

REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, September 9, 2021

3:30 – 5:00 p.m., Zoom Meeting

Committee members present: Melissa Hines (Co-Chair), Lars Dzikus (Co-Chair), Patricia Bamwine, Luis Finotti, Hunter Hamock (GSS President), Greg Kaplan, Siris Laursen, Mohammed Mohsin, Allyson Neal

Other attendees: Sara Bradberry, Amy Broemmel (Past Graduate Council Chair), Stefanie Ohnesorg (Graduate Council Chair), Dixie Thompson, and Catherine Cox (Graduate Council Liaison)

Melissa Hines called the Zoom meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Agenda Items: submitted by Dr. Dixie Thompson, Dean of the Graduate School

1. *Composition of a Master's Committee*

- Do we need a master's committee of 3 people for every master's student? Example, do we need a committee of 3 for those students in coursework-only programs?
- Should we open the committee assignments to people who are not at the rank of assistant professor?

Current Catalog Language

Master's Committee

A master's committee is composed of the major professor from the student's academic program and at least two other faculty members, all at the rank of assistant professor or above and should be formed as early as possible in a student's program, and must be formed by the time a student applies for admission to candidacy. If the student is pursuing a minor, the student in consultation with the major professor, should consider adding a committee member from the minor department.

The responsibility of this committee is to

- assist the student in planning a program of study and carrying out research or other scholarly work,
- serve as the review panel for thesis or project proposals,
- prepare a final comprehensive examination, and
- assure fulfillment of the program's degree requirements.

D. Thompson:

The items on the agenda today are coming forward as discussion items.

The first discussion item relates to the master's committee.

The current policy is that all master's committees have a minimum of 3 faculty members on the committee. This is a good policy, especially for students writing a thesis or taking comp exams. However, we have many programs now that offer a coursework only option. These students take the required courses and earn their degree – no exam or defense is required.

- For those students in programs that offer the coursework only option, do they need a committee of 3 to sign off or approve their Admission to Candidacy Application?

In relation with the current master's committee policy, the language in the catalog states that the committee members must be at the rank of assistant professor or above. We often get requests for lecturers or instructors be approved on the master's committee. Usually, they will have expertise in the student's area of study or concentration. Normally, we approve these exceptions.

I open this up for questions and discussion.

1. Could a lecturer with a master's degree be approved to serve on the master's committee?

Thompson: I believe that a person with a master's degree could serve as a useful member on a master's committee. If they have the disciplinary expertise in the student's area of study and with the Director of Graduate Studies endorsement, I would be inclined to approve that committee.

Broemmel: I will share that in our department many of our lecturers are successful retired teachers, who are working with and supervising our graduate teaching interns. These retired teachers have that professional expertise to be an important member of a master's committee, but they do not have a terminal degree.

Thompson: With more of these requests being submitted is why I bring this forward. Do we need to change the language, or should we keep the language and make the exception approvals in the Graduate School?

Ohnesorg: Should each unit look at this to determine if it is acceptable within their department instead of at the top level? Do we know how other schools approve committees?

Hammock: Adding a lecturer to the master's committee may benefit the student if, as mentioned, is an expert in their field of study. My concern then is, does this open the door of having multiple lecturers on a committee who are not certified. Would there be any situation that would compromise the integrity of the degree?

Hines: For those programs that are coursework only, do they need a committee?

Thompson: That is partly why we are having this discussion today. For those master's students that have chosen the coursework only option – they have no defense, no project, no comprehensive exams. Who will be the faculty member and/or mentor responsible to make sure the student is staying on track and meeting the degree requirements? We do not want students to feel like they are on their own with no faculty support. If we do away with the 3-person committee for the coursework only option students, what will we replace that with? That is the key question.

Ohnesorg: Just a note to keep in mind. Lecturers are not usually compensated for service beyond their teaching load. On the flip side, we do not want to put a burden on lecturers.

Thompson: My office will determine how many programs are listed in the Graduate Catalog as coursework only options. We will contact those departments to ask how they feel about doing away with the 3-person master's committee. And, if we do away with the 3-person committee, what do they recommend as a replacement?

Bamwine: If we open this up to lecturers will this also be an option for trainees at the post-doc level? I ask because coming out of a post-doc position and applying for jobs, one of the questions is if you have had student supervision?

Thompson: If we decide to change the language – maybe instead of inserting lecturer – we revise to say "other qualified individuals approved by "X."

2. Approvals for Classified Research

The second item for discussion today is related to classified Research. We have a few theses or dissertations each year where their research is classified. We have research that is associated with the Department of Energy, Department of Defense, and funded research that has classified information. This classified information cannot be released for public consumption. Those students do not publish their thesis or dissertation in TRACE. There is a process where students working with classified research apply to be exempted from publication in TRACE.

Our current policy states that the college dean, department head, and dean of the Graduate School must approve the student's classified research.

- Is it necessary for the College Dean to sign off on a classified thesis or dissertation?
- Is it adequate for only the Department Head and the Dean of the Graduate School to approve?

D. Thompson: I presented this proposal to the College Deans. They agreed to keep this requirement in place as is, because it helps create checks and balances to ensure that students are receiving a good experience. Because of the feedback from the colleges, I withdraw this proposal for consideration.

Current Catalog Language

Classified Research

~~A basic principle in graduate education is that theses and dissertations produced by graduate students will be published and made available to other researchers in the field. When a graduate student is involved in classified or proprietary research, and such research is intended to lead toward a thesis or dissertation, prior approval should be secured from the department head and dean, and from the Dean of the Graduate School. Should the research become classified in the course of a project, these same persons should be notified immediately so that proper procedures can be assured. Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to rejection of a thesis or dissertation manuscript.~~

~~Is it necessary for the college dean to have to approve when the college dean may be unfamiliar with the student and the research? Is this an important step for the college dean to approve, to be aware of how many exemptions are coming through their college?~~

~~This does not involve many students. Probably less than 6 a year.~~

~~The committee has the same responsibility—to sign and approve the final product. It goes through the same rigor as any other thesis or dissertation. But, because of the classified information in the document itself, it is not released beyond the committee.~~

~~I will take this to the next Graduate Associate Deans meeting and ask them to evaluate the policy. I will bring their feedback to the next APC meeting. Based on what the deans communicate, we will know our next step—to revise or to leave the same.~~

M. Hines

Thank you, Dr. Thompson for the discussion items today. I ask each of you to go back to your departments and share what we discussed today. Then, bring back that information to our next meeting. Are there any more questions today?

D. Thompson: Thank you everyone for the positive feedback and dialogue today. Please take these issues back to your units and college and ask the faculty for their input. Then be prepared to share that information at our next APC meeting.

Dr. Hines thanked everyone for the discussion and questions of these two items.

Meeting adjourned at 4:10.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison