

Masters Committee Guidelines

A master's graduate committee serves a critical role in guiding and assessing a student's journey through their graduate program. Composed of faculty members with expertise in the student's field of study, the committee provides essential support and mentorship, helping to shape the research direction and ensuring the academic rigor of the student's work. They offer valuable feedback, monitor progress, and facilitate scholarly development, from the initial proposal¹ to the final culminating activity. Additionally, the committee ensures that the student's work meets the standards and contributes meaningfully to their chosen discipline, ultimately validating the student's readiness for professional or academic advancement.

Masters theses and projects require a minimum of two committee members, with a third adding expertise and support depending on the needs of the student. Members of the graduate advisory committee, particularly the chair, should have a strong background in the appropriate academic area, be able to communicate and work well with other faculty in the program, and the time to participate on or chair the committee².

The committee chair must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member who is from the Program. The chair of the graduate advisory committee should be selected as early as possible and in consultation with the Graduate Program Coordinator.

The second member will likely have the same qualifications as the committee chair. The second member may be:

- A tenured or tenure-track faculty member associated with a program other than the one granting the degree
- A tenured or tenure-track faculty member who is fully retired from the program but willing to “volunteer” their time to serve on the committee.
- Exceptions may be made for individuals who possess particular expertise in the field through a request by the committee chair or the graduate coordinator to the graduate dean/associate dean.

A third committee member may also be included on the committee who meets the second member's qualifications. An exception may be allowed for a person to serve as the third member in cases where the person does not meet the specific criteria indicated above but is otherwise qualified for committee membership due to significant professional achievement in an area related to the subject of the thesis or project. This includes professionals working in the community. Here, approval is required by the committee chair, graduate coordinator, and graduate dean/associate dean.

Graduate advisory committee membership is prohibited for people with conflicts of interest (e.g., those who are related to the graduate student by blood, marriage, personal relationship, or living arrangement).

Students who select the thesis or project as their culminating activity are urged to complete it during the semester they are enrolled in 699P or 699T (customarily taken during the last semesters of the master's program). In cases where the thesis or project is not completed during enrollment in these units, students are allowed a maximum of three additional semesters to complete the thesis or project. If the thesis or project is not completed by this deadline (and the program time limit has not run out), members of the committee may choose to withdraw. In the case of a faculty member withdrawing, it is the responsibility of the student to reconstitute the committee.

Exceptions to the policy on Graduate Advisory Committees may be requested by the graduate program coordinator and must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Advisor/Committee Chair

The Advisor/Committee Chair has the overall responsibility for guiding the student through the process of the successful completion of their culminating activity that fulfills the expectations of scholarly work at the masters level as well as meets the requirements of the Department or Program and the University.

The Advisor shall:

- be able and willing to assume principal responsibility for advising the student;
- have adequate time for this work and be accessible to the student;
- provide adequate and timely feedback to both the student and the Committee regarding student progress toward degree completion;
- guide and provide continuing feedback on the student's development of a research project or culminating activity by providing input on the intellectual appropriateness of the proposed activities, the reasonableness of project scope, acquisition of necessary resources and expertise, necessary laboratory or computer facilities, etc.;
- establish key academic milestones and communicate these to the student and appropriately evaluate the student on meeting these milestones.
- complete the Graduate Student Progress Report at the end of each semester

Suggested meeting frequency: Biweekly

Committee members

Committee members provide expertise to augment and support the student's culminating activity.

Committee Member(s) shall:

- have adequate time to assume the responsibilities associated with serving on a student's Committee;
- ensure that the student's work conforms to the highest standards of scholarly performance within the discipline and within the expertise provided by the Committee member;

- provide advice to both the student and the student's advisor(s) on the quality, suitability and timeliness of the work being undertaken;
- review culminating activity drafts as provided by the student and the advisor and provide feedback in a timely fashion; and
- participate in, and independently evaluate student performance in the final thesis defense.

Suggested meeting frequency: Bimonthly, possibly more frequently in the final month of the thesis/project.

Student Responsibilities

While it is expected that students receive guidance and support from their advisor and all members of the culminating activity committee, the student is responsible for actually defining and carrying out the project approved by the committee and completing the culminating activity demonstrating masters level work. As such, it is expected that the student assumes a leadership role in defining and carrying out all aspects of their degree program and culminating activity. Within this context, students have the following responsibilities:

- to formally establish a Thesis/Project Advisor and Committee by the end of their first year in their degree program;
- to call meetings of the Thesis/Project Committee as needed;
- to actively inform and solicit feedback from the Advisor and Committee on progress made toward degree;
- to respond to, and act on feedback from the Advisor and Committee in a timely and constructive manner;
- to understand and then apply the institutional and programmatic standards related to the ethical conduct of research in the completion of the student's thesis/dissertation; and
- to know, understand and follow deadlines defined by the institution and the degree program related to all aspects of the student's degree program.

¹ The IDST Regen Ag MS program does not have a formal proposal requirement, however, it is expected that there will be agreement between the committee and the student with respect to the thesis research project goals early in the program and that this will be documented in the student's semester progress report.

² Currently it is required that a chair be selected during the time of application for admission to the DST Regen Ag MS program.