as the 3rd required member
Additional Member	<p>a. All of the above UW faculty and extended term Academic Professionals (with and without terminal degree) <i>without</i> exception request.</p> <p>b. Any UW academic personnel under annual appointment and with terminal degree, <i>without</i> exception request<sup>2</sup>.</p>	Optional - additional members can serve without exception request as long as general committee requirements are met <sup>2</sup>
External Member	Individuals employed outside of UW or cooperative agreements that hold a degree equal to or higher than the degree sought by the student <u>without case-by-case exception request.</u>	Optional - may replace a required member as long as general committee requirements are met <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Masters committees (MA, MS, MPA, MFA) must include three required members, including a Chair and Outside Member.

<sup>2</sup> General Committee Requirements – In all cases the majority of members on a master’s committee should hold the credentials that would allow them to chair master’s committees. In no case can the number of External, non-extended term, and non-terminal degree committee members represent the majority of members on a master’s committee.

**Table 2. Doctoral Degree Committee Member Roles on the Committee Assignment Form<sup>1</sup>**

Role on Committee	Academic Personnel description	Required / Optional
Chair	<p>a. Tenured and tenure-track faculty.</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals with terminal degree and a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student's degree.</p> <p>c. Emeritus faculty.</p> <p>d. UW faculty employed via cooperative agreements with state and federal agencies (e.g., Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, USGS, etc.) who hold terminal degrees and have a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student's degree</p>	Required, all committees
Co-Chair	<p>a. Same as 'Chair' above (a-d above) and</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals <i>without</i> a terminal degree but who a demonstrated record of research or creative activity appropriate to the student's degree.</p>	Optional
Outside Member	Tenured or emeritus faculty whose tenure/promotion home lies outside the degree program being pursued by the student. Cannot be an adjunct or jointly appointed faculty within the degree program of the student (except in interdisciplinary degree programs-see text). Nontenured, tenure-track faculty may serve if: 1) she/he has demonstrated experience mentoring graduate students (as certified by the faculty member's unit head) and 2) the committee Chair has no role in evaluating the untenured faculty member for reappointment and/or tenure.	Required, all committees
Required Member	a. Same as 'Chair' above (a-d for chair).	Required (first- third members), all committees <i>except</i> if a co-chair serves as one of the three required members; all committees must conform to general committee requirements <sup>2</sup>
Required Member	a. Same as 'Chair' above (a-d as above).	Required (4 <sup>th</sup> member), all committees;
Required Member	<p>a. Same as 'Chair' above (a-d above) and</p> <p>b. Extended term track Academic Professionals <i>without</i> terminal degree <u>without exception request</u>.</p> <p>c. Any UW academic personnel under annual appointment <u>without exception request</u>.</p>	Required (5 <sup>th</sup> member), all committees
Additional Member	<p>a. All of the above UW faculty and extended term Academic Professionals (with and without terminal degree) <i>without exception request</i>.</p> <p>b. Any UW academic personnel under annual appointment <i>without exception request</i><sup>2</sup>.</p>	Optional – added members can serve without exception request if general committee requirements are met <sup>2</sup>
External Member	Individuals employed outside of UW and cooperative agreements that hold a degree equal to or higher than the degree sought by the student or who have exceptional documented expertise in the discipline <u>without exception request</u> .	Optional - may replace a required member as long as general committee requirements are met <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral committees must include five required members, including a Chair and Outside member. All committee members have full voting rights regardless of which role they serve on the committee. Ed.D. committees require only 3 members: chair, Outside member, and one additional required member.

<sup>2</sup> General Committee Requirements – No less than four members and the majority of members on doctoral committees must be UW academic personnel who hold the credentials that would allow them to chair doctoral committees. In no case can the number of non-extended term, non-terminal degree, visiting, and External committee members represent the majority of members on a committee.