

Process for Making Changes to a Student's MA or PhD Committee

When a graduate student and faculty member agree to work together as advisee and advisor, the relationship should be productive and satisfying. The relationship should be marked by open and regular communication, honesty, and respect. As the advisee-advisor form a committee, such expectations carry over into that group as a whole.

Sometimes a need arises for a change in advisor, or for a change in the composition of the committee. In the event that a student's advisor moves to another institution, for instance, the advisor can no longer serve in that capacity.

In other cases, if a student or advisor finds that a change is in order either in their relationship, or in the composition of the committee, a meeting of the full committee must be called to discuss the situation. Sometimes a student finds that another advisor would be more appropriate because the student's research interests have shifted dramatically. A faculty member may no longer feel capable of advising a student. If all the parties come out of such a meeting agreeing to the proposed changes, then the student must inform the graduate coordinator via email of the decision, include the entire committee in that message, and fill out the required paperwork.

There are highly exceptional cases, however, when this standard process does not succeed or when initiating it would seem unwise. These are cases with interpersonal problems that do not seem resolvable through ordinary dialogue. In such cases, either the student or advisor must approach the graduate coordinator for counsel on how to proceed. If the graduate coordinator is part of the committee, then the Chair of the department can be consulted instead. If both are on the committee, then the Associate Dean of the College must be consulted.

Changes may be approved at any point after the student's plan of study has been approved. However, in general, such changes should be requested after coursework but before work on the exams have begun, or after the exams have been completed, but before work on the prospectus has begun.