

English Department
Best Practices for Graduate Committees and Advising
November 17, 2010

This document is meant to supplement and expand upon the policies outlined in Appendix B of the English Department Faculty Workload Policy (rev. April 2010), which aim to encourage equitable distribution of dissertation and thesis direction and graduate supervision. The goal of this “Best Practices” document is to elaborate in greater detail the recommended procedures for graduate committee work and advising so as to help ensure equity among faculty members and consistent practice in graduate committees throughout the department. The phrase “doctoral committee” here includes both exam and dissertation committees.

1. Chairs and co-chairs of doctoral committees and MA thesis committees are expected to be a student’s primary advisor throughout the dissertation/thesis process. As such, it is expected that these faculty will take on a greater share of the workload than other committee members, including: meeting with students on a regular basis; reading drafts of proposals and chapters and offering oral and written feedback in a timely manner; assessing the student’s performance throughout the process and alerting him/her (as well as other committee members and the DGS, as appropriate) about perceived weaknesses in the work; and serving as a primary source of information about the field of specialty, the job market, and possible career options post-degree. Upon agreeing to chair a student’s committee, the faculty chair should meet with the student to set out an appropriate work schedule and to clarify what standards the faculty member will expect of the student’s work.
2. Members of doctoral committees and MA thesis committees are expected to be available to consult with a student throughout the dissertation/thesis process, but their share in the committee’s workload should be less than that of the chair. Upon agreeing to serve on a committee, faculty members should arrange to meet with the student to set out an appropriate work plan, including: how often the member will meet with the student throughout the process; when and in what format the faculty member would like to review drafts of written work; and what standards the faculty member will expect of the student’s work.
3. When possible, it is preferred that two members of a doctoral committee are tenured faculty members. Under most circumstances, it is also preferable that the chair of the doctoral committee be a tenured faculty member.
4. Ideally, members of doctoral committees and MA thesis committees should have a conversation with the chair early in the process to discuss preferred procedures for submission of drafts, responsibility for reading drafts, and other matters related to timeline, workload, and methods of reading and assessment. In the case of doctoral committees, the meeting held to discuss the dissertation prospectus might be a useful time to discuss and clarify these issues.
5. Normally, it is expected that Assistant Professors will have on average no more than 15 points of committee work (calculated according to the formula outlined in Appendix B (p. 6) of the Faculty Workload Policy). For all faculty, including full Professors, it is desirable that the total number of points of graduate supervision in any given year not be greater than 30.