

Choosing an Advisor and Committee

Graduate degrees are awarded by the Texas A&M Office of Graduate Studies (OGS). The OGS relies on a committee of faculty from student's home academic department to advise the student and oversee her or his program of study and research. Accordingly, each student must form a committee of faculty members from and work with them.

Committees are very important. They can ask the student to take particular courses; they can ask for changes in the student's degree plan; they administer the students written and oral exams (as appropriate); and they review the student's research proposal and the completed thesis or dissertation.

The committee chair serves as the student's academic advisor (a role separate from the department graduate advisor). The committee chair is the most important committee member because they will mentor the student most closely and will help him or her select other committee members.

All committee members must sign all official forms associated with completing degree requirements. No degree requirement can be completed without the formation and approval of the student's committee. The Department Head also must sign these forms before they can be submitted to the OGS. (Usually, the Department Head asks the student to have the graduate advisor review the forms first to insure that department guidelines have been met.)

Because the committee plays such an important role in the student's graduate education, students are advised to form committees as soon as possible. The department graduate advisor can provide assistance in getting started. The topic is discussed at length in the proseminar required of all new graduate students.

A masters student should try to form a committee early in their second semester and no later than the end of their second semester. A doctoral student should try to form a committee no later than the end of their third semester.

In both cases, it is important to do this in order to make good progress toward completing the degree in a timely manner. In some cases, the OGS will bar the student from registering for classes if they have not formed a committee and filed a degree plan.

The Graduate Catalog (available on-line or in the bookstore) provides a lengthy discussion of the characteristics, requirements, and responsibilities of student committees. Students should obtain and read the relevant sections of the graduate

catalog. The sections below provide brief outlines of some of the material presented in the graduate catalog.

The MS Committee

MS Committee Membership

- . at least three members of the graduate faculty
- . members must be “representative of the student’s fields of study and research”.
- . the chair or one co-chair must be from the student’s major department (i.e., Sociology)
- . at least one committee member must be from a department other than the student’s major department.
- . committee members must be from the College Station or Galveston campuses.

MS Committee Responsibilities

- . degree plan
- . research proposal
- . thesis
- . final examination
- . counseling on academic matters.
- . guiding and directing the student’s academic program.
- . recommending the student for progression to the doctoral program.

The PhD Committee

PhD Committee Membership

- . at least four members of the graduate faculty
- . members must be “representative of the student’s fields of study and research”.
- . the chair or one co-chair must be from the student’s major department (i.e., Sociology)

- . at least one committee member must be from a department other than the student's major department.
- . the committee chair must be from the College Station or Galveston campuses.

PhD Committee Responsibilities

- . degree plan
- . preliminary examination
- . dissertation proposal
- . dissertation
- . final examination
- . counseling on academic matters
- . guiding and directing the student's academic program.

Related Issues

Factors to Consider for Chairs

- . areas of research expertise and interest.
- . reputation and standing in the field.
- . willingness to work with student.
- . compatibility of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Factors to Consider for Members

- . areas of research expertise and interest.
- . ability to advise on theory and methodology
- . compatibility with the student and with each other's perspectives.

Informal Responsibilities

- . professional mentoring.
- . recommendation letters.
- . post-doctoral mentoring.