

Guidelines for serving on thesis and dissertation committees:

1. Thesis and dissertation committees represent the university in ensuring that the student has met all requirements for graduation. Your signature on the final document at the student's defense indicates that you consider him/her ready to graduate.
2. If asked to serve on a committee, you should aim to be present at all meetings but your attendance at the defense is absolutely required as well as if you are a member of an examination committee for a qualifying or candidacy exam. In extraordinary circumstances, you can attend by videoconference provided that is approved by the dean of the school or his/her designee; for the School of Medicine, this is the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education. You must plan to be present for the entire seminar and subsequent defense.
3. It is really difficult for students to get all 5 committee members together for meetings. When asked, please be as flexible as possible in helping to the student to find a common time. Plan to stay for the entire meeting – for routine meetings blocking 1.5 to 2 hours should be sufficient; defenses generally take 3 to 4 hours including the seminar.
4. Students and/or advisors are not required to feed you. If you receive food, it was a nice gesture, at their own expense, but should not influence your decisions.
5. Graduate programs handle meetings differently but in general you should come to meetings having read and critically evaluated any documents that were provided to you by the student.
6. Things to look for/do in a student meeting:
 - a) Is the student progressing in their knowledge of their discipline?
 - b) Is the student reading the literature both broadly and deeply?
 - c) Is the coursework appropriate for the discipline and the research area?
 - d) Is the student developing verbal and written communication skills?
 - e) Is the research progressing in a timely manner?
 - f) If the research is not progressing, help the student and advisor to get things back on track. This may involve changing experimental approaches, changing research questions, eliminating distracting activities that are taking the student away from the laboratory.
 - g) Be sure that students in their 5th year are progressing toward graduation.
 - h) Ensure that advisors are not changing student's projects without rationale or adding additional experiments onto the student that are outside the aims of the dissertation. These situations are never cut and dry but if you are concerned, bring it up in the meeting (preferably when the student is out of the room).
 - i) Provide feedback to the student in a constructive fashion and in a timely manner. The last meeting for the defense is not time to show displeasure of the entire hypothesis.
 - j) Is the student demonstrating independence on the project?
7. Committee members often become role models and additional mentors for the student. If this happens it is a compliment to you.

8. The student may come to you if he/she is having trouble in the laboratory or with the advisor. If this happens, listen, do not promise confidentiality, encourage him/her to talk to the advisor, seek advice from the program director and the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.

9. Service on thesis and dissertation committees requires a large amount of time and effort. Be sure to list this on your promotion and tenure documents under teaching and **do not agree to serve on more committees than you can provide sufficient time and attention.**