

Date: March 27, 2026
To: Steering Committee
From: Liz Gardner, Graduate Director, FSHN, Chair, UCAG
Re: Committee Composition for Graduate Student Guidance Committees.

Below is a summary of concerns regarding the current Graduate School guidelines for graduate student guidance committee composition. It is requested that this document be discussed at Steering and be forwarded to the appropriate committees for further discussion and guidance.

Graduate School's Requirement for Committee Members

<https://grad.msu.edu/academics/policies-and-procedures#m>

The Rule for Guidance Committees:

As members of the "regular faculty" ([MSU Bylaws 1.1.1.1](#), [GSRR 8](#), and [Faculty Handbook §II](#)), MSU tenure-stream faculty, the principal administrator of each major administrative unit, and librarians are eligible to sit on and chair graduate committees. **People beyond these categories must receive Graduate School approval to be eligible to join graduate committees.**

"The 'regular faculty' of Michigan State University shall consist of all persons appointed under the rules of tenure and holding the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor, and persons appointed as librarians. In addition, the principal administrative officer of each major educational and research unit of the university shall be a member of the 'regular faculty.'"

Master's:

Plan A

1. **Three or more persons** may be members of the guidance committee.
2. Persons who are not Michigan State University regular faculty who can contribute to the student's program may serve as members of the guidance committee and assist in the work of the committee, **providing that the number of such persons does not exceed the number of regular faculty on the committee.**

An exception may be granted by the Dean of the Graduate School to allow a non-tenure stream faculty member or an Academic Specialist to serve on a master's student's examination committee as one of the three required faculty members, or in special circumstances, as the chairperson of a master's student's examination committee or as the thesis advisor.

Plan B:

1. **Two or more persons** may be members of the guidance committee.
2. Persons who are not Michigan State University regular faculty who can contribute to the student's program may serve as members of the guidance committee and assist in the work of the committee, **providing that the number of such persons does not exceed the number of regular faculty on the committee.**

An exception may be granted by the Dean of the Graduate School to allow a non-tenure stream faculty member or an Academic Specialist to serve on a master's student's committee as one of the two required faculty members, or in special circumstances, as the chairperson of a master's student's committee.

Doctoral:

1. **More than four persons** may be members of the guidance committee.
2. Persons who are not Michigan State University regular faculty who can contribute to the student's program may serve as members of the guidance committee and assist in the work of the committee, **providing that the number of such persons does not exceed the number of regular faculty on the committee.**

An exception may be granted by the Dean of the Graduate School to allow a non-tenure stream faculty member or an Academic Specialist to serve on a master's student's examination committee as one of the three required

faculty members, or in special circumstances, as the chairperson of a doctoral student's examination committee or as the thesis advisor.

Current Process for Exception:

1. Non-regular faculty must submit request for approval by Grad School for EACH individual committee in their home department on which they wish to serve. Additional individual approvals are required for committees for faculty who are jointly appointed in other departments. One request must be submitted per program code. For example, a non-regular faculty member may be approved to sit on a FSHN committee but must get a separate approval to sit on another committee in a different department, despite having the required experience.
2. Non-regular faculty can apply for 5-year blanket approvals, but the window of opportunity to submit a request is **once a year in April**; however, approval to sit on committees commences the following September. These approvals must be renewed every 5 years.

The Burden:

Real World Example (FSHN):

	Total Students in program AY25	Total student committees impacted by policy AY25	Total student committees with "extra" members for 50/50 ratio AY25	Total committees required GPD to sit on Committee AY25	Anticipated Total Students in program AY26	Anticipated Total student committees impacted by policy AY26	Total student committees with "extra" members for 50/50 ratio AY26	Total committees required GPD to sit on Committee AY26
MS Food Regulatory Affairs	6	6	0	6	13	13	0	13
MS Nutrition & Dietetics	27	27	0	1	28	28	0	1
MS Food Science	9	5	3	0	7	3	1	0
MS Human Nutrition	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
PhD Food Science	12	7	0	0	12	8	1*	0
PhD Human Nutrition	12	7	1*	0	13	8	1*	0
Total	68	53	3	7	74	61	1	14
* 6 people on committee, not dual degree								

Overarching Issues:

1. Burden on TS faculty: need at least equal numbers to offset non-regular faculty. We simply do not have the numbers of eligible TS faculty members.
2. There is undue administrative burden on the faculty, department, and graduate school by having to constantly request permission from the grad school to add non-regular faculty members to committees.
3. Many non-regular faculty have research appointments and must request permission to be chair of their own students' committees, despite funding their research projects.
4. Dr. Laura Bix did a comprehensive review of non-regular appointments and found this "equal number" policy was disproportionately affected female non-regular faculty. This was the basis for allowing 5-year blanket approvals.
5. Many non-regular faculty have expertise in clinical and/or research areas that regular faculty may not have and have been hired to fulfill that need.
6. Many non-regular faculty have relevant experience in professional programs.
7. Many non-regular faculty members who want to serve on committees have expressed concerns of denigration and discrimination, and argue they are well qualified (more qualified than TS faculty in some cases) to sit on relevant thesis committees.
8. Non-regular faculty members have the right to choose NOT to serve on a committee if they so desire.
9. This requirement is **detrimental** to the student as it potentially limits **willing faculty** from serving on a guidance committee for which they are **eminently** qualified.
10. **There is no precedent for the arbitrary distribution of equal numbers of regular/non-regular faculty. The recommendation of the Dean of the Graduate School at the time that this policy was made was to "hire more TS faculty".** This is not a realistic approach to solve this problem.

The Ask:

Clearly, a review of current policy on graduate student guidance committee composition is warranted based upon the evidence provided. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that this matter be directed to the appropriate committees (UCGS, UCFA) for interpretation and review of this policy.