Best Practices for Graduate Thesis or Dissertation Advising
Thesis and Dissertation Oversight (TDO) Committee

This statement was adopted by the Graduate Council on 13 April 2015. Its purpose is to provide best practice guidelines for graduate programs in adopting or revising their procedures for advising students in the preparation of their theses and dissertations. The recommendations were compiled by examining a survey of the practices of all ECU Graduate Programs in guiding their graduate students for Masters and Doctoral Theses or Dissertations and Defenses. There is substantial variation among the programs for how a thesis or dissertation is done, and who is involved in the advising and decision-making steps. The repository of “best practice” information, informed by responses by individual ECU program to the Survey, is intended to make it easier for the various graduate programs, Graduate Council, the Graduate Council’s Executive Committee, and the Dean of the Graduate School to evaluate instances where there is a problem for a student and recommend possible revisions. These “best practices” will be published in the Graduate Director’s Handbook and available through the ECU Graduate School website.

The Policies of each individual Degree Program regarding Thesis or Dissertation Advising shall be available in writing and communicated to students. The guidelines outlined below should be implemented consistent with all stipulations in the Graduate Faculty Manual.

1. Initial advisor or committee
Right attention and advising from the very beginning of a masters or doctoral students’ enrollment in a thesis- or dissertation-based program is critically important as a student prepares to launch into a well-conceived, well-monitored program of study and research. It is a best practice that each student will have an Initial Advisor or advisory committee to guide him or her during his or her early stages in the program prior to selecting a Thesis or Dissertation Advisor. The initial advisor may be the graduate program director or other graduate faculty as deemed appropriate by the program. The initial advisor or advisory committee helps the student select a graduate faculty member whose research expertise aligns well with the student’s intended area research to serve as his or her thesis or dissertation advisor. The thesis or dissertation advisor chairs the student’s Thesis or Dissertation Committee, which may or may not be the same as the student’s Initial Advisor or advisory committee.

2. Thesis or Dissertation Advisor and Committee
   a. Composition of the Thesis or Dissertation Committee
      i. Thesis or Dissertation Advisor (Mentor) should act as chair
      ii. Selection of the Thesis or Dissertation Committee should be by the Student in consultation with the Thesis or Dissertation Advisor prior to an attempt at Candidacy by the Student.
      iii. At least one additional graduate faculty member from within the degree program
      iv. Membership should complement the direction or aims of the Thesis or Dissertation project planned by the Student.
v. Doctoral: At least one member external to the degree program or Dissertation Advisor’s department is strongly recommended.

vi. Doctoral: minimum of four (4) graduate faculty members in total

vii. Masters: minimum of three (3) graduate faculty members in total

viii. Wherever feasible, there should be continuity in the composition of a student’s Committee (from Advisory to Candidacy to Thesis).

1. Provides consistency of expectations of the Student

2. Allows early and comprehensive evaluation of Student’s progress toward the degree

ix. It is preferable that a single committee advise the Student throughout the degree. In cases where programs allow two or more distinct Committees at different stages of the degree process (e.g. during the coursework phase or during research phase; or prior to or following candidacy), the Committees are expected to relate information about the students progress to one another at regular intervals (at least annually).

b. Timing of forming the Thesis or Dissertation Committee

i. Selection of Thesis or Dissertation Committee members should precede any formal preparation for Candidacy.

ii. The Thesis or Dissertation Committee should be formed by the Student in consultation with the Thesis or Dissertation Advisor immediately following initial planning of the Thesis or Dissertation or project

iii. Prior to selection of the Thesis or Dissertation Advisor, the graduate program director or designated Initial Advisor(s) will act as the Advisory Committee for each new student.

c. Qualifications of Members

i. All internal Thesis or Dissertation Committee members must have ECU graduate faculty status.

ii. External members may be from industry, government, community organizations or other universities, and must have been approved by the Graduate School by the process described in the Faculty Manual.

iii. Each member is expected to have a terminal degree equivalent to or beyond the degree being sought by the student. The terminal degree requirement may be waived for an outside member from an agency, industry, government, or community organizations who serves to provide novel expertise to the committee.

d. Frequency of student meetings with Thesis or Dissertation Committee

i. A required first organizational Thesis or Dissertation Committee meeting should occur as soon as is feasible after selection by the Student and Thesis or Dissertation Advisor.

ii. At least once per semester for Masters students

iii. An organizational meeting with a doctoral student must occur prior to the Assessment for Candidacy status.

iv. At least once per year for Doctoral students
v. Meetings may occasionally be substituted with a formal, written update to the entire Thesis or Dissertation Committee, as allowed by the Program guidelines.

vi. Programs should consider including in their written documentation a description of the frequency of occurrence of formal Thesis or Dissertation Committee meetings and their outcomes.

vii. Face to face meetings or video conferences with students are expected for at least one of the annual meetings.

3. Advancement to Candidacy Status
   a. Programs should clearly define in writing the steps required for Advancement to Candidacy or the program equivalent and the expected timeline to achieve it.
   b. Advancement should precede a Student’s entry into the research or project or scholarly activity implementation process.
   c. Form of the Assessment (aka Thesis or Dissertation Proposal or Competency Exam or Qualifying Exam or Candidacy Exam or Thesis Prospectus).
      i. May be comprised of a single or multiple components (e.g. written exam, submitted outline or grant proposal or oral presentation)
      ii. All components should be evaluated by the Committee; outcomes reported in a single, documented report to Program Director
      iii. Doctoral programs: outcome must be formally reported to the Graduate School using the “Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy” form. (Efforts should be made to include this step in the student’s electronic academic file.)
   d. Timing of the Assessment
      i. Advancement to Candidacy is essential for Doctoral degrees. Advancement to thesis status is encouraged but not required for Masters degrees.
      ii. When applicable, efforts should be made to administer the Assessment (3c, above) as early in the degree progression as practical. Outcomes should be used by the Thesis or Dissertation Committee to thoughtfully and objectively consider if it is in the student’s best interest to continue in the Thesis or Dissertation track.
      iii. Recommended for Masters degree for full-time graduate students: End of 2nd semester; no later than 3rd semester (not including summer)
      iv. Recommended for Doctoral degree for full-time graduate students: End of 4th semester; no later than 6th semester (not including summer)
   e. Failure and Remediation
      i. Programs should have a clearly defined policy communicated in writing to Students on opportunities to repeat the initial Candidacy Assessment. Programs may choose to grant no such opportunity; but it is recommended that no more than two (2) repeat Assessments be allowed.
      ii. Recommendation: If the policy includes an opportunity to repeat the Candidacy Assessment, the committee should provide individualized guidance on what remediation is need and a timeline for completing the next assessment.

4. Responsibilities of the Thesis or Dissertation Committee
   a. Role in Committee Meetings.
      The Thesis or Dissertation Committee will:
i. Advise the student in the educational program, as well as the planning, conduct and interpretation of research or scholarly activity.

ii. Monitor and evaluate the Student's progress toward the degree

iii. Oversee the Student's intellectual, professional and scholarly development and respond to any difficulties in the Student's performance

iv. Meet in formal sessions to critically assess progress toward the degree (frequency described above)
   1. Meetings may be requested by the Student or Thesis or Dissertation Advisor
   2. or by a member of the Committee.
   3. Frequent direct interaction between the Student and Thesis or Dissertation Committee members is essential
   4. Thesis or Dissertation Committee must express to the Student and Thesis or Dissertation Advisor any concerns they have regarding the student's performance and quality of work

v. In the event the Student’s performance or progress is insufficient, Thesis or Dissertation Committee will offer guidelines to aid in the fulfillment of their expectations.

b. Role in Thesis or Dissertation preparation and defense.

The Thesis or Dissertation Committee will:

i. Approve of the subject matter and methodology of the Thesis or Dissertation research

ii. Review and comment on drafts of the Thesis or Dissertation regarding editorial, linguistic and bibliographic quality prior to submission to the Graduate School.

iii. Verify proper organization, content and formatting of the Thesis or Dissertation for submission to the Graduate School

iv. Verify, to the best of their ability, the quality of the data collection and evidence, data analysis, and logical reasoning or interpretation in light of the proposal aims

v. Evaluate whether the Student’s Thesis or Dissertation fulfills the requirements of the degree

vi. Encourage the Student in the submission and revision of manuscripts based on the Thesis or Dissertation for publication in the scholarly literature

vii. Programs should include an authorization signature for any additional formal readers of the thesis or dissertation, in addition to the Thesis or Dissertation Advisor and Department Chair, on the “Report of Defense” or “Recommendation to Award Degree” form to the Graduate School.

Respectfully submitted,

TDO Committee (2014):

Brett D Keiper
Biochem (chair)

Carl Swanson
History

Heather Rie
Math

Marie Pokorny
Nursing (retired)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy Morehead</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Lamson</td>
<td>Med Family Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl McFadden</td>
<td>Education Leadership, Higher Ed. (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry West</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared Stallings</td>
<td>Graduate Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica Moore</td>
<td>ITCS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>