

Guide for Graduate Students: Arranging Committee Meetings According to David Waterman (3-1-07)

Typically in this department, responsibility for arranging meetings to approve thesis or dissertation proposals, approve course programs, PhD qualifying exams, or defense of a thesis or dissertation, is left to the student. Getting the hang of making these arrangements takes some practice in my experience, so here are some guidelines. Of course, you can learn this on your own, but that is often a case of mastering the art after you no longer need it.

Step 1: Always *get your advisor's approval that you are ready to proceed to a committee meeting.* Also discuss with your advisor about who needs to be at the meeting. Department or College rules, for example, don't always require that outside or minor department members attend committee meetings other than the thesis or dissertation defense, but your advisor may feel they need to be there.

Note: If you send any documents--your thesis or dissertation proposal, a draft of the thesis, etc. to your full committee without prior approval of your advisor, this will create confusion, since other members won't know whether it's something your advisor has said is ready to defend, that they should evaluate it for that purpose, etc. It may be, for example, that your advisor wants you to send your draft thesis to everyone to get their opinion on whether it is ready to defend, but this decision needs to be made by your advisor and you need to clearly explain that when you send it out.

Step 2: Find out from your advisor approximately when the meeting should take place, and find out an overall window of time, say within one or two weeks (see below, depending on purpose of the meeting), when your advisor will be available for the meeting.

Step 3: Send an e-mail message, simultaneously to all members of your committee, including your advisor, requesting specific times when they would be available, within no more than a one week window. Also, ask your advisor how long the meeting needs to be and include that information.

For example:

Dear Professors Quagmire, Gruntmeier, and Lunchbight,

My advisor, Prof. Quagmire, has told me that I need to have a meeting of my master's thesis committee, of which you are a member, to discuss and approve my thesis proposal. Can you please let me know the specific times that you could be available for a one hour meeting between Monday, June 3 and Friday, June 7?

After I hear from you, I will let you know a time when everyone can attend. If you are not available that week, please let me know about the following week.

Attached is the draft of my thesis proposal.

Thank you,

Lucille Ball

Note: this is just an example—use words that you are comfortable with. Keep in mind, however, that it's just business. Professors are not doing you a favor by meeting with you; it's their job. Always be considerate, but you don't need to appeal for a meeting as if you are panhandling.

Step 4: After you hear from everyone, pick a mutually agreeable time, arrange for a meeting room from Tamera, and then send an e-mail to everyone at once announcing that the time and date of ____ seems to be mutually agreeable and that you have scheduled the meeting in Room ____, and that they should please let you know right away if that time is not available for them.

Notes on lead time: Always try to schedule any meeting at least one, and preferably two or more weeks ahead. Many faculty have busy schedules that are likely to be filled with less notice, so that you might get stuck sending out a whole new set of messages asking for different dates. Also, by the time you hear back from everyone, it may be impossibly close to your chosen date and time for you to announce it. Also, if you are defending a thesis or dissertation, you must nearly always give everyone at least 2 weeks to read the work after you have sent it to them. Most of the time they will actually read it the morning of the meeting or the day before, but that's the way it works.

Of course, there may be exceptions. For example, you might learn that you or one of your committee members suddenly has to leave town for 3 months at the end of the week and you need to have a meeting within 2 days. In that case, you can ask everyone if they can by chance meet in the next 2 days due to this unforeseen circumstance, and if they can meet they will say yes, but be ready to give it up and have the meeting when everyone is back in town.