

## Recommendations for Credentialing and Dissertation Committees

10 January 2018

### Background

Following extensive discussions in the Credentials Committee and increasing calls from Department and College constituencies, the Graduate School was tasked at the end of the 2016-2017 academic year with reforming the credentialing process for the authority to direct dissertations. In response, Dean Dixie Thompson convened a special summer Credentials Working Group to make recommendations for potential reforms. The Credentials Working Group was chaired by Associate Dean Ernest Brothers, and included committee members Amy Broemmel (CEHHS), Todd Moore (CAS), Charles Noble (HCB), John Stier (CASNR), and Mehmet Aydeniz (CEHHS).

In September 2017, the Summer Credentials Working Group finalized their recommendations. Following a joint meeting of the Academic Policy Committee and the Credentials Committee, Dean Thompson appointed an Ad-Hoc Committee on Credentialing and Dissertation Committees to work through the recommendations of the Summer Working Group, and propose concrete policy changes on the credentialing process and graduate school policies on the establishment of PhD Dissertation committees. The Ad-Hoc Committee, with members drawn from both the APC and the Credentials Committee, met in early November to draft new language governing Dissertation committees. Guided by the original charge to reform the process from Spring 2017 and the work of the Summer Working Group, the committee sought to write policy based on the following principles:

1. All tenured and tenure-track faculty at the rank Assistant Professor or above be automatically credentialed to direct dissertations;
2. Joint faculty at the rank Joint Assistant Professor or above in interdisciplinary/intercollegiate PhD programs be automatically credentialed to direct dissertations;
3. Permission for non-tenure track faculty either from inside or outside of UT be handled first in the graduate program unit, and submitted to the graduate school by the Department or Program head.

As with any policy, small changes can have cascading affects. The most difficult question in this process has been how to deal with Bredesen Center joint faculty, and other edge cases in the variety of programs at the University. For precedent on including ORNL Joint Faculty, the committee looked to the University of New Mexico, which has a similar relationship with two national laboratories.

The committee tasked with evaluating the current Ph.D. credentialing process believes strongly that the most informed decisions regarding an individual's ability to meet the needs of doctoral students pursuing a Ph.D. are made at the doctoral program granting level. With that in mind, we are advocating a system in which the department /interdisciplinary unit is charged with making the determination of who can chair and serve on Ph.D. committees within the parameters established at the University level. We also believe that both tenured faculty and those faculty hired into tenure-track positions are inherently presumed to have the capabilities to serve as Ph.D. committee chairs. We recognize that those in other roles, both inside and outside of the University of Tennessee, may possess the qualities necessary to serve, and believe that the department /interdisciplinary unit would be most knowledgeable about making judgments related to those qualifications. As such, we are proposing a new system in which there is no university-wide credentialing committee. Rather, the primary responsibility for approving Ph.D. committees lies at the department/interdisciplinary unit level, although the Dean of the Graduate School still retains the responsibility of making certain that such committee appointments fall under the broad parameters outlined below.

On January 10, 2018, the Academic Policy Committee and Credentials Committee held a joint meeting to review and discuss the proposed policy. The committees unanimously approved the policy.

## **Guidelines for Ph.D. Committee Service**

Ph.D. committees at the University of Tennessee must be composed of at least four people. At least two committee members must be tenured or tenure track UT faculty. The chair of the committee is typically from the student's department/intercollegiate program. At least one member must be from an academic unit other than that of the student's department; in interdisciplinary programs, one member shall be from outside that program. Committee members outside the student's home department/program are referred to below as external members. External members may be from outside of the University of Tennessee, but must be approved in accordance with the procedures below.

The Dean of the Graduate school must approve every PhD student committee; however, the primary responsibility for approving individuals to serve on those committees is held at the department/interdisciplinary unit level, according to their bylaws. As a rule, the faculty member's graduate unit/department submits the Doctoral Committee form with any necessary attachments to the Graduate School immediately upon formation of the dissertation committee.

Those who may chair and/or serve on committees fall under one of the following categories. However, the Dean of the Graduate School may grant one-time approval outside the parameters of these categories, in specific cases as supported by the department and deemed in the best interest of the student.

**Category One:** University of Tennessee tenured or tenure-track faculty holding a doctoral degree or joint faculty holding a doctoral degree are automatically granted the approval to chair or be a member of any doctoral committee.

**Category Two:** Individuals who are not tenured/tenure track whose primary employer is the University of Tennessee and who hold the titles of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor can co-chair or be a member of dissertation committees. However, they may only co-chair committees if their appointment is within the student's major.

**Category Three:** Tenured or tenure-track faculty at other institutions may serve as the external member on a dissertation committee. The individual's CV must be attached to the Ph.D. committee form when it is submitted to the Graduate School.

**Category Four:** Others who are considered experts in the field may serve as an external member of the dissertation committee. The individual's CV must be attached to the Ph.D. committee form when it is submitted to the Graduate School.

**Category Five:** Emeritus faculty may continue to chair, or serve as a member of, existing committees. They may not be appointed to any new committees once retired, but they may continue to serve out their previously approved committee roles. In the case that a Ph.D. committee chair leaves the University of Tennessee prior to a student completing the degree, the chair may (1) resign from the committee, (2) serve as a co-chair of the committee; or (3) serve as a member of the committee. The student must submit a change of committee form documenting the appointment of a new chair or co-chair and updating the appointment status of the previous chair.

In cases when a department head believes an exception to the above categories is needed, the department head may appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School.