

Useful Information for Doctoral Committee Chairpersons

This document outlines certain important, useful information to the chairpersons of doctoral advisory committees. This is not intended to be a comprehensive document on the policies and regulations governing the doctoral program in engineering. The graduate catalog and the web site of graduate school (www.tntech.edu/gcat/) are the authoritative sources. Anyone with specific questions should consult the chairperson of the department and/or the Associate Dean of Engineering for Graduate Studies.

Preliminary Assessment

During the first semester or early in the second semester of enrollment, the Ph.D. student must undergo an assessment of his/her strengths and weaknesses in the academic area of study and field of research. The purpose of this assessment is to tailor a Program of Study of advanced course work and to prepare the student to undertake independent research. Each department will have its own policy on the instruments of this assessment procedure and its administration. The chairperson of the department and the chairperson of the advisory committee are expected to work together in advising the student in this first step which must be completed before the end of the second semester.

Formation of the Advisory Committee

The policy of the graduate school requires that the student, in consultation with the department chairperson, will determine a minimum of five qualified and suitable graduate faculty members who are willing to serve on the advisory committee. The chairperson of this committee (as the first such identified member) will assist the student and the chairperson of the department in this task.

Under normal circumstances, a single faculty member will act as chair of the advisory committee. The expertise of the faculty member in the subject area will be the primary criterion guiding the chair selection. In the case of some interdisciplinary research projects, two faculty members may be appointed as co-chairs on the advice of the Department Chair and at the discretion of the Associate Dean of Engineering for Graduate Studies. The expertise of the two faculty members contributing more or less evenly in guiding the interdisciplinary research will be the primary criterion for the selection and appointment of joint chairs.

If for any reason, the chair of an advisory committee is unable to continue in that capacity (e.g., change of employment, retirement, poor health, sabbatical leave, etc.) and if the student is already near completion of the research work, then a second faculty member with strong expertise in the subject area may be appointed as co-chair. However if the student has not made significant progress in the research work, a new chair of the committee may be appointed to advise the student in the same area of research or in a new area as determined appropriate under the circumstances.

Aside from these two circumstances (well-defined interdisciplinary research, or departure of advisory committee chair), it is expected that the advisory committee will be chaired by a single individual. Co-chairs will not be appointed for the purpose of giving non-engineering faculty members an opportunity to participate in the role of graduate student committee chair. Co-chairs will not be appointed in order to build a stronger case for promotion or tenure of junior faculty members.

The committee will consist of a minimum of three members from the student's major department and at least one member from outside this department. The Associate Dean of Engineering for Graduate Studies will serve as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the committee. An individual highly qualified in the proposed area of research, but outside of Tennessee Tech, may also be invited to serve on the committee as a non-voting member with the approval of the Associate Dean of Engineering for Graduate Studies and the Associate Vice President for Graduate studies. Any changes in the composition of the committee must be initiated by the student with a written request following the procedure mentioned in the catalog.

Meetings of the Advisory Committee

The advisory committee will normally meet several times during the student's tenure to review the progress made and counsel the student. At the minimum, the committee shall meet for the following actions at the appropriate times.

1. To decide on the Program of Study
2. To decide on the administration of the comprehensive examination
3. To evaluate the student's performance in the comprehensive examination including the approval of the research proposal
4. To approve the research work of the student and the written dissertation.

The chairperson of the advisory committee shall call the meeting of the committee for the above and other such purposes as needed. It is expected that at a minimum, four meetings of the committee will be convened during the period of the student's study. Relevant information, such as copies of program of study, proposal, draft of dissertation, etc. must be provided to all committee members sufficiently in advance of the meeting. The outcome(s) of each meeting should be documented by the chair of the committee and copies sent to the department chair and to the Associate Dean of Engineering for Graduate Studies.

Program of Study

The student's Program of Study should be filed by the time he/she completes 15 course credits towards doctoral studies. A minimum of 24 credits of doctoral research and dissertation is required. The program of study will also include the graduate level background courses taken prior to enrollment in the doctoral program (e.g., 24 hours of course credit at the masters level). The advisory committee is responsible for developing the appropriate plan of study taking into account the results of the preliminary assessment

of the student's strengths and weaknesses in the academic area of study and the intended field of research.

Comprehensive Examination

The Ph.D. comprehensive examination will consist of a written part and the presentation and oral defense of the research proposal. The chair of the committee will work with the other committee members and the student to schedule the written parts and the proposal presentation part in due time. See the college policy on administering the comprehensive examination and evaluating the student's performance. The written comprehensive examination and a copy of the approved version of the proposal should be sent to the department office for safekeeping.

Duration of Ph.D. Studies

All requirements for Ph.D. degree, including dissertation, should be completed within a period of eight consecutive years. A student receiving financial assistance is expected to pass the comprehensive examination and become a candidate for the degree within a continuous period of three years to qualify for the assistantship beyond that time. Normally a student is expected to complete the proposed research and defend it in about a year after becoming a candidate for the degree.