



Standard Administrative Policy and Procedure

Subject: Graduate Committee Formation

Number: UW SAP 2-122.3

I. PURPOSE

This Policy and its procedures designate the standards applicable to graduate committee formation to ensure conformity with University of Wyoming (“UW” or “University”) 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. 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

Adjunct Graduate Faculty:

Internal Adjunct Graduate Faculty: Internal Adjunct Graduate Faculty may serve in any capacity that aligns with the privileges the faculty member possesses in their home department. Privileges shall not exceed those of the faculty member’s home department and shall be in alignment with the wishes of the adjunct department.

External Adjunct Graduate Faculty: External Adjunct Graduate Faculty appointed under UW Reg 2-1 may be nominated for External Adjunct Faculty status, and if approved, may serve as Co-Chairs and Required Members of graduate student committees at the Master’s and Doctoral levels.

Department Head: As used herein, Department Head refers to the administrative leader (usually titled Head or Director) of an academic unit (e.g., department, division, school). 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.

Graduate Committee Members:

Minimum Required Members:

Chair: The role of Chair is to serve in primary direction of the student's research or creative activities. The Chair oversees required committee meetings and exams as dictated by University and Departmental requirements. The Chair must be a member of the UW Graduate Faculty.

Outside Member: The Outside Member serves as the broader audience and is tasked with balancing academic rigor with fairness during the student's graduate education. The Outside 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). The Outside Member must be a Tenure-Stream Graduate Faculty.

Other Required Members: The primary role of the Other Required Members is to provide academic and research/creative project support to the student. There is a minimum number of members required for each graduate committee (three for master's and four for doctoral), and the Other Required Members meet the committee minimum in combination with the Chair and Outside Member. Required members must be a member of the UW Graduate Faculty.

Optional Roles:

Additional Members: Graduate committees may have more than the minimum required number of members. The primary role of the Additional Members is to provide academic and research/creative project support to the student.

Co-Chair: A single member of a graduate committee may be designated as Co-Chair. The Co-Chair has an integral role in supervising the student's research that goes beyond that normal for other non-Chair members of the committee. Only UW Graduate Faculty, including External Adjunct Graduate Faculty, may be Co-Chairs.

External Member: External Members are non-UW personnel or UW non-academic personnel who serve on the committee to facilitate the student's research or creative activity. External Members are not UW Graduate Faculty.

Graduate Faculty: Per the By-Laws of the School of Graduate Education, the Graduate Faculty is composed of individuals who offer and direct graduate education. UW academic personnel are

appointed as Graduate Faculty either as a function of their position (i.e., tenure-track or tenured faculty) or via the exception process. There are two categories of Graduate Faculty:

Tenure-Stream Graduate Faculty (TGF): Tenured Track and Tenured faculty members may serve on graduate student committees in all capacities: committee Chair or Co-Chair at the Master's level and at the Doctoral level, committee Member, or Outside Member, as long as they do not have an adjunct or other appointment in that department.

Non-Tenure-Stream Graduate Faculty (NTGF): Non-Tenure-Stream Graduate Faculty may serve as committee Chair or Co-Chair at the Master's level and for Professional Doctorates, and as a committee Member at the Master's and Doctoral levels. Only faculty on a fixed-term rolling contract or fixed-term rolling contract track are eligible to be NTGF. The home department will make a commitment to ensure the NTGF member's job description is commensurate with their service as a NTGF.

III. POLICY

A. Forming a Graduate Committee

1. Committee Assignment Form

Students, in consultation with their major professor/committee Chair or graduate program coordinator, nominate a graduate committee by completing the [Graduate 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 Graduate Committee Assignment Form as early in their program as is consistent with their specific degree program expectations. In general, graduate committees should be assigned by the end of the second semester 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. The Registrar will not accept a Program of Study form until the Graduate Committee Assignment Form has been approved by the School of Graduate Education and is recorded with the Registrar.

Committee members, in signing the Graduate 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 committee members, Committee Assignment Forms must be approved by: 1) the relevant Department Head/Interdisciplinary Program Director, 2) Dean of the graduate degree's home school or college, and 3) the Vice Provost & Dean of Graduate Education. After final approval by the Vice Provost & Dean of Graduate Education, the Graduate Committee Assignment Form will be recorded and forwarded to the Registrar by the Vice Provost & Dean of Graduate

Education. 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 Graduate Faculty. For Doctoral Committees, the majority and no fewer than three (3) members must be UW Graduate Faculty. In no case can the number of non-Graduate Faculty, UW academic personnel, and External Members represent the majority of members on a graduate committee.

The graduate committee functions to guide all aspects of the student's degree completion in an advisory capacity for the student's coursework and research programs. The committee will also determine the outcome of required preliminary examinations, the thesis/dissertation, project report or creative activity, and conduct the final defense examination.

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 (3) required members (Table 1), 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, and a Required Member. Academic personnel can serve in each committee role as described in Table 1. In addition, the majority of Master's Committee members must be UW Graduate Faculty.

2. Doctoral Committees

Doctoral Committees consist of at minimum, four (4) required 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, and two (2) Required Members. Both the Chair and the Outside Member must be UW Graduate Faculty. Academic personnel who can serve in each committee role appear in Table

2. In addition, the majority of Doctoral Committee members must be UW Graduate Faculty.

C. Roles and Responsibilities of Graduate Committee Members

1. Committee Chair (must be UW Graduate Faculty)

The role of the Chair is to serve in primary direction of the student's research or creative activities. The 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. Only members of the UW Graduate Faculty (except External Adjunct Graduate Faculty) may serve as committee Chairs (Tables 1 & 2).

A decision to serve as 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 Member (must be UW TGF)

The Outside Member represents the School of Graduate Education, 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 Member, in consultation with the Chair and Department Head, is critical for fairness with which UW treats its graduate students and ensuring institutional academic integrity. The Outside Member is not expected to contribute topical expertise, rather the role of the Outside Member is to challenge the rigor and fairness of the process. 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 an Outside Member are necessarily the most rigorous of all committee membership. As such, the Outside Member must be TGF. Pre-tenured TGF may serve as Outside Members on committees. However, department and unit heads may restrict a pre-tenured TGF from doing so in their discretion. 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 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., PiEE), 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 UW TGF whose academic home differs from the academic home of the Chair. In the case of combined/joint departments with multiple graduate degree programs, departmental faculty and the Head should meet to decide who may or may not serve as Outside Members for particular graduate degrees, and the Head is responsible for communicating this information to the School of Graduate Education. 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. Faculty holding Internal Adjunct Graduate Faculty status in a department may not serve as Outside Members for degrees in that department. 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 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 Members must be included to meet the required minimum number of total committee members (four (4) for Doctoral Committees and three (3) for Master's Committees). The primary role of the Other Required Members is to provide academic and research/creative project support to the student. Restrictions on who can serve as an Other Required Member are few, as long as the majority of the entire committee is Graduate Faculty (see Tables 1 and 2).

4. Co-Chair

If deemed appropriate by the student in consultation with their Chair, a member of the graduate committee may be designated as the Co-Chair at the time of the committee formation (or change) process. The Co-Chair may be one of the Required Members, except the Outside Member. Alternatively, the Co-Chair may be an Additional Member. External, non-UW members may not serve as Co-Chairs, unless they have been granted External Adjunct Graduate Faculty status. Normally, someone is designated as Co-Chair if they have an integral role in supervising the student's research that goes beyond that normal for other non-Chair members of the committee.

5. External Members

External Members are non-UW personnel or non-academic, UW personnel who serve on the committee to facilitate the student's research or creative activity. An External 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 Graduate Faculty on the committee. 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 Chair or the Outside 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. External Members must submit their current C.V. as part of the graduate committee formation process.

D. Other Considerations in Graduate Committee Membership

1. Retired UW Faculty

Emeritus academic personnel who had Graduate Faculty status upon retirement, retain their designation as UW Graduate Faculty and their eligibility to serve on graduate committees in the same fashion as they did prior to retirement-given department/unit approval.

2. UW Committee Members that Leave the University Before the Student Finishes

When the departing faculty member is Chair of 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 the School of Graduate Education via the Committee Change Form.

Graduate Faculty who leave the University will have a one-year grace period that is applicable to any ongoing roles on UW graduate committees. During this period, such individuals may continue to advise and serve as Chair or in any required member role for any students in-progress at the time of the individual's end of employment with the University. If a student does not complete the degree during that one-year grace period, the departed faculty member's committee role should be replaced by another UW Graduate Faculty member consistent with the guidelines for chairing advisory/examining committees outlined herein. The former Graduate Faculty member may remain on the committee as an External Member, if appointed as such. 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.

3. UW Academic Personnel Serving as Additional Members

UW academic personnel without Graduate Faculty status may serve on committees as Additional Members. 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.

4. Conflicts of Interest and Conflicts of Commitment 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 in the [University Conflicts of Interest and Commitment Policy](#). Appearance of a conflict of interest may be as serious as an actual distortion of behavior. A conflict of interest exists when an employee has an external interest that affects or provides an incentive to affect the employee's conduct of his/her University activities. A conflict of commitment exists when an employee renders professional service that is not part of his/her duties to the University to the detriment of his/her obligations to the University.

Conflicts of interest or commitment 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. Additional guidance is found in the [UW Code of Ethical Conduct](#).

Graduate committees may contain members whose relationships may appear to lend credibility to challenges if disclosed. Such relationships should be disclosed to the Department Head, student and committee Chair, Outside Member, and documented. Disclosure to the student and the other committee members can be held as sealed documents by the Department 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 disclosures so that conflicted votes are balanced by other members). Finally, for consistency with the UW Code of Ethical Conduct, 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).

5. 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 Member serve as the initial reporting level. Usually, a graduate student can consult with their Chair to resolve any mismatched member perceptions. Occasionally students or the Chair decide to revise the committee appointments using the Committee Change 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 school/college Dean. Members may choose to report directly to the School of Graduate Education 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 school/college Dean (in that order) to express their concerns. The School of Graduate Education 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"). The School of Graduate Education can provide guidance at the request of the Chair, Department Head, or Dean.

6. **Adjunct Academic Personnel**

External adjunct academic personnel. External 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 may be nominated for External Adjunct Graduate Faculty status. External Adjunct Graduate Faculty status may be granted based on the individual's ability to contribute to graduate education as demonstrated by: holding a terminal degree or clear equivalent considered appropriate to the department or degree program; a letter of nomination from the dean or department chair; and a 1–2 page letter from the candidate providing a rationale for the request and documentation of the merit for the request. External Adjunct Graduate Faculty may serve as Co-Chairs and Regular Members on graduate committees.

Individuals holding external adjunct appointments but who do not have External Adjunct Graduate Faculty appointments, can serve on committees as outlined in this document on a case-by case basis via the External Member role.

Internal adjunct academic personnel. Internal adjunct faculty are those UW academic personnel who have an adjunct appointment in a department outside of their academic home. Internal Adjunct Graduate Faculty may serve in any capacity that aligns with the privileges the faculty member possesses in their home department. Privileges shall not exceed those of the faculty member's home department and shall be in alignment with the wishes of the adjunct department.

7. **Exception Requests**

Department Heads, with the approval of school/college Dean and the School of Graduate Education, 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. school and college Deans and the School of Graduate Education 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. Normally, exceptions involving an individual's role on graduate committees should be avoided, and such individuals should be nominated for Graduate Faculty status.

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. To apply for this exception, a 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 and all three should be

submitted as part of the *Committee Assignment or Change Form*. The request will be reviewed by the School of Graduate Education. 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 Director and the school/college Dean before they will be considered by the School of Graduate Education.

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 an academic unit, 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). The term-exception request should be made as 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 Vice Provost and Dean of 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: School of Graduate Education/Academic Affairs

Source: None

Links: <http://www.uwyo.edu/regs-policies>, <http://www.uwyo.edu/uwgrad/index.html>

Associated Regulations, Policies, and Forms: [UW Catalog](#), [Committee Assignment Form](#)

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Table 1. Master’s Degree Committee Member Roles as Reflected on the Committee Assignment Form¹

Role on Committee	Academic Personnel Description	Required / Optional
Chair	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (except External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Required, all committees
Co-Chair	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Internal or External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Optional
Outside Member	UW TGF 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).	Required, all committees
Required Member	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Internal or External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Required, all committees <i>unless</i> a co-chair serves as the 3rd required member
Additional Member	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Adjunct Graduate Faculty), or UW academic personnel without UW Graduate Faculty status.	Optional - additional members can serve without exception request as long as general committee requirements are met ²
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 ²

¹ Master’s Committees must include three (3) Required Members, including a Chair and Outside Member.

² General Committee Requirements – In all cases the majority of members on a Master’s Committee should be UW Graduate Faculty. In no case can the number of non-UW Graduate Faculty committee members represent the majority of members on a Master’s Committee.

Table 2. Doctoral Degree Committee Member Roles on the Committee Assignment Form¹

Role on Committee	Academic Personnel description	Required / Optional
Chair	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> for professional docrorates only	Required, all committees
Co-Chair	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Internal and External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Optional
Outside Member	<u>UW TGE</u> 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).	Required, all committees
Required Member	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Internal and External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Required, all committees
Required Member	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> (including Internal and External Adjunct Graduate Faculty)	Required all committees <i>except</i> if a Co-Chair serves as one of the required members; all committees must conform to general committee requirements ²
Additional Member	a. <u>UW Graduate Faculty</u> , or UW academic personnel without UW Graduate Faculty status.	Optional – added members can serve without exception request if general committee requirements are met ²
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 ²

¹ Doctoral Committees must include four (4) 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.

² General Committee Requirements – No less than three (3) members and the majority of members on Doctoral Committees must be UW Graduate Faculty. In no case can the number of non-UW Graduate Faculty represent the majority of members on a committee.