

How to be a good **GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHAIR**

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This document should provide you with everything you need to know to carry out your duties as Chair of a Graduate Advisory Committee. The most up-to-date version of this document will always be found on the ACB web site. You may wish to print out whatever section is relevant, and bring it to your next Graduate Advisory Committee meeting.

Note: See "Policies & Procedures" manual of the Graduate Program in Anatomy and Cell Biology for more details, guidelines, and information.

How to Establish the Initial Program of Studies

Background:

Since most or all of the coursework in the M.Sc. or Ph.D. program occurs in the first year, the student must have the input of a Graduate Advisory Committee to review and approve the initial Program of Studies at the time of entrance into the program.

Preparation:

Immediately upon the Student's arrival, the Student and Supervisor should discuss and agree upon the general nature of the research project, the coursework required to meet academic, research and career objectives, and the composition of the Graduate Advisory Committee.

It is the responsibility of the Supervisor to form a Graduate Advisory Committee, identify its Chair, and call a meeting before the student registers for class. Graduate Advisory Committees for M.Sc. students must have three members. Graduate Advisory Committees for Ph.D. students must have five members, including one from outside the department (the Cognate member). Co-supervisors count as one member.

The Student should fill out the Initial Program of Studies form and circulate it to the members of the Graduate Advisory Committee before the first meeting.

Day of the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair records the minutes of the meeting.

The Student is not required to make a presentation.

The Graduate Advisory Committee should review and discuss the proposed Program of Studies and agree upon the following:

- The makeup of the Graduate Advisory Committee is appropriate
- Coursework required for the Program of Studies
 - Correct any background deficiencies
 - Prepare for research
 - Prepare for comprehensive exam (if applicable)
 - Prepare for career
 - Do not repeat prior courses (i.e. medical)
- General nature of research project
- Financial support for student is in place
- Necessary safety and ethics training courses are identified

The Advisory Committee Chair should be familiar with the minimum credit unit requirement and associated rules. Note that students will be required to pay extra tuition if they register for courses not listed on the Program of Studies. Does the student want to take additional courses? If so, should those courses be included in the Program of Studies?

Following meeting:

Student must submit the Initial Program of Studies form to the Advisory Committee Chair. The Advisory Committee Chair submits the final version of the Initial Program of Studies and the minutes of the first meeting to the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator enters the Program of Studies in the electronic database, and maintains a paper file.

The Chair of the Graduate Program Committee reviews and approves the Program of Studies.

Student registers for classes, begins any non-credit training, and initiates thesis project.

The Program of Studies can be amended at any time in the future.

How to Conduct the Annual Progress Report Meeting

Background:

Every student makes an Annual Progress Report to their Graduate Advisory Committee in early summer (usually May). The Graduate Coordinator will schedule all Annual Progress Report Meetings.

An Annual Progress Report must be filed for each student registered in our program, every year, whether they are present or absent from the department. It is especially important to file progress reports when their are any unusual situations, and in the final months before the defense is scheduled.

Additional meetings of the Graduate Advisory Committee may be called at any time (see next section), but these additional meetings do not constitute Annual Progress Report meetings.

Preparation:

For the Annual Progress Report meeting, the student completes the Annual Review of Progress form and a written Progress Report (5 - 10 pages) and distributes it to the members of their Graduate Advisory Committee one week before the meeting.

Day of the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair obtains the Student's file from the Graduate Coordinator.

The Advisory Committee Chair records the minutes of the meeting.

The Student makes a 20 minute oral presentation reviewing their progress in their thesis work. Members of the Graduate Advisory Committee provide commentary, help and advice, as necessary.

The Student and the Graduate Advisory Committee discuss whether satisfactory progress is being made in all aspects of the program:

- Research project
- Required coursework
- Non-credit requirements (ACB 990, GSR 960, safety training, ethics training, etc.)

Specific additional topics that may arise (may require prior preparation):

- Changes in the Program of Studies
- Transfer from MSc to PhD program (see requirements for Qualifying Exam)
- Permission to write thesis (see specific requirements)
- Scheduling of Comprehensive Exam (PhD only, see instructions)
- Time limit, extension, or leaves of absence

Any additional issues or problems are discussed.

The Chair may elect to ask the Student to leave the room so that the Graduate Advisory Committee may deliberate in private, if desired.

Any necessary changes are made to the Annual Review of Progress form.

Following the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair returns the Student's file, the Annual Review of Progress form, and the minutes of the meeting, to the Graduate Coordinator. It is especially helpful if the minutes can be provided in electronic format.

The Graduate Coordinator enters information in the electronic database and maintains paper files. The Chair of Graduate Program Committee reviews and approves the Annual Progress Report. The Graduate Coordinator posts a copy of the meeting minutes to the student's PAWS account.

How to Conduct Additional Meetings of the Graduate Advisory Committee

Background:

From time to time, it may be desirable to hold additional meetings of the Graduate Advisory Committee outside of the format of the Annual Progress Report. These additional meetings may be requested by the Student, the Supervisor, the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee, the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee or the Department Head. Requests for a meeting should be directed to the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee, who will call the meeting.

Specific topics that may warrant discussion by the Graduate Advisory Committee include (but are not limited to):

- Changes in the Program of Studies
 - changes in coursework
 - major changes in research plan
- Transfer from MSc to PhD program (see requirements for Qualifying Exam)
- Permission to write thesis (see specific requirements)
- Scheduling of Comprehensive Exam (PhD only, see instructions)
- Time limit, extension, or leaves of absence
- Difficulty of the Student in meeting academic objectives in a timely manner
- Difficulty of the Supervisor in providing adequate supervision and/or resources
- Requests for a change of Supervisor

Note that there are specific formats for meetings called to approve a MSc/PhD transfer, or to give Permission to Write (see below).

Preparation:

The Graduate Coordinator will assist in scheduling the meeting at the request of the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee. The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee must inform the Graduate Coordinator of the purpose of the meeting, list of attendees, and details of attendee availability.

Any written material to be reviewed at the meeting should be circulated to members of the Graduate Advisory Committee beforehand.

Day of the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair obtains the Student's file from the Graduate Coordinator.

The Advisory Committee Chair records the minutes of the meeting.

Topics of discussion should be clearly identified. Any change to the Program of Studies must be formally approved. The Graduate Advisory Committee should attempt to reach consensus on the recommendation of a resolution to any problem, any recommended course of action, or the timing and nature of future milestones to be met.

The Chair may elect to ask the Student to leave the room so that the Graduate Advisory Committee may deliberate in private, if desired.

Following the meeting:

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee submits the minutes of the meeting (including an explicit description of any approved changes to the Program of Studies) to the Graduate Coordinator.

The Graduate Coordinator updates the Program of Studies (if necessary), enters the minutes in the electronic data base (not as an Annual Progress Report), maintains paper files and posts a copy of the minutes to the student's PAWS account.

The Chair of the Graduate Program Committee reviews and approves any changes to the Program of Studies.

How to Conduct a M.Sc. to Ph.D. Transfer Meeting

Background:

The candidate Student must be making excellent progress in the M.Sc. program and have completed 9 graduate credit units at the time of request for transfer to the Ph.D. program.

Transfer can only occur during the period from 12 months to 24 months following initial registration in the M.Sc. program.

The meeting to seek permission to transfer to the Ph.D. program constitutes a written and oral Qualifying Exam.

Preparation:

The Graduate Coordinator will assist in scheduling the meeting at the request of the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee. The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee must inform the Graduate Coordinator of the purpose of the meeting, list of attendees, and details of attendee availability.

At least one week before this meeting, the student must prepare and distribute to the Graduate Advisory Committee a written document that thoroughly outlines both past progress and the future research project that is proposed for the Ph.D. program. This document constitutes the written portion of the Qualifying Exam.

Day of the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair obtains the Student's file from the Graduate Coordinator.

The Advisory Committee Chair records the minutes of the meeting.

The student makes a 20 minute oral presentation of completed and planned research work, and answers questions about the written document. This presentation and subsequent discussion constitute the oral portion of the Qualifying Exam.

A new Program of Studies (new Graduate Advisory Committee, (new research, additional coursework, non-credit requirements, etc.) for the Ph.D. program is discussed.

The Student is asked to leave the room.

The committee determines whether the following requirements are met:

- Student is performing well in coursework
- Student demonstrates excellent progress potentially leading to Ph.D. work
- Student demonstrates substantial command of subject matter
- Student demonstrates independent thinking
- Student demonstrates mature scientific writing skill
- A suitable new Program of Studies is proposed

The committee approves or denies the transfer request, or postpones a decision pending further progress on the part of the Student.

Following the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair submits minutes of the meeting to the Graduate Coordinator. The outcome of the written and oral components of the Qualifying Exam, and the request for a transfer, must be indicated in the minutes of the meeting. If approval to transfer is granted, the minutes must also state the date that the Qualifying Exam was passed, the effective date of the transfer, and a give a complete outline of the new Program of Studies. The Chair of the Graduate Program Committee reviews and approves the transfer and the new Program of Studies. The Advisory Committee Chair completes the M.Sc. to Ph.D. transfer form (GSR 206), obtains the nestudent's signature, and submits it to the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator obtains the signature of the Department Head, submits form GSR 206 to CGSR,

and enters the new Program of Studies in the electronic database. The Graduate Coordinator posts a copy of the minutes to the student's PAWS account.

The Student's stipend should be adjusted upward beginning the month of the effective transfer date.

Permission to Write

Background:

As the student nears the end of a M.Sc. or Ph.D. program, they must seek 'permission to write' from their Graduate Advisory Committee. This can occur at a regularly scheduled Annual Progress Report meeting, or at a meeting called at any other time. 'Permission to write' is a misnomer. The student is permitted to work on the written thesis at any time. What is really being sought is permission to stop laboratory work.

Preparation:

The Graduate Coordinator will assist in scheduling the meeting at the request of the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee. The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee must inform the Graduate Coordinator of the purpose of the meeting, list of attendees, and details of attendee availability.

The task of the student is to obtain the agreement of the Advisory Committee that the experimental work that has already been completed is sufficient to write a thesis. One week before the meeting, the student should distribute to the Advisory Committee a written report that shows all data figures that will go into the thesis, and an outline of the thesis written in the form of a Table of Contents.

Day of the meeting:

The Advisory Committee Chair records the minutes of the meeting.

The Student makes a 20 minute oral presentation reviewing all data to be included in the thesis.

The Student and the Graduate Advisory Committee discuss whether sufficient data have been collected to write a thesis, whether data analysis is adequate, and whether the outline of the proposed thesis is appropriate.

Check to be sure that all requirements on the Program of Studies have been completed.

The Graduate Advisory Committee Chair may ask the student to leave the room to allow the Graduate Advisory Committee to continue deliberations in private.

The Graduate Advisory Committee should endeavor to make a clear and unambiguous decision about whether enough work has been completed, or what specific additional work must be completed.

If it is the consensus of the Graduate Advisory Committee, the student is given 'permission to write'. The Graduate Advisory Committee may alternatively give provisional 'permission to write' if a small amount of clearly defined, additional work is identified. It should be clearly stipulated whether this additional work must be attempted, or whether it must be completed. The Supervisor is charged with informing the Chair when the additional requirement has been met.

The Advisory Committee may deny 'permission to write'. In such a case, a new request for permission to write must be presented to the Graduate Advisory Committee at a future meeting.

Following the meeting:

The Graduate Advisory Committee Chair forwards the minutes of the meeting to the Graduate Coordinator. The minutes should indicate the date that 'permission to write' was obtained.

The Graduate Coordinator enters the minutes in the electronic database, maintains paper files, and posts a copy of the meeting minutes to the student's PAWS account.

How to Conduct a Comprehensive Examination

Background:

The Comprehensive Exam for Ph.D. students should occur approximately 18 months after the student enters the Ph.D. program or transfers from the M.Sc. program.

Preparation:

Plans for the comprehensive exam are finalized at a meeting of the student's Graduate Advisory Committee (Annual Progress Report meeting, or any other Advisory Committee meeting) within 15 months of entering Ph.D. program. The student should consult the Policies and Procedures Manual for details about the format.

The student will be examined in four subject areas, in oral examination format. The first subject area is the area of the student's thesis work. The remaining three subject areas are chosen by the student from the following list:

- Cell Biology
- Histology
- Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- Gross Anatomy
- Developmental Biology
- Neurobiology
- Neuroanatomy
- Biomedical Imaging

If the student wishes to substitute a different subject area the choice must be approved by the Graduate Program Committee (allow 2-4 wks).

The Graduate Advisory Committee determines a list of faculty Examiners with appropriate expertise for each of the chosen subject areas. The Supervisor examines in the thesis topic area. The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee contacts potential examiners and confirms their participation.

The student is entitled to ask each Examiner in advance about the general nature of the requirement for that particular topic.

The student should be permitted no more than 3 months to prepare.

Day of the Exam:

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee chairs the exam and records the minutes, but does not ask questions. (If the Advisory Committee Chair is an Examiner, another faculty member can substitute to chair the exam.)

Examiners ask questions in their assigned subject area. No more than 15-20 minutes per Examiner in the first round. No more than two rounds. Examiners may explore weak spots in the student's knowledge, but should not persevere unnecessarily.

The student exits the room. The examining panel deliberates and assigns a grade of 'fail', 'pass', or 'excellent'. A pass grade requires performance at the advanced undergraduate level in the thesis topic area and at least two other areas, with room for slightly lower performance in only one area. A grade of excellent is appropriate for overall performance in the top 20% (i.e. 1 out of 5 students) with no significant deficiency in any of the four areas.

If a grade of 'fail' is assessed, the student must retake the Comprehensive Examination. The student will be re-examined in only those areas in which performance was deemed to be inadequate. The student will be given up to two months of additional preparation time for each area of inadequacy.

A second failure to pass the Comprehensive Exam results in discontinuation from the Ph.D. program.

After the Exam:

The Graduate Advisory Committee Chair reports the minutes and results of the exam in a memo to the Graduate Coordinator. The memo should specify the date of the exam, the subject areas and the faculty examiners, and the final outcome (pass, fail, excellent).

How to Chair a M.Sc. Thesis Defense

Preparation:

The Supervisor has the primary role of guiding the student through the thesis-writing process.

Once a firm timeline for thesis completion is agreed upon, the Supervisor should informally contact potential External Examiners. The External Examiner should come from a cognate department within the U of S and be a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research. The External Examiner should have no recent history of collaboration with the supervisor, and no prior involvement with the student or the project.

The student must deliver the completed thesis to all members of the Graduate Advisory Committee a minimum of four weeks prior to the defense date. The Graduate Advisory Committee reviews the thesis for acceptable quality within one week.

Once the thesis is found to be of acceptable quality, the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee will advise the Graduate Coordinator to prepare the necessary paperwork and arrange a time and place for the defence.

The student will distribute any corrected version of the thesis to the examining committee three weeks prior to the defense, and will provide one additional copy to the Graduate Coordinator for delivery to the External Examiner.

The Graduate Coordinator along with CGSR will insure that all requirements for program completion are met. The Graduate Coordinator will insure that all necessary forms are available, along with the student file, on the day of the defense.

Day of Defense:

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee will obtain all necessary paperwork (see below) and the student's file from the Graduate Coordinator. The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee will conduct the defense.

A general audience is permitted at the student presentation phase of the defense.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee introduces the candidate (candidate's background, title of thesis).

The candidate makes a 20 minute oral presentation, followed by any questions from the general audience. The general audience leaves the room.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee reviews the defence procedure with Examiners.

The External Examiner begins questions. All Examiners participate. There are two rounds of questions (10 - 15 minutes each for the first round, generally never more than two rounds).

The candidate exits the room. The Examiners deliberate, then vote to select one of the following options:

- 1) Thesis acceptable, with or without minor revisions. Oral defense acceptable. Candidate passes. Any minor revisions must be completed in 1-2 weeks.
- 2) Major revision of written thesis required. Oral defense acceptable. Revisions must be completed in 6 weeks.
- 3) Thesis acceptable. Oral defense inadequate. A second oral examination is scheduled within 3 months.
- 4) Major revision of thesis required. Oral defense inadequate. New thesis must be submitted and a second oral defense scheduled in 6-12 months.
- 5). Either the thesis or the oral examination is completely unacceptable, with no prospect for improvement to acceptable level. The candidate exits the program with no degree.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee will return all paperwork associated with the thesis defense and the recommendation for the award of a degree to the Graduate Coordinator. (Exception: form GSR 403.2 Oral Defense Report of the External Examiner).

In cases in which the thesis is provisionally acceptable, but minor or major revisions to the thesis are required, the Supervisor will refrain from signing form GSR 301. Nevertheless, form GSR 301 (3 copies) will be returned to the Graduate Coordinator with all other paperwork immediately upon completion of the defense. The Supervisor must review and approve any required thesis revisions that are completed after the defense. Once the Supervisor is satisfied with the revisions, the Supervisor contacts the Graduate Coordinator to sign form GSR 301. Only after this occurs, the Graduate Coordinator will submit all paperwork to CGSR.

After Defense:

The following items must be reviewed and submitted to CGSR by the Graduate Coordinator:

Recommendation for Award of a Master's Degree (GSR 300.2)	(signed by grad chair or dept head)
Certificate of Master's Thesis Work (GSR 301)	(signed by examiners, three copies)
Vote for Thesis Award (GSR 211)	(committee chair)
Final electronic copy of (revised) thesis	(prepared by student)
Exit questionnaire	(completed by student, optional)

The External Examiner submits:

Oral Defense Report of the External Examiner (GSR 403.2)

The student submits online:

Application to Graduate

The student delivers to the Graduate Coordinator a new electronic copy of the final thesis with all revisions completed and approved by the Supervisor.

The student must arrange to submit an electronic version of the completed thesis to CGSR.

Bound copies of the thesis are no longer required, but may be produced, at the expense of the student.

How to Chair a Ph.D. Thesis Defense

Preparation:

The Supervisor has the primary role of guiding the student through the thesis-writing process.

Once a firm timeline for thesis completion is agreed upon, the Supervisor should informally contact at least three potential External Examiners. External examiners must come from outside the U of S. The External Examiner should have no recent history of collaboration with the supervisor, and no prior involvement with the student or the project. Note that travel funds are available from CGSR to bring in External Examiners, or that facilities are available for a teleconference thesis defense.

The Graduate Advisory Committee must receive a completed thesis from the student a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the defense date. The Advisory Committee reviews the thesis to determine if it is of a quality acceptable for forwarding to the external examiner within one week.

Once the thesis is found to be acceptable and the committee has selected 3 potential External Examiners, the Chair of the Advisory Committee will notify the Graduate Coordinator the thesis' readiness and the 3 names and details of the External Examiners. A CV of the selected External Examiner is required for CGSR. The Graduate Coordinator will contact the selected External Examiner by email and discuss his or her availability for the defense. Once a defense day, time and location is agreed upon, the Graduate Coordinator will prepare the GSR 300.1 form and acquire the Dean, Department Head or Designate signature. The Graduate Program Chair will be notified and may sign the document. The GSR 300.1 is submitted with the CV and 2 copies of the student's thesis. This must be done a minimum of 4 weeks prior to the defense date. CGSR will approve (or not) of the External Examiner and notify the Graduate Coordinator. If the selected External Examiner is not approved, the CGSR will contact the second name on the list for availability. If the External Examiner is approved, CGSR will notify the Graduate Coordinator, and send by courier an invitation to the External Examiner, hard copies of the thesis and form for pre- and post- defense reports.

The Graduate Coordinator, along with CGSR, will ensure all program requirements are met. If an item is missing or there are system errors, the student, Supervisor and Graduate Program Chair will be notified.

The External Examiner submits the Pre-Defense Report of the External Examiner (GSR 403.1) to CGSR.

Day of Defense:

The defense is formally chaired by a Dean's Designate chosen by CGSR. CGSR provides all necessary paperwork to the Dean's Designate.

The Dean's Designate usually asks the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee to conduct the actual examination. The examination proceeds as follows:

A general audience is permitted at the student presentation phase of the defense. Alternatively, a separate, public seminar can be arranged.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee introduces the candidate (candidate's background, title of thesis).

The candidate makes a 20 minute oral presentation, followed by any questions from the general audience. The general audience leaves the room.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee reviews the defence procedure with Examiners.

The External Examiner begins questions. All examiners participate. There are two rounds of questions (10 - 15 minutes each for the first round, generally never more than two rounds). External examiner receives time priority.

The candidate exits the room. The Examiners deliberate, then vote to select one of the following options:

- 1) Thesis acceptable, with or without minor revisions. Oral defense acceptable. Candidate passes. Any minor revisions must be completed in 1-2 weeks.
- 2) Major revision of written thesis required. Oral defense acceptable. Revisions must be completed in 6 weeks.
- 3) Thesis acceptable. Oral defense inadequate. A second oral examination is scheduled within 3 months.
- 4) Major revision of thesis required. Oral defense inadequate. New thesis must be submitted and a second oral defense scheduled in 6-12 months.
- 5). Either the thesis or the oral examination is completely unacceptable, with no prospect for improvement to acceptable level. The candidate exits the program with no degree.

The Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee will collect all paperwork associated with the thesis defense and the recommendation for the award of a degree and deliver it to the Graduate Coordinator. (Exceptions: form GSR 403.2 Oral Defense Report of the External Examiner, GSR 403.3 Oral Defense Report of the Dean's Designate).

In cases in which the thesis is provisionally acceptable, but minor or major revisions to the thesis are required, the Supervisor will refrain from signing the Certificate of Thesis Work. Nevertheless, the Certificate of Thesis Work form (3 copies) will be returned to the Graduate Coordinator with all other paperwork immediately upon completion of the defense. The Supervisor must review and approve any required thesis revisions that are completed after the defense. Once the Supervisor is satisfied with the revisions, the Supervisor contacts the Graduate Coordinator to sign the Certificate of Thesis Work. Only after this occurs, the Graduate Coordinator will submit all paperwork to CGSR.

After Defense:

The following items must be submitted to CGSR by the Graduate Coordinator:

Certificate of Thesis Work	(signed by examiners, three copies)
Permission to use Postgraduate Thesis (GSR 302)	(signed by student)
Vote for Thesis Award (GSR 211)	(if applicable)
Two copies of (revised) thesis for binding	(prepared by student)
Oral Defense Report of the Dean's Designate (GSR 403.3)	(prepared by Dean's Designate)
Exit questionnaire	(completed by student, optional)

The External Examiner submits:

Oral Defense Report of the External Examiner (GSR 403.2)

The student submits online:

Application to Graduate

The student delivers to the Graduate Coordinator a new electronic copy of the final thesis with all revisions completed and approved by the Supervisor.

CGSR completes the Recommendation For the Award of Doctor of Philosophy, and it is signed by the Dean of the CGSR.

The student must arrange to submit an electronic version of the completed thesis to CGSR.

Bound copies of the thesis are no longer required, but may be produced, at the expense of the student.