

GUIDELINES: Thesis Committee Formation and Meetings

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I. Formation of Ph.D. Thesis Committee

The Graduate advisor and Ph.D. thesis director should be consulted in forming this committee. The Neuroscience Program rules for formation of this committee are somewhat more specific than those of the university. The Neuroscience Program rules are: the committee must include a Chair, three additional members with expertise in the area of thesis research from UCSF, and one outside member from a local university. The committee must include the Ph.D. thesis advisor, but this person can not serve as Chair. The committee must also include at least one faculty member from the student's qualifying examination committee to provide continuity. The committee can be formed initially with the Chair, Ph.D. thesis advisor and one additional member (one should be from the qualifying exam committee).

All committee members should have expertise enabling them to provide critical and helpful advice in the area of the thesis. Committee members must also be willing to read and evaluate the thesis.

The committee should serve the needs of the student. As projects proceed in new directions, perspectives change, or the student feels the committee is not meeting his/her needs, the composition of the committee can be changed without embarrassment by the student in consultation with his/her graduate advisor and Ph.D. thesis advisor.

II. Meetings of Ph.D. Thesis Committee

The student is responsible for organizing an initial meeting of the committee, ideally within one month of formation of this committee, but in any event no later than August 31 at the end of the 2nd year of study. Subsequent meetings of the committee must occur at a minimum of once every 12 months. Meetings with the Chair must occur every 6 months. Students must meet with their thesis committees each year as follows:

- 2nd and 3rd year students must meet with their committees by August 31.
- 4th year students and higher must meet with their committees by June 30.

The program will not process paperwork for enrollment and stipend support for students who have not done so unless the program director has approved an exception. The student is responsible for organizing all of these meetings. (If student fails to meet this responsibility, the program will intervene). Either the student or committee may initiate more frequent meetings as needed. Meetings may be held when necessary without all committee members. The outside member is not expected to attend these meetings.

III. Responsibilities of the Student

For each meeting, the student is responsible for preparing a written summary outlining the thesis project, progress on this project and objectives for completion of the thesis. This should include a time table. The summary should make clear what would be necessary to constitute an acceptable Ph. D. thesis, in the student's view. A copy of this summary is to be given to each member of the thesis committee and to the Neuroscience Program Office. Students should present and discuss critically experiments (successful or unsuccessful) at each meeting. Students should be current on the literature in relevant areas and should be prepared to discuss broader issues of relevance and importance as well as experimental data.

IV. Responsibilities of the Ph.D. Advisor

The Ph.D. advisor should provide a verbal or written preliminary evaluation to the student of the adequacy of the written summary prepared for each committee meeting. The Ph.D. advisor should provide both the student and committee with his/her evaluation of the student's progress and prospects.

V. Responsibilities of the Committee

The Committee should provide candid advice to both the student and advisor with the goal of facilitating progress towards the best possible Ph.D. thesis, as well as a timely progression toward the Ph.D. thesis. The committee should explicitly decide whether the summary of the Ph.D. thesis project describes goals adequate for award of a Ph.D. and communicate this decision with any modifications or reservations to the student and advisor. The committee should consider at each meeting: project strengths and



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weaknesses, the realism of the time table; the student's familiarity with the relevant literature; student's experimental strengths and weaknesses; and the adequacy of advice provided to the student by the Ph.D. advisor and others. The committee should provide advice in as positive a manner as possible to provide as much support as possible to the student in what is a very difficult undertaking.

The committee has the responsibility, particularly for thesis projects that may be overly ambitious, to set deadlines for obtaining significant results that would justify continuation of the student's approach, and to explore with the student fall-back projects to be carried out if the present project fails.

Between meetings, the committee members will be willing to meet with the student for advice and discussions.

The committee, excluding the thesis advisor, has the responsibility at each meeting to meet separately with the thesis advisor and student at the beginning or end of the meeting to have confidential discussions on any subjects relevant for the student's progress and welfare.

VI. Responsibilities of the Committee Chair

The committee chair should prepare a brief written report on each meeting for submission to the Graduate Advisors and Neuroscience Program office. This report will include among other things, a statement on the time-table and the adequacy of the student's statement of proposed work necessary for an acceptable Ph.D. thesis. The chair should meet separately with the student and advisor after each meeting to discuss this report and other aspects of the meeting. While advice should be provided in as positive a manner as possible, the chair has the responsibility of identifying potential and actual problems and ensuring that candid advice on the project and/or the student's progress and prospects is conveyed to the student and the program.

The chair will also meet individually with the student each 6 months, or more frequently, to provide input on progress and discuss any other issues of interest to the student.

The chair has the responsibility to ensure that any concerns about the student's interests or welfare in his or her laboratory are conveyed to the Neuroscience Program Director and Executive Committee. The chair should be acquainted with services provided by the university and the Neuroscience Program to enhance student welfare and should facilitate student use of these services when appropriate.

VII. Responsibilities of the Thesis Committee Oversight Group

The Neuroscience Executive Committee has constituted itself as a Thesis Committee Oversight Group with responsibility for reviewing records of thesis committee meetings. Individual members of the Executive Committee have oversight responsibilities for small groups of students. Each Executive Committee member has responsibility for ensuring that the students, the committees and the advisors are fulfilling their responsibilities in a consistent manner that meets the needs of both the student and program.