

GUIDELINES: NEUROSCIENCE GRADUATE PROGRAM TERMINAL MASTER'S DEGREE MS PROCESS

A. INITIAION: There are three avenues by which a student can move from the NGP PhD track to the terminal Master's track. The process can be initiated by recommendation of the PhD advisor, qualifying exam committee or dissertation committee. Transfer to the terminal Master's track cannot be initiated by request of the student. The final decision on whether a student may pursue a terminal Master's degree is made by the student's Master's thesis committee as described below. Prior to that, the following procedures are followed:

1. Recommendation of the PhD advisor: Prior to the student's qualifying exam, the PhD advisor may recommend to the Director that the student is not progressing satisfactorily on the PhD track and that, in the advisor's opinion, the student will be unable to complete their dissertation research. In this case, the Director, advisor and student will come to an agreement on whether the student should move to another lab, pursue a terminal Master's degree, or leave the program. If all parties agree to pursue a terminal Master's degree, the process starting at C. below will be followed. The procedure to be followed in the event of a disagreement is described elsewhere.
2. Failure of the PhD qualifying exam: If the PhD qualifying exam is not passed on a first attempt, the student is given a second exam. If the student does not pass the second exam, the PhD dissertation committee can recommend that the student be dismissed from the NGP or that the student be allowed to pursue a terminal Master's degree. The recommendation is conveyed to the NGP in written form through completion of signed documents recording the outcome of the second attempt written and oral PhD qualifying exam. *This decision is preliminary and will not be submitted to the Graduate College, until steps 1, 2 and 3 in the "Verification" process described below are completed.*
3. Failure of the PhD defense: If the student fails to defend her/his PhD dissertation to the dissertation committee's satisfaction, the committee has the option to recommend that the student write up their work as a terminal Master's thesis. *This decision is preliminary and will not be submitted to the Graduate College, until steps 1 and 3 in the "Verification" process described below are completed.*

B. VERIFICATION: Upon receiving the qualifying exam committee's recommendation, the NGP director will take the following actions:

1. As soon as possible after the second qualifying exam (preferably on the same day), the NGP Director will meet with the qualifying exam committee or its chairperson to discuss their decision and to verify that all procedures were followed correctly, and that the student was treated fairly.
2. If the decision is to dismiss the student, the Director will inform the student and the student's advisor of that decision. The Director, advisor and student will then meet to decide on an exit plan for the student.
3. If the decision is to recommend that the student proceed to a terminal Master's degree, the NGP director will meet with the student's advisor to get an initial assessment of whether enough data exists to write a MS thesis, or if not whether enough data could be collected within the 1 year limit allowed for a terminal MS). An initial timeframe will be discussed, along with plans for funding the student's stipend during that time. The Director, advisor and student will then meet to discuss the tentative plan for pursuing a terminal MS.

C. BEFORE THE FIRST MS COMMITTEE MEETING:

1. The Director, the advisor, and the student will consult on choosing members of a MS thesis committee. The new committee should include the thesis advisor, one faculty outside of the mentor's department who will serve as the committee chair, and at least one but optimally two additional faculty. At least two members of the committee must be members of the NGP. The committee members can, but need not, include members of the original PhD qualifying exam committee.
2. The Director invites prospective committee members to serve. Once the committee is confirmed, the NGP Administrator will then schedule the first committee meeting.

FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING: The goals of the first MS committee meeting is to officially decide whether the student may pursue a MS degree.

1. Approximately one week before the first committee, the student will submit a brief summary of their proposed thesis, including the hypothesis and preliminary data. This document is intended to help the committee understand the scientific basis of the thesis project and the current status of the research. A recommended length is one to three pages.
2. At the meeting, the student will provide an oral presentation summarizing the research that she/he hopes to write up as a Master's thesis. The committee will discuss the proposed thesis with the student. By this time the student's advisor will most likely have already indicated that in their judgement the student does have sufficient data and time to write a MS thesis. Nevertheless, the committee will confirm the advisor's view as to whether the student currently has enough data to write a thesis, whether more research is necessary, or whether in the view of the committee, the student will be unable to complete a suitable research project within the timeline presented by the advisor and/or the one year maximum timeframe allowed for this process.
3. This committee meeting will simultaneously serve as the qualifying exam that the Graduate College requires of all graduate students. The committee's decision to allow the student to proceed with writing a terminal MS thesis will serve as the passing grade for the qualifying exam. A committee decision to dismiss the student from the NGP without a terminal MS will constitute a failing grade for the qualifying exam. Please note that the committee's decision is final. It will be conveyed to the NGP and to the Graduate College via signed forms provided at the start of the meeting.
4. If the student is approved to continue with a terminal MS, the committee will agree on a timeline, including a deadline for submitting the thesis and a proposed defense date.

FURTHER COMMITTEE MEETINGS OR UPDATES: Subsequent meetings or other methods (e.g. emailed progress reports) to review student progress will be scheduled at the discretion of the committee. It is advisable that the committee provide a tentative schedule for such meetings at the first committee meeting.

SCHEDULING THE DEFENSE: A tentative defense date will be set at the first meeting. The actual defense date can be agreed upon as the student nears completion of their research. The following timeline should be followed:

1. Two months prior to defense: Submit Intent to Graduate Form: <http://www.uvm.edu/~gradcoll/pdf/Intent%20to%20Graduate%20-%20Fillable2.pdf> The completed thesis should be submitted to the thesis committee no less than two weeks before the scheduled defense.
2. One month prior to defense: Submit Thesis Draft for Graduate College Format/Record Check. The student must arrange this in advance with the Graduate College as per their guidelines.
3. Three weeks prior to defense: Defense Notice must be submitted to graduate college. This is required to provide notification of the public portion of the defense.
4. Two weeks prior to the defense: Thesis due to the committee.

DEFENDING THE THESIS: The thesis defense will consist of both a public and a closed-door component as per Graduate College Requirements.

SUBMITTING THE FINAL, SIGNED THESIS TO THE GRADUATE COLLEGE: The student has up to six weeks after the defense to address any committee comments and concerns. **The deadline for submitting the final thesis to the Graduate College is six weeks from the date of the defense**