Dissertation Chair

An important key to success in a dissertation is the selection of a dissertation chair who must be a member of the SPGIA core faculty. The dissertation chair gives primary guidance to the student while in candidacy.

Typically, students and faculty members discover or develop mutual interests, and the decision of who will be the advisor flows naturally from their evolving relationship. This decision is voluntary on both sides; that is, the student is free to select the dissertation chair, and the faculty is free to decide which students’ committees to chair. *It is the responsibility of the student to identify a dissertation chair who will accept the responsibility of supervision.* Failure to do so may result in dismissal from the program. It may become necessary to make significant modifications to the proposed topic to meet the interests of the available faculty.

The Role of the Chair

Chairs serve as the major advisor and mentor to the doctoral candidates as they research and write their dissertation. Expectations of the chair include the following:

For the Proposal:

- Consult and meet with the student on a regular basis
- Advise on topic selection (e.g., appropriateness, academic value)
- Guide the student in the proposal writing process (e.g., understanding the need for a clearly defined problem statement, precise research questions, viable methodology, focused literature review, and thorough bibliography)
- Counsel student on reliability and validity of data-gathering methods
- Ensure that all research activities will be reviewed by the Human Subjects Review Board prior to implementation of the research activities. George Mason University requires that all research activities involving human subjects or data regarding human subjects that are directed by a Mason faculty member, staff member or student (including thesis and dissertation work) or involve Mason faculty, staff or students as participants, must be submitted to the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance for review and approval. Refer to [http://oria.gmu.edu/home/](http://oria.gmu.edu/home/)
- The Dissertation Chair will serve as the principal investigator for the research and assumes responsibility for the legal and ethical conduct of the work.
- Facilitate committee discussions about creating and improving the proposal
For the Dissertation:

- Meet with student on a regular basis to provide guidance and evaluation during the research and writing stages
- Review dissertation drafts in a timely manner
- Offer recommendations for revisions
- Communicate with committee members
- Discuss any problematic issues in the dissertation with the committee, student, and program director
- Approve the final draft for the dissertation defense, with the concurrence of the committee members
- Attend and supervise the dissertation defense
- Attend graduation/convocation to hood the candidate

Dissertation Committee

As soon as the student passes the Comprehensive Exams, the student should meet with the Doctoral Program Director about forming the dissertation committee.

All dissertation committees must consist of at least three members of the Mason faculty, at least two of whom must be from SPGIA. The dissertation chair must be a member of the Political Science program of the student’s field of study. Only a faculty member with a full-time appointment at George Mason University may serve as dissertation chair. The chair as well as the two other primary committee members must be tenured or tenure-track (assistant, associate, or full professor). Other Mason faculty, as well as individuals from outside the university, may be appointed as additional members to the committee. Such appointments are made where the additional member’s expertise and contribution add value to the dissertation, but appointment does not require tenured or tenure-track faculty status.

Student-initiated changes in the composition of the dissertation committee may occur only with the approval of the PhD Program Director and SPGIA Dean in consultation with the committee. Faculty may resign from a dissertation committee with appropriate notice by submitting a written resignation.

If the dissertation chair departs from the university the following will apply: With the approval of the PhD Program Director, faculty departing at the end of the academic year (spring) will be allowed to continue in that role until the deadline for submitting dissertations for the summer. If the student does not or will not meet the deadline for submission in summer, a new chair must be appointed for the student’s committee. In all other cases, it is required that the dissertation chair be a member of the graduate faculty member with a full-time appointment at Mason.
The Role of the Committee
The dissertation committee works with the chair to provide advice and consultation to the candidate throughout the process of research and writing. Expectations of the committee members include the following:

For the Proposal
- Meet with the student
- Advise on topic selection (e.g., appropriateness, academic value)
- Offer expertise in the member’s area of study
- Read and review the proposal in a timely manner
- Discuss any recommendations for revisions with the committee chair and student

For the Dissertation
- Meet with the student to provide guidance and evaluation during the research and writing stages
- Review dissertation drafts in a timely manner
- Offer recommendations for revisions
- Discuss any problematic issues in the dissertation with the committee chair and student
- Approve the final draft for the dissertation defense, in consultation with the other committee members

Members of the dissertation committee are expected to be present in person at the dissertation defense.