

# Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Memorandum of Action

MOA – 21/01

Revision of Language to Allow Co-Chairs for Thesis, Specialist, and Dissertation Committees

**Name of Council(s)/Committee(s):** Graduate Studies Council

**Approval Date:**  
28 January 2021

**Implementation Date:**  
Upon Administrative Approval

**Responsible Office(s) and Responsible Enforcement Official(s):**

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of the Graduate College

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Revise the committee requirements in the Graduate Catalog to allow co-chairs for thesis, specialist, and dissertation committees, requiring that at least one co-chair has full graduate faculty status.

*Julie Apker*

29 January 2021

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Julie Apker, Chair, Graduate Studies Council

Date

Approve                      Disapprove                      Other Action  
Comments:

*Marilyn S. Kritzman*

March 4, 2021

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Marilyn S. Kritzman, WMU Faculty Senate President

Date

X Approve                      Disapprove                      Other Action  
Comments:

*Jennifer P. Bott*

4/6/2021

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Jennifer P. Bott, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date

X Approve                      Disapprove                      Other Action  
Comments:

*Edward Montgomery*

4/6/2021

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Edward Montgomery, WMU President

Date

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Faculty Senate  
Memorandum of Action**

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**Revision of Language to Allow Co-Chairs for Thesis, Specialist, and Dissertation Committees**

**RECOMMENDATION**

Revise the committee requirements in the Graduate Catalog to allow co-chairs for thesis, specialist, and dissertation committees, requiring that at least one co-chair has full graduate faculty status.

**RATIONALE/PURPOSE**

There is an increased desire to have two faculty serve as co-chairs for thesis, specialist and/or dissertation committees. Some reasons include students involved in interdisciplinary programs and projects, students working with WMed faculty, and students working with faculty who have recently retired. Our university Graduate Catalog policy currently does not include provisions for co-chairs.

Since WMed and emeriti faculty cannot have full graduate faculty status, it is proposed that just one of the co-chairs be required to have full graduate faculty status.

A review of peer, Michigan, and similar institutions revealed that many specify the possibility of co-chairs, including allowance of one co-chair having associate graduate faculty status.

**STAKEHOLDERS**

All departments with graduate programs that require a thesis, specialist, and/or dissertation committee.

**HISTORY:**

- a) Effective date of current version: unknown
- b) Date first adopted: unknown
- c) Revision history: unknown
- d) Proposed date of next review: none specific since GSC monitors all graduate-related policies on a regular basis

**CURRENT POLICY MODIFICATION** (additions in bold and deletions with strikethrough):**Master's Thesis Committee**

A master's thesis committee shall be appointed for each student undertaking a thesis as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree. The purpose of the thesis committee is twofold: 1) to provide the range of expertise necessary to advise a student in the conduct of the master's thesis, and 2) to ensure that evaluation of the thesis represents a consensus of professionals in the student's chosen discipline.

The master's thesis committee is charged with the supervision and evaluation of the master's thesis, a task that includes but is not limited to the following responsibilities: a) advise the student on selection and/or development of a master's thesis topic; b) review and approve a proposal for the master's thesis; c) provide consultation regarding progress on the thesis; d) evaluate the final document; and e) in those departments requiring an oral defense, evaluate the oral defense of the thesis.

In addition to the previously described responsibilities that are generic to all thesis committee members, the ~~chairperson~~ **chair (or co-chairs)** of the committee assumes the following additional responsibilities: a) in those departments where this responsibility is not discharged through other mechanisms, advise the student regarding selection of thesis committee members; b) routinely monitor student progress on the thesis; c) call thesis committee meetings; d) evaluate the readiness of the thesis proposal and of the

thesis for committee review and action; and e) inform the student of the need to adhere to the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Theses, Specialist Projects, and Dissertations* (available on the Graduate College website).

Each thesis committee shall consist of a minimum of three members or associate members of the graduate faculty of Western Michigan University. The committee chair must be a full member of the graduate faculty, **and in the case of co-chairs, at least one co-chair must have full graduate faculty status**. At least two of the committee members must be from the department or academic program in which the student is pursuing the master's degree. **Each member of the committee must be either a member or associate member of the graduate faculty (a current list of graduate faculty members by department available on the Graduate College website)**. The appointment of a master's thesis committee is a three-stage process requiring, first, a mutual agreement between the master's student and the prospective committee members; second, a formal appointment by the chairperson of the department (or the chairperson's designee); and third, notification of and approval by the office of the dean of the Graduate College regarding this appointment.

[rest of existing language remains the same]

### **Specialist Project Committee**

A specialist project committee shall be appointed for each student undertaking a project as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a specialist degree. The purpose of the project committee is twofold: 1) to provide the range of expertise necessary to advise a student in the conduct of the specialist project, and 2) to ensure that evaluation of the project represents a consensus of professionals in the student's chosen discipline.

The specialist project committee is charged with the supervision and evaluation of the specialist project, a task that includes but is not limited to the following responsibilities: a) advise the student on selection and/or development of a specialist project topic; b) review and approve a proposal for the specialist project; c) provide consultation regarding progress on the project; d) evaluate the final document; and e) in those departments requiring an oral defense, evaluate the oral defense of the project.

In addition to the previously described responsibilities that are generic to all project committee members, the ~~chairperson~~ **chair (or co-chairs)** of the committee assumes the following additional responsibilities: a) in those departments where this responsibility is not discharged through other mechanisms, advise the student regarding selection of project committee members; b) routinely monitor student progress on the project; c) call project committee meetings; d) evaluate the readiness of the project proposal and of the project for committee review and action; and e) inform the student of the need to adhere to the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Theses, Specialist Projects, and Dissertations* (available on the Graduate College website).

Each project committee shall consist of a minimum of three members or associate members of the graduate faculty of Western Michigan University. The committee chair must be a full member of the graduate faculty, **and in the case of co-chairs, at least one co-chair must have full graduate faculty status**. At least two of the committee members must be from the department or academic program in which the student is pursuing the specialist degree. **Each member of the committee must be either a member or associate member of the graduate faculty (a current list of graduate faculty members by department available on the Graduate College website)**. The appointment of a specialist committee is a three-stage process requiring, first, a mutual agreement between the specialist student and the prospective committee members; second, a formal appointment by the chairperson of the department (or the chairperson's designee); and third, notification of and approval by the office of the dean of the Graduate College regarding this appointment.

[rest of existing language remains the same]

### **Doctoral Dissertation Committee**

A doctoral dissertation committee shall be appointed for each student undertaking a dissertation as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of the dissertation committee is to review the dissertation proposal, procedures, and results; to make suggestions relative to these matters to the student; and to decide whether to approve the dissertation and the oral defense as fulfilling these requirements for the doctoral degree.

Each doctoral dissertation committee shall consist of at least three members. The student's major dissertation advisor shall serve as chair ~~person~~ or co-chair of the committee. **Co-chairs of committees are allowed, but at least one of the co-chairs must have full graduate faculty status. Of the overall committee,** at least one member shall be from outside the student's department (this person may be from a related cognate discipline, from outside the student's college, or from outside WMU) who shall serve as a bona fide, fully participating member of the committee. The committee shall be approved and recommended by the unit, approved by the office of the appropriate academic dean, and approved and appointed by the graduate dean. Each member of the committee must be either a member or an associate member of the graduate faculty; ~~the committee chair must be a full member of the graduate faculty~~ (a current list of graduate faculty members by department is available on the Graduate College website).

[rest of existing language remains the same]

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### **POLICY DETAILS**

The Graduate College shall establish timelines for notifying all departments with graduate programs of this revision.

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