



The Graduate College

SELECTING A DEFENSE COMMITTEE

PLEASE NOTE: The Defense Examination Committee approved by the Graduate College is different from the Studies Committee, which is appointed by the student's department chairperson or graduate program director. The studies committee and defense examination committee need not be identical.

MASTER'S: Your defense examination committee will require a minimum of 3 members including an advisor and a chairperson. Your advisor and the chairperson must be appointed members of the UVM graduate faculty (a list of graduate faculty may be found in the Graduate Catalogue and on the Graduate College website). If you have co-advisors, there must be an additional member who is not an advisor or the chairperson. The chairperson must be from outside your and your advisor's department and program including primary and secondary appointments. The chairperson of your defense committee does not have to be from your studies committee. Your defense examination committee must be approved by the Graduate College. You must submit the "Defense Committee Membership" form found [here](#) as soon as your committee is formed OR by the Intent to Graduate deadline for your graduation cycle at the latest. A new form must be submitted if your committee changes.

DOCTORAL: Your defense examination committee will consist of a minimum of 4 appointed members of the University of Vermont Graduate Faculty including an advisor and a chairperson (a list of graduate faculty may be found in the Graduate Catalogue and on the Graduate College website). At least two members must be from inside your department. If you have co-advisors, there must be an additional member from the graduate faculty who is not an advisor or the chairperson. The chairperson must be from outside your and your advisor's department and graduate program including primary and secondary appointments. The chairperson of your defense examination committee does not have to be from your studies committee. Your defense examination committee must be approved by the Graduate College. You must submit the "Defense Committee Membership" form found [here](#) as soon as your committee is formed OR by the Intent to Graduate deadline for your graduation cycle at the latest. A new form must be submitted if your committee changes.

EXCEPTIONS: Check with your department for specific requirements concerning your committee, advisor, and chairperson. Individual departments may require more than 4 committee members or have specific membership requirements.

For University-wide interdisciplinary programs, and/or programs that incorporate faculty from multiple departments, the chairperson must be from outside the department of the candidate's advisor.

When appropriate, a non-UVM member or non-graduate faculty member serve as an additional member on the committee. This must be approved by the Graduate College Dean or Associate Dean. To make this request, the student's advisor must complete the "Request for External Defense Committee Member" form found [here](#). A current curriculum vitae from the member is required to complete the form.

THESIS/DISSERTATION ADVISOR: This advisor is typically your scholarly mentor - a faculty member in your program who works most closely with you as you proceed through all phases of your research. Your advisor usually has specific expertise in the field of your scholarship and offers guidance in the structure, content and methodology of the work. The advisor also assures that you are aware of current standards for the actual thesis or dissertation manuscript, its organization, and format. The additional members of your thesis/dissertation defense committee are typically selected based upon specific types of expertise they hold as well. For example, you may identify a faculty member who has worked extensively with a certain type of experimental design that you are using, or perhaps the individual's scholarship has adopted a different but complementary theoretical perspective. In any case, the committee member might help you consider alternative or more in-depth ways of thinking about certain aspects of your scholarly project.

ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON: The defense examination committee chairperson serves quite a different role. First and foremost, the chairperson is responsible for assuring that the procedures and standards of UVM's Graduate College are met as you complete and defend your thesis/dissertation. This helps to ensure that the UVM degree you earn reflects some common standard of accomplishment across the University. The chairperson is the objective "outsider" (vis-a-vis your program) capable of ascertaining that the thesis or dissertation and defense meet university-wide standards and guidelines. At the same time, the chairperson is there to assure that you, the student, are receiving full and fair attention from the committee--the sort of opportunity and treatment that is due each and every student in UVM's Graduate College. Essentially, the chairperson serves a dual purpose, as a student advocate, and as a bearer of standards for the College as a whole.

A student may choose to identify a chairperson who also has scholarly expertise closely related to the thesis/dissertation; this can be helpful but it is not necessary. In fact, interesting and important contributions can be made by a chairperson who has considerable distance from the field of inquiry. Approaching the issues from a different discipline, an individual can ask insightful questions and offer innovative perspectives that may be overlooked by those who have long been immersed in the traditions.

ADVICE: Be thoughtful and creative as you work to assemble your defense examination committee. Consider your own background - its strengths and its gaps - as well as those of your advisor; ask yourself what sorts of support you would find helpful (scholarly, motivational, practical, psychological, etc.) and try to identify committee members who can contribute accordingly. Then relax and take advantage of the different skills and insights your committee members can bring to bear on your work. The system is designed to support the development of first-rate scholarship on your part.