

Carnegie Mellon University

Subject: Guidelines on Doctoral Thesis Committees

At its meeting of 24 April 1987, the MCS College Council approved the following guidelines concerning the purpose, appointment, composition, and timetables of doctoral thesis committees, with a footnote on the appointment of a “departmental sponsor” to assist an absent thesis advisor.

The following provisions shall be included in the catalogue description of the doctoral degree programs, or otherwise communicated to the faculty and to all students enrolled in such programs.

DOCTORAL THESIS COMMITTEE

1. The purpose of a doctoral thesis committee is to judge the validity, originality, significance, and proper presentation of the candidate’s doctoral thesis. To that end, the committee shall examine the thesis submitted by the candidate, conduct the public oral final examination on the thesis, prescribe corrections or revisions to the thesis before or at the time of the examination, and certify to the Dean its finding on the acceptability of the thesis in its final form.
2. Normally, the members of the thesis committee shall be nominated by the thesis advisor with the agreement of the candidate, and their appointment approved by the Department Head or the faculty member designated to supervise the Department’s doctoral programs. Ultimate responsibility for the appointment of a thesis committee rests with the Department.
3.
 - a) The doctoral thesis committee shall consist of no fewer than four members, and shall include the thesis advisor, as well as the departmental sponsor* if there is one.
 - b) At least half of the members of the committee shall be regular or research faculty members in the Department in which the degree is to be conferred; one of these, who must be a regular faculty member with the rank of Assistant Professor or higher, shall chair the committee. If qualified under the preceding provision, the thesis advisor will ordinarily chair the committee; the same is applicable to the departmental sponsor* if there is one.
 - c) At least one member of the committee shall be a “visitor”, i.e., a person not affiliated with the Department in which the degree is to be conferred nor with any Department participating in the candidate’s thesis research; the thesis advisor may not serve as “visitor”. To be eligible to be a “visitor”, a person should be familiar with academic standards and procedures and be especially qualified to judge some aspect of the

thesis. A “visitor” may come from another Department at Carnegie Mellon, from some other university, or from outside academic institutions altogether.

4. A vacancy on the doctoral thesis committee need only be filled if the remaining members would not constitute a valid committee. When a vacancy is filled, care shall be taken that the new committee member has the time and opportunity to participate effectively in the performance of the committee’s functions.

The final examination may proceed only if the committee members present would, by themselves, constitute a valid thesis committee according to the preceding provisions. A member of the committee who is unable to be present at the final examination may, if he or she wishes, submit a written recommendation.

5. The thesis committee should be appointed no less than two months before the estimated date of the final examination. In order to permit an orderly performance of the committee’s functions, it shall be the responsibility of the candidate to keep the committee informed about the progress of his or her work, from the time the committee is appointed to the time the thesis is submitted. The committee may specify whether this should be done individually, or collectively by formal or informal presentations.
6. When the thesis advisor (and the departmental sponsor* if there is one) is satisfied that the thesis is ready, it shall be submitted to the committee. The final examination shall be scheduled so as to provide the committee with two weeks to study the thesis between its submission and the date of the examination.

* Departmental sponsor. The thesis advisor need not be a faculty member in the Department, or even in the University. When the thesis advisor is, however, not a regular or research faculty member at Carnegie Mellon University, the Department Head or the faculty member designated to supervise the Department’s doctoral programs shall appoint, in consultation with the thesis advisor and the candidate, a regular or research faculty member in the Department to serve as the candidate’s “departmental sponsor”. It shall be this departmental sponsor’s responsibility to monitor the candidate’s work and to assist him or her, the thesis advisor, and the Department in assuring that it conforms to the candidate’s doctoral program.

N.B. Last modified on April 27, 1987