

Berkeley Graduate Division

Date: August 29, 2019

To: Deans, Department Chairs, Head Graduate Advisors, and Graduate Student Affairs Officers

From: John Battles, Chair, Graduate Council

Lisa García Bedolla, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate Division

Re: Revisions to Policies Governing Composition of Higher Degree Committees



Increased flexibility in higher degree committee composition

In response to reports from graduate students and their advisors about the difficulties forming committees for Master's theses, doctoral qualifying examinations, and doctoral dissertations, the Graduate Council has approved revisions to the policy governing the composition of higher degree committees. The goal is to provide greater flexibility to students and departments while maintaining the excellence and rigor of graduate education at Berkeley.

We announce the following changes, effective December 18, 2019.

1. For higher degree committees, any member of the Academic Senate can serve as the Academic Senate Representative regardless of departmental, school, or graduate group affiliation. The prohibition against non-Senate faculty serving in this role remains in place.
2. For higher degree committees, the chair or co-chair of the committee must be an Academic Senate member who is a member of the degree granting unit.¹ There are no other requirements regarding the percentage of members from the degree granting unit, or from outside the unit (e.g., a committee can come entirely from within the degree granting unit).
3. For all higher degree committees, the head graduate advisor (HGA) in the student's degree granting unit must approve the composition of the committee. See the last page for implementation details.

These changes establish new minimum requirements. **Graduate degree programs that wish to retain their current requirements may do so**, but they must:

1. inform Graduate Division of the requirements by **December 16, 2019**;
2. apply those requirements to all students uniformly; and
3. publish those requirements in a student handbook and/or on a departmental website.

Programs that do not submit a response by December 16, 2019 will be assumed to have adopted the new requirements.

Programs may adopt the new minimum requirements before December 16th by completing [this survey](#) or informing Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs Linda Song via email (lhsong@berkeley.edu).

¹ For the purposes of this policy, academic unit membership is defined as follows: 1) for departments and schools, faculty must have voting rights in the academic unit offering the degree (in the case of emeriti, they must have had voting rights before retirement), and 2) for graduate groups, faculty must be core members in that group (and on file as such in the Graduate Division).

To support your students, please make your decision thoughtfully and ensure that students and faculty are informed.

While graduate degree programs can retain their current requirements, the student information system will enforce the new minimum requirements as of December 18th.

If your program will hold students to higher requirements, then it is important that HGAs and GSAOs enforce those requirements and verify students' adherence to departmental policy before submitting eForms to the Graduate Division. Graduate Division will not be verifying that submitted committees meet each department's requirements.

To avoid student appeals, it is vital that all students in each program are held to the same set of requirements for the composition of higher degree committees. We therefore strongly urge faculty of departments, schools, and graduate groups to meet and decide what the requirements will be for graduate students in their programs and maintain the status quo until a final decision has been made and communicated to students.

How to retain current requirements or to adopt the new policy

Until academic programs consult with faculty on this policy and finalize their decision, they are advised to follow current requirements.

Once a program decides how it wants to proceed, please complete [this survey](#) (it will also be sent to all GSAOs later this semester), or inform Assistant Dean Linda Song at lhsong@berkeley.edu.

Because the student information system will enforce the new minimum requirement, it is vital that programs implement consistent adoption across all higher degree committees.

Process for Head Graduate Advisors

As has always been the case, HGAs should approve the composition of higher degree committees.

When a committee is submitted for approval, the GSAO and HGA will be notified by email. The email will include the student's information and proposed committee members.

After the HGA has approved the committee, the GSAO can enter the approval² in Campus Solutions.

Ask us questions!

Please direct questions to the Graduate Division Student Academic Advisor for your program, either Britney Stewart (britneys@berkeley.edu) or Clay Calder (jccalder@berkeley.edu), and cc Assistant Dean Linda Song (lhsong@berkeley.edu).

Full policy language is available at <http://grad.berkeley.edu/policy/degrees-policy/>.

The Graduate Council report recommending policy revisions is available at http://grad.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/GC_HDC-composition-policy_5.6.19.pdf.

² The authority currently granted to GSAOs in CS presumes HGA approval.

Examples of acceptable Qualifying Exam committees under the new policy

(requires Head Graduate Advisor approval):

Chair	Senate member from degree-granting unit
Additional Member	Senate member from degree-granting unit
Additional Member	Senate member from degree-granting unit
ASR	Senate member from degree-granting unit

Chair	Senate member from degree-granting unit
Additional Member	Senate member from Outside the unit
Additional Member	Senate member from Outside the unit
ASR	Senate member from Outside the unit

Examples of acceptable dissertation committees under the new policy

(requires Head Graduate Advisor approval):

Chair	Senate member from degree-granting unit
Additional Member	Senate member from degree-granting unit
ASR	Senate member from degree-granting unit

Chair	Senate member from degree-granting unit
Additional Member	Senate member from Outside the unit
ASR	Senate member from Outside the unit