

## Proposed policy on advisers and committees for graduate students

### Background:

For completion of a graduate degree, every graduate student at Oregon State University (OSU) must have a major advisor with faculty status in the OSU Graduate School. Every graduate student must also have a Graduate Committee constituted of the membership described in the Graduate Catalog by the third term of enrollment for masters students and 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 standing and making timely and satisfactory progress towards their degree, and yet are unable to secure or maintain an advisor or constitute a full committee, OSU currently does not have policy regarding treatment or procedures. In examining policies adopted by other comparable universities regarding the same situation, Cornell, UW-Madison and University of South Florida were found to place responsibility on the student and allow for dismissal when the student is unsuccessful in finding a major advisor. In contrast, UC Davis, Univ. of Washington and Virginia Commonwealth Univ. obligate the University to create a full committee. It is in OSU's best interest to decide on a policy in these situations to avoid ad hoc and inconsistent treatment of students.

### Recommendation:

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 or who--based on required program-specific evaluations--are not making timely or satisfactory progress toward the degree. 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.

### Graduate School Policy on Committees:

As every graduate student must have a major advisor and full committee as described above, 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 standing, 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 must be initiated by the student who must contact their graduate degree program's Lead (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. The graduate degree program Lead will then 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 3 (if necessary) should not be more than twelve weeks.

- 1) The student's graduate degree program lead (e.g. Director, Department Head/Chair; defined as the academic faculty member with authority to direct or coordinate the unit's graduate program) or their designee (e.g. Graduate Committee Chair, Associate Chair) will, in consultation with potential advisors/committee members, assign an advisor and/or committee member.
- 2) Should the graduate student's degree program be unable or unwilling within four weeks to assign an adviser or committee member to allow the student the opportunity to succeed, or should the student not agree to the degree

programs solution, then the student's college-level Associate Dean for graduate programs or other Dean-level college representative should, in consultation with the student's original graduate program lead, 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
- 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 home<sup>1</sup>.

Appropriate actions determined by this panel should make every effort to consider the best interests of the student. However, OSU also cannot guarantee that there is sufficient expertise among the faculty to provide adequate advising at the 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 the OSU to find an adequate academic advisor or constitute a full committee. If the panel in step 3 above establishes that sufficient expertise 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 committee 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 they have been discriminated against or that their 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 (currently found at <http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/progress/grievance-procedures>).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.