

Establishing major advisors and committees for graduate students

Background:

Most graduate students at Oregon State University (OSU) must have a major advisor with faculty status in the OSU Graduate School as well as a Graduate Committee constituted of the membership described in the Graduate Catalog by the third term of enrollment for masters students or the fifth term for doctoral students (current instructions may be found at <http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/success/graduate-committee>).

For students who are in good academic standing¹ (defined below) and making timely and satisfactory progress towards their degree, and yet are unable to secure or maintain a required advisor or constitute a full committee, OSU currently does not have policy regarding treatment or procedures. There are a multitude of reasons that this situation may arise including, for example, the move of a faculty member to another university, death of a faculty member, irreconcilable differences between a student and advisor, or failure of a faculty member to achieve tenure.

In examining policies adopted by other comparable universities regarding the same situation, some placed responsibility on the student and allow for dismissal when the student is unsuccessful in finding a major advisor. Others obligate the University to create a full committee. It is in OSU's best interest to decide on a university-wide policy in these situations to avoid ad hoc and inconsistent treatment of students.

Proposed new OSU policy on establishing advisors and committees for graduate students:

We have an ethical responsibility to students to provide students with the opportunity to continue to progress toward completion of a degree if they are in good academic standing and have been making timely and satisfactory progress toward the degree. OSU does not accept responsibility for and this policy does NOT cover students who are not in good academic standing (defined below). Further, this policy does not cover the provision of graduate assistantship (either research or teaching) funding, which is never guaranteed beyond the time limits of an annual contract for any student.

For every graduate student who must have a major advisor and full committee constituted of the membership described in the Graduate Catalog, in nearly all cases, students secure their own advisors and committees or they are assigned by the program. For students who are in good academic standing¹, and making timely and satisfactory progress and who, despite their best efforts, are unable to secure or maintain an advisor or constitute a full committee on their own, the following actions will be taken. These actions should be initiated by the student who must contact their

¹ A graduate student in "good academic standing" is defined as one who currently meets all of the following requirements:

1. Has a GPA that meets or exceeds the OSU and program-specific minimums. (Graduate programs may impose minimum GPA requirements that are more strict than the university minimum of 3.0);
2. Has met all OSU Graduate School established deadlines (currently accessible at <http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/progress/deadlines>);
3. Has met all requirements and deadlines of the degree program in which they are enrolled with the exception of having a current major advisor;
4. Is not in violation of the Student conduct code;
5. Is deemed, by their academic program, to be making satisfactory academic progress towards their degree. A student may assume that they are making satisfactory progress towards their degree unless they have been informed otherwise in writing by their major advisor and/or graduate program leader.

graduate degree program's leader (a.k.a. graduate program Head, Director, or Coordinator and defined as the academic faculty member with authority to direct or coordinate the unit's graduate program) to inform them of the inability to form or maintain a full graduate committee with a major advisor. This process can also be initiated by the graduate program when a student is discovered as being without a major advisor.

A graduate student has a responsibility to find a major advisor and committee members. Before initiating the process below, the student's graduate degree program leader (defined above) will meet with the student and provide a written list of steps that the student will complete to attempt to find an advisor or committee members within the program. Failure to complete the steps within four weeks may result in the student's loss of good academic standing and dismissal from the program. Only after the student documents that they have completed the recommended steps to finding an advisor and have been unable to do so will the following steps be taken. The graduate degree program leader will initiate the process according to the steps below, and maintain contact with the student informing them of the decision reached at each step in a timely manner. The time period from initial contact by the graduate student until resolution through step 4 (if necessary) should not be more than twelve weeks, excepting summer term.

- 1) If, having followed the steps recommended by the graduate program, the student remains unable to secure a major advisor or constitute a full graduate committee, then the student's graduate degree program leader (defined above) and the Unit (e.g. department, school) Head/Chair/Administrator (which may include multiple units in the case of interdisciplinary programs) with supervisory authority over faculty will, in consultation with the student and potential advisors/committee members, assign an advisor and/or committee member(s).
- 2) Should the graduate student's degree program be unable or unwilling within four weeks to assign an advisor or committee member to allow the student the opportunity to succeed, or should the student not agree to the degree program's assignment of advisor or committee member(s), then the student's college-level Associate Dean for graduate programs or other Dean-level college representative should, in consultation with the program leader, make a similar attempt.
- 3) If both the student's degree program and college are unsuccessful within another four weeks of time, then appropriate action will be determined within four weeks by a panel convened by the Dean of the Graduate School (or designee) and consisting of:
 - The student's graduate program Lead or the unit head such as Department Chair, Department Head or Director of School,
 - The Dean of the College that houses the student's program or designee such as an Associate Dean for Graduate studies,
 - The Dean of the Graduate School or designee,
 - A representative from OSU Faculty Senate Graduate Council from a college other than the affected student's graduate program home, and
 - Optionally at the student's request, a graduate student representative from ASOSU enrolled in a college (or colleges in the case of interdisciplinary programs) other than the affected student's graduate program home².

Appropriate actions determined by this panel should make every effort to consider the best interests of the student. However, OSU cannot guarantee that there is sufficient expertise among the faculty to provide adequate advising at the

² Prior to service on this committee, the graduate student representative will need to be fully apprised of the confidential nature of the procedures and agree to keep all discussions in strict confidence as a requirement of federal student protections under FERPA.

graduate level on every potential field of study or specific area of scholarly inquiry that may be desired by an enrolled student. Programs make every effort to ensure at admission that adequate advising is available for a student's scholarly interest at the time. Circumstances, including but not limited to death, dismissal, or move of faculty with specialized expertise, limited capacity for accepting new advisees, or changes in student interest in a particular scholarly specialty, may impede the ability of OSU to find an adequate academic advisor or constitute a full committee. If the panel in step 3 above establishes that sufficient expertise or capacity is not available among the faculty at the university to support advising for the student's desired area of study, then the panel may recommend dismissal from the university. However, this should be the path of last resort, particularly in cases where the loss of a major advisor occurs through no fault of the student such as death or movement of faculty to another university.

- 4) If the graduate student does not agree with the outcome designed by the panel through step 3, they are free to attempt, once again, to find their own advisor or committee members and will have four additional weeks to do so before losing good academic standing and being dismissed from the program.

Students who believe that their academic rights have been denied in connection with their Degree Program's assignment of an advisor or Graduate Committee may file a grievance pursuant to the Grievance Procedures for Graduate Students at OSU. Students who believe that they have been discriminated against in this process may contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access at OSU.