

HOW TO PUT TOGETHER A DOCTORAL COMMITTEE: GENERAL GUIDELINES

Department of English, UNCG

Preliminaries:

- Doctoral Committees in the English Department consist of at least three members. All three must be faculty in the English Department, and at least one member of your doctoral committee must be a tenured faculty member. If you wish to include a committee member from outside the Department or University, then you must have a four-person committee (i.e. three from English plus one other).
- 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. Whether s/he is tenured or untenured, the chair of the committee must hold an Endorsement to Chair Doctoral Committees from the Graduate School.
- During your first year in the PhD program, get to know faculty members in your field. Even if you are not taking a course with them, try to arrange a time to introduce yourself, learn about their fields of expertise, and share your own professional interests. The more faculty members in your field (and in the Department as a whole) whom you know and with whom you have a professional relationship, the easier it will be to ask them to serve on your committee later on. Plus, you will have a better sense of which faculty have research interests, methodologies, or theoretical approaches that overlap with your own.
- During your first year, begin identifying your field of specialization and specific research topics you hope to pursue.
- Especially when considering faculty to serve as members (rather than chair) of your doctoral committee, be sure to consider faculty who might be outside your immediate field of study (e.g. 19thC American literature) but who have expertise in a specific sub-field or theoretical approach in which you hope to do work (e.g. the novel or feminist theory).
- By the end of your first year or the beginning of your second year, you should have a working relationship with several faculty members in your field(s) and have developed a short list of faculty members who could serve as your advisor and/or as members of your committee.
- Once you have some specific people in mind for your committee, you will need to email or schedule a brief meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss your options in more detail before asking those faculty members directly. We do this in part to avoid overloading individual faculty members with multiple committee requests at once, and so that we can suggest alternative faculty members if someone is on leave, etc.
- After the DGS has given approval, you should then contact faculty members directly with whom you are interested in working. It is often best to start by asking the faculty member you wish to chair, as then you can discuss with that person the other members you wish to have on your committee. Try to have these conversations during an in-person meeting, if at all possible.

Paperwork and the Exams:

- Once all of your faculty members have agreed to serve on your doctoral committee, you will need to fill out the Doctoral Committee Form (available from Alyson). Ideally, you should file this form once you have completed 18 hours of course work, or shortly thereafter. You may always file a revised form later, if needed.
- Consult with the members of your committee frequently as you prepare for your doctoral exams and put together your reading lists.
- You should discuss with one or more of your committee members the possibility of doing a Directed Reading (ENG 778) as you lead up to your exams. You may count up to 6 hours of ENG 778 within your plan of study. If you wish to approach faculty members about doing a directed reading, please be sure you arrange to speak with them well in advance, as these courses represent additional workload and planning for faculty members as well. For more information, please consult the document: “English Department Guidelines on Directed Readings.”
- Early in the preparation for your exams you must consult with your committee chair and schedule a meeting with your committee as a group, not individually, to preview preparation for the examination. At this session you should present the tentative reading lists, previously drawn up in consultation with the individual committee members, for further revision and ratification by your entire advisory committee. Ideally, this group meeting should occur at least one year before you take exams (six months at the minimum).
- In many instances, students choose to revise their doctoral committee after they have completed their exams, in order to (for example) work with faculty members who are better suited to the specific topic of their dissertation. Discuss these choices with the chair of your committee, and file a Revised Doctoral Committee Form with Alyson if needed.
- If you run into any difficulties or have any questions throughout the process of putting together your Doctoral Committee, please don’t hesitate to contact the DGS!

For more information, please see the following documents: “English Department Policy on Doctoral Committees,” “Best Practices for Graduate Committees and Advising,” and “English Department Guidelines on Directed Readings.” Please also review the information on PhD Exams on our website.