

## Higher Education Program COMMITTEE GUIDELINES and PROCEDURES Updated August 24, 2017

The thesis or dissertation is a professional product that not only represents the student's level of achievement, but also the scholarship generated by the program, department, college, and George Mason University. The committee works to ensure the product demonstrates original research that contributes new knowledge and/or a reinterpretation of existing knowledge to the area of investigation. Students are to work closely with their committees throughout the proposal, research, and writing process. The student is responsible for scheduling meetings with committee members, and staying in close contact with his or her committee.

### ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chairs serve as the major advisor and mentor to students as they research and write their thesis, project, or dissertation. Chairs are responsible for following all program, department, college, and university procedures. **PhD in Education students, do not assume your portfolio chair is your dissertation chair.** Portfolio committees disband after portfolio III. Expectations of the chair include:

#### Proposal

- Consult and meet with the student on a regular basis. Chairs are to be available monthly, but students are obligated to initiate appointments.
- Communicate with committee members about student's progress.
- Advise on topic selection (e.g., appropriateness, academic value).
- Guide the student in the proposal writing process (e.g., clearly defined problem statement, precise research questions, viable methodology, focused literature review, and thorough bibliography).
- Counsel student on expectations of reliability, validity, fidelity, and/or trustworthiness of data-gathering methods, their execution, and subsequent findings. Note that the chair may defer to the committee methodologist for issues specific to methodology.
- Provide students with and instruct them to review good samples before completing the proposal.
- Ensure that all research activities involving human subjects directed by a GMU faculty or staff member or conducted by a GMU student (including thesis and dissertation work), or that involve GMU students as participants, are submitted to the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) for review and approval. Refer to the website <http://oria.gmu.edu/> for information. All research activities will be reviewed by ORIA prior to implementation of the research activities. The Committee Chair will serve as the principal investigator (PI) for the research and assumes oversight for the legal and ethical conduct of the work. Note that HEP prefers that applications for human subjects approval **not** be submitted by students **until after** the dissertation proposal defense.
- Facilitate committee discussions about creating and improving the proposal.
- Uphold academic rigor by not allowing the project to move forward unless it meets high research standards.
- Follow University and CHSS/CEHD/MAIS policies on timelines. Note, extensions must be recommended by the HEP director to the Dean's Office. Extensions are granted for substantial life changing circumstances only (e.g., life threatening illnesses rather than too busy at work).

- Hold a proposal defense meeting to discuss expectations with the entire committee and the student.

#### Completed Document

- Uphold academic rigor by not allowing the project to move forward unless it meets high research standards.
- Provide guidance and evaluation during the research and writing stages and offer recommendations for revisions.
- Hold students to a high standard of research excellence.
- Prepare student for what is to occur at defense meeting.
- Clarify with students **that three weeks** should be expected for chairs and committee members to read and respond to complete drafts of theses or dissertations.
- Discuss any problematic issues with the committee, student, and program director/academic coordinator.
- With the concurrence of the committee members, approve the final draft. Whether the student passed or failed the defense is agreed upon by the committee **before** the oral defense. Students cannot enter an oral defense until committee members agree to pass the defense.
- Remind student to meet with the library thesis/dissertation coordinator for a format review.
- Attend and supervise the dissertation defense in person.
- Attend graduation convocation and for doctoral students, hood graduates.

### ROLE OF THESIS OR DISSERTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The thesis or dissertation committee members work with the chair to provide advice and consultation to the student throughout the process of research and writing. Some expectations of the committee members are:

#### Proposal

- Meet with the student.
- Advise on topic selection (e.g., appropriateness, academic value).
- Offer expertise in the area of study.
- Read and review chapter drafts within two weeks of submission and three weeks for entire proposal.
- Discuss any recommendations for revisions with the committee chair and student.

#### Completed Thesis or Dissertation

- Meet with the student to provide guidance and evaluation during the research and writing stages.
- Review thesis or dissertation drafts in a timely manner (respond within three weeks).
- Offer recommendations for revisions.
- Discuss any problematic issues in the thesis or dissertation with the committee chair and student **before** the defense.
- In consultation with the other committee members, approve the final draft for the defense. Members of the thesis or dissertation committee are expected to be present in person at the defense. At most, one member of the committee may be absent from a

defense, and this should occur only in unusual circumstances.

## ROLE OF STUDENT

- Work closely with the committee throughout the proposal, research, and writing process.
- Make monthly appointments with the chair and communicate regularly with chair regarding progress.
- Be familiar with and comply with policies and procedures outlined in the catalog and the timelines on the Registrar's website. This includes ORIA procedures and signature sheets.
- Read examples or other materials provided by chair or committee members.
- Schedule student-committee contacts (e.g., proposal defense, final defense). Note: students often underestimate the difficulty in finding an open two-hour block for four busy people. Keep in mind that most faculty are 9-month employees.
- Students must give committee members and chairs **at least two weeks** to review and offer feedback to chapter drafts and **three weeks** to respond to drafts of a complete document. All work should be submitted first to the committee chair, revised based on feedback, and then returned to the chair. When approved by the chair, the work should be given to committee members. This may require multiple drafts. Also note, students often underestimate the time required to make revisions based on committee feedback. Students are expected to engage with feedback in an open and respectful manner.
- Professionalism is expected during all aspects of the process.
- Students are required to make timely progress as outlined by the chair. Not making progress may result in the chair stepping down from the role of a student receiving a NP (no progress grade). Note, extensions must be recommended by the HEP director to the Dean's Office. Extensions are granted only for substantial life changing circumstances.
- Students should write like a scholar and use language of a scholar. This acknowledges that writing multiple drafts is an important part of the scholarly writing process; hence students should expect to write several drafts of each chapter.
- Defenses cannot be scheduled until all committee members have reviewed and approved the draft document. Whether the student passed or failed the defense is agreed upon by the committee **before** the oral defense. Students cannot enter an oral defense until committee members agree to pass the defense.
- Students are discouraged from bringing gifts and food to defenses.