BEST PRACTICES for CHAIRING DISSERTATION COMMITTEES

Committee chairs should…

- Actively assist the student in the selection of faculty for their committee.
- Assist the student in scheduling and planning committee meetings.
  - Keep the department/program norms in mind.
- Ensure the committee knows the roles and expectations of the chair/co-chairs and members.
  - Members other than the chair(s) have variable involvement in the student’s project.
  - The Chair determines when the student may share drafts with the committee.
  - Everyone should stay in touch throughout the process.
- Proactively coach the student to prepare for situations such as...
  - Committee members failing to—within a reasonable time frame—respond to the student’s requests/questions, or review document drafts.
  - Committee member disagreements (personal, intellectual) which become problematic.
  - Contentious debate during a defense, where the chair may ask guests to leave temporarily.
- Take the reins on resolving member conflicts that do not resolve themselves in a professional or timely manner.
- Communicate the department’s process for deliberations and voting during a defense.
- The Graduate School does not formally recognize co-chairs.
  - However, some programs at the University use such a model to train individual chairs.
  - When there are co-chairs, consult to determine responsibilities.
- Fill out the Dissertation Committee Meeting form, discuss its contents during meetings, and send completed forms to the Student Services Specialist.
- Serve as professional mentors to student advisees.

EXPECTATIONS for DISSERTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee members are expected to…

- Attend meetings whenever possible.
- Offer advice and feedback to the student as necessary to guide them through their project.
- Read proposals carefully and provide feedback, preferably written, in a timely manner (within three weeks).
- Be familiar with the expectations for the dissertation and the oral defense.
- Be clear about which committee member wants which revisions.
- Communicate with the chair and other committee members.