

**Process Handbook**

**Advanced Degree Programs**

**School of Medicine**

**Virginia Commonwealth University**

**August 2003**

The Office of Graduate Education of the School of Medicine, Virginia Commonwealth University, provides coordination and oversight of advanced degree programs offered by Departments in the School of Medicine. Institutional oversight of graduate education at Virginia Commonwealth University is maintained by the School of Graduate Studies, which through University Graduate Council establishes University policy on matters relevant to graduate education. As a practical matter, direct interaction with the School of Graduate Studies is infrequent for students and faculty. The Office of Graduate Education of the School of Medicine provides liaison to the School of Graduate Studies on behalf of the students and faculty. In the course of progressing toward degree completion, contact with the Office of Graduate Education is therefore, common.

The Office of Graduate Education is physically located in Room 1-058 Sanger Hall. The office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday - Friday.

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This booklet supplements the description of policies, which apply to advanced degree (Certificate, Masters and Doctor of Philosophy) programs administered by the School of Medicine as presented in the University Graduate Bulletin. In this document, Bulletin language relating to the progress of the student in a training program following admission to the institution has been reproduced and is *italicized* to provide a condensed policy handbook. These policy statements have been supplemented with descriptions of process and procedure, including examples of the forms required at various stages of advancement toward the completion of the degree. Overall the handbook is intended to serve as a practical guide to address and clarify questions which arise on a continuing basis. The document is intended to serve the students and faculty of the School of Medicine. Comment and suggestion as to content and presentation is welcome and encouraged.

Graduate education in the basic health sciences occupies a critical position in the varied missions of the School of Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University. The maintenance of high standards of quality while serving the career objectives of our students are the responsibility of the Departments offering advanced degree programs.

Advanced Degree Programs - School of Medicine  
Virginia Commonwealth University

## **ORGANIZATION**

*In the School of Medicine advanced degree programs are coordinated through the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Education who acts for the Dean on all issues related to the administration of advanced degree programs. Each advanced degree program is represented by a faculty member who serves as Director for Graduate Programs. Directors are appointed either by the Chair of the department offering graduate degrees or, in the case of interdisciplinary programs, by the Dean in consultation with the Chairs of participating departments. The Directors of Graduate Programs act on behalf of the programs and hold the responsibility and authority to represent the respective department(s) and their faculties to the School.*

## **MCV CAMPUS GRADUATE COMMITTEE**

*The assembled Directors of Graduate Programs and the Associate Dean for Graduate Education form the MCV Campus Graduate Committee, with the Associate Dean serving as Chair of the Committee. The Committee holds the responsibility for ensuring appropriate administration of graduate programs as described within, reviewing modifications of didactic courses and new course offerings, reviewing proposed modifications of program curricula to ensure maintenance of standards of quality, avoid duplication and comply with the missions of the School and for recommending action to the Dean. The committee members provide the pool of candidates from which the School representatives to the University Graduate Council are chosen.*

*The School of Medicine follows the Policies of the School of Graduate Studies with regard to the modification of existing courses, curricula and programs as well as the introduction of new offerings. Proposals will normally come from the faculty acting through departmental bodies charged with the responsibility of monitoring academic training. In the case of offerings in interdisciplinary areas, these will normally require the input and approval of departments whose faculty and students are participants. The Associate Dean for Graduate Education in the School of Medicine may assist in coordination of the proposal process. Proposed changes and additions are, under University guidelines, subject to review by the Curriculum Committee of the School. The MCV Campus Graduate Committee serves as the Curriculum Committee for the School of Medicine. On approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee, the approval of the Dean of the School of Medicine is required prior to submission to University Graduate Council for review.*

## **REGISTRATION**

*While most students register for the first semester beginning in August, arrangements may be made to initiate graduate work at other times during the academic year.*

Registration for the three academic terms (Fall, Spring, Summer) following the

student's matriculation at VCU is normally performed in advance of the formal registration period. **THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TIMELY SUBMISSION OF REGISTRATION FORMS FOR EACH TERM.** Similarly the student is responsible for compliance with University policy standards that may impact on registration. Overdue financial obligations, failure to comply with health policy requirements, etc. may interrupt the registration process. Should a late fee be applied, the student is responsible for payment unless mitigating circumstances can be shown to apply.

Full-time students register for 15 hours of graduate credit in the Fall and Spring terms and 6 hours of graduate credit for the summer term. Enrollment must be continuous during the training period. Full-time status permits registration for 15 credit hours; University policy regards registration for credit hours over 15 in a given semester (Fall, Spring or 6 in the Summer term) as an "overload" and subject to additional tuition cost. However, relief from additional tuition cost is provided if the course "overload" is a requisite component of the program of study.

Registration for less than the minimum required number of credit hours may be permitted for students in the final stage of completing a doctoral dissertation. Such exemption must be requested by the Faculty Advisor with approval of the Graduate Program Director and the Office of Graduate Education. Request for such an exception is made by submission of a Special Action form (obtained from the Office of Graduate Education) which is illustrated on the following page. Such exemption is not automatic.

On occasion, students may be conducting degree work at a site distant from the institution. Under such circumstances registration for a reduced number of credit hours may be permitted with the approval of the Office of Graduate Education. Students have an obligation to maintain continuous enrollment during such periods.

## **ENROLLMENT**

*Students are enrolled in a specific program offered by the School. The details of didactic and scholarly requirements are available from the individual programs. Specific curriculum requirements, mechanisms for the appointment of advisors and the format of written and oral comprehensive examinations are established by individual programs.*

## **THE STUDENT ADVISOR AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

*Students receive guidance and counsel from the Director of Graduate Programs for the appropriate program prior to appointment of the permanent advisor. The permanent advisor holds the primary responsibility for monitoring the development of the student in the program and providing the appropriate guidance and counsel essential to the scholarly development of the student.*

The mechanism and timing of the appointment of the permanent advisor is determined by the individual department/program. The Graduate Program Director should be consulted for information regarding this process which should be made available in written form.

*An advisory committee appointed shortly after the permanent advisor is appointed, serves as both an examining and consultative body, functioning to assist the development of the student. Committee members hold a special responsibility as a source of counsel for the student.*

*1 Each student shall have an advisor and an advisory committee.*

2. *Appointment of the advisor:*
  - a. The initial advisor will be the director of the graduate program or his/her designee prior to appointment of the permanent advisor.
  - b. A permanent advisor shall be appointed from the Graduate Faculty by the Chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee upon recommendation of the Chair of the student's major department. Appointment should be made no later than the beginning of the fall semester following matriculation. A change in the permanent advisor may be made by the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee upon recommendation of the Chair of the major department.
3. *Duties of the advisor:*
  - a. *The advisor shall, with the student's advisory committee, have responsibility for guiding the student's academic program.*
  - b. *The advisor shall develop a plan for student's didactic program with the student.*
  - c. *The advisor shall, on the basis of the proposed didactic and scholarly program for the student, identify members of the faculty to comprise the student's advisory committee and elicit their agreement to serve, the advisor serving as the Chair of the committee.*

### **VCU SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES REQUEST FOR SPECIAL ACTION**

The Request for Special Action form can be found on the School of Graduate Studies web page or can be obtained from the Office of Graduate Education.

Click here: <http://www.vcu.edu/graduate/gf/forms.html>

- d. *The advisor shall supervise the student's research work and thesis preparation and be one of the examiners of the thesis (M.S.)/dissertation(Ph.D)*
- e. *At the close of the spring term, the advisor shall submit to the program director or to the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee a report covering the progress of the student. Copies of the report should be provided to the student and the membership of the student advisory committee by the advisor.*

A more detailed listing of the responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor has been developed and adopted as School policy. This document is appended to the handbook as Appendix I.

4. *The Student's Advisory Committee.*
  - a. *The student's advisory committee shall be appointed no later than the end of the fall term of the second year after matriculation by the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee, upon recommendation of the student's advisor, review by the Graduate Program Director and recommendation of the Chair of the department of the permanent advisor. Appointment of the student*

*advisory committee must be done within three months of the appointment of the permanent advisor and prior to the administration of comprehensive (or final) examinations. The composition of the advisory committee shall be such that significant areas of the student's scholarly program are represented in the expertise of the faculty members.*

- (i) *The committee for the Ph.D. candidate shall consist of a minimum of five members as follows: the student's advisor; two other members of the graduate faculty of the department\program in which the student is enrolled; and at least two other members of the graduate faculty from departments other than the one in which the student is enrolled (where feasible, from two different departments).*
- (ii) *The committee for the M.S. candidate shall consist of a minimum of three members as follows: the student's advisor (who serves as Chair of the committee); one other member of the graduate faculty of the department/program in which the student is enrolled and one other member of the graduate faculty from a department other than the one in which the student is enrolled.*
- (iii) *A faculty member who is not a member of the graduate faculty may be appointed to a student advisory committee if approved by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee subject to approval by the Dean, School of Graduate Studies. The appointment of the Advisory Committee is effected by the submission of a completed Graduate Student Advisory Committee and Course Plan Form for approval by the Office of Graduate Education. Should changes/additions to the Advisory Committee become necessary, a revised form must be submitted for approval by the Office of Graduate Education.*

*b. Duties of the student's advisory committee.*

*The advisory Committee functions as an advisory body to ensure that timely progress toward degree completion is being achieved, as an examining body participating as appropriate for the intended degree in written qualifying examinations and conducting the oral qualifying examination and final examination and as a consultative body to provide scholarly counsel.*

- (i) *The student's advisory committee shall work with the student's advisor in guiding the student's graduate program and shall meet at least annually. It is strongly recommended that the advisory committee meet with the student prior to administration of the comprehensive examination(s) by the committee.*
- (ii) *The student's advisory committee shall recommend and approve a degree program (including foreign language if applicable) for the student as soon as practical. The*

*proposed program should be filed with the chair of MCV Campus Graduate Committee no later than the third semester of the study.*

- (iii) *The student's advisory committee shall conduct the oral comprehensive and final examinations.*

The composition of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee should include in its membership individuals having a broad level of relevant scientific expertise and experience in advanced degree education. The membership may include individuals who are not members of the Graduate Faculty on approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee and the Dean of Graduate Studies. Such appointments are valid for service on a specific Graduate Student Advisory Committee; separate approval must be obtained for appointment to each Committee. This mechanism allows the participation by individuals whose capabilities and experience enhance the environment for graduate education. Such appointments are not restricted to members of the University community or academia. Indeed, in many cases, participation by qualified scientists holding positions in the private sector is particularly advantageous. Graduate Student Advisory Committee membership may also include individuals who serve in a non-voting capacity. Individuals serving in such a role act as expert consultants. Such appointments cannot satisfy the requirements for the composition of the Committee

## **COMPLETION**

In addition to curriculum requirements, individual programs may incorporate additional activities (e.g. participation in seminar programs or "journal clubs", presentation of research in progress at meetings, etc.) as requirements for program completion. The Graduate Program Director of the program should be consulted for details.

Central to the completion of research-based advanced degree programs is the research project conducted with the guidance and counsel of the Faculty Advisor. The nature of scholarship in the health sciences is such that the role of the Faculty Advisor in providing guidance in the identification of a suitable area of investigation and the progressive accumulation of data, which constitute the body of the thesis/dissertation, is particularly critical.

In order to ensure that appropriate progress in the maturation of the student as a science professional is achieved, continuing communication between the student and Faculty Advisor is essential. It is in the best interest of the student that the expectations of the Faculty Advisor be fully understood and discussed as appropriate. The student has the obligation to gain an understanding of what will be regarded by the Faculty Advisor as a satisfactory standard of accomplishment.

Three formal mechanisms are employed to monitor student progress in research:

- (1) Grade awarded for performance in Directed Research course credit
- (2) Meetings of the student with the Advisory Committee
- (3) Performance evaluation memorandum

Students are awarded a grade for research activity by the Faculty Advisor in each term. A grade other than "satisfactory" is a matter of serious concern and requires action by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee to permit continued participation in the program.

At least once a year a performance assessment is communicated to the student in

writing. Such written assessment may include areas of concern with respect to the timely development of the student in the program which warrant particular attention. Similarly the student meets with the Advisory Committee at least once each year to present a progress report on the research project both to inform the committee membership and to elicit counsel. A written report of such meetings should be maintained by the Faculty Advisor. The formal structure of advanced degree programs provides a basis for ensuring that the standards of performance are maintained and that students are treated equitably while engaged in training that develops an appropriate level of professional rigor and accomplishment.

## **GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE & COURSE PLAN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

The Graduate Student Advisory Committee and Course Plan form can be found on the School of Medicine web page.

Click here: [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/gp/committeeplan\\_med.pdf](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/gp/committeeplan_med.pdf)

### **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATE DEGREES**

1. *All full-time graduate students are expected to register for a minimum of 15 hours of graduate credit per semester and six semester hours during the summer exclusive of audited courses. This requirement includes research. As an example, when students are registered for 10 credits in formal courses, they are expected to undertake five credits of research under the direction of their advisor or any approved faculty members. These courses shall be graded as "S"-satisfactory, "U"-unsatisfactory, or "F"-fail. Registration of one semester hour registration is permitted only in exceptional cases with prior permission from the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee.*
2. *Students are required to remain in good academic standing through the course of their degree program. Unsatisfactory student performance includes:*
  - a. *the assignment of a grade of "U" or "D" or "F" in any course*
  - b. *failure to maintain a cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.5 or greater*
  - c. *failure to pass the written or oral comprehensive examination*
  - d. *failure to pass the final examination*

*A student whose performance is unsatisfactory must obtain the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee to gain permission for continuing in the graduate program. The Committee elicits the recommendation of the department/program (as represented by the Director of Graduate Studies of the appropriate program) and, as appropriate, the student's advisor in making a determination. Unsatisfactory performance also constitutes grounds for the termination of financial assistance to the student.*
3. *Students may not take the comprehensive examination for the Ph.D. degree if their overall grade-point average is less than 2.5 or if the grade-point average for courses within the major department is below 3.0. Students may not take the final oral examination for the M.S. or Ph.D. degree if their overall grade-point average is below 3.0. The examining body for the administration of the comprehensive examinations and the final examination is the student advisory committee. For the*

- oral comprehensive examination for Ph.D. students and the final examinations for M.S. students, the body is supplemented by the addition of a representative of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee who chairs the examining body. The representative must be a member of the graduate faculty and is appointed by the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The representative holds the responsibility for compliance with protocols appropriate to the examination, including the equitable treatment of the candidate.*
4. *Copies of the thesis\dissertation consistent with University standards shall be provided to the members of the student's advisory committee three weeks or more before the date of the defense of thesis\dissertation. Following acceptance of the thesis\dissertation defense schedule by the committee, the student must submit a copy of the thesis\dissertation and a request for scheduling of the final examination to the Chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee a minimum of ten working days in advance of the examination date. After passing the final examination, it shall be the responsibility of the candidate to present to the Office of Graduate Education the approved original thesis\dissertation plus the minimum required number of copies (three for M.S., four for Ph.D.) in final form suitable for binding. In consultation with office staff, the candidate shall be responsible for binding and processing the thesis through University Library Services and for payment of all charges for these services.*
  5. *A degree is granted only after all requirements have been fulfilled, including payment of all fees to the University, and after submission of the copies of the thesis for binding.*
  6. *VCU currently requires registration for a defined credit hour level during both the didactic and research phases of advanced degree training. For programs requiring the preparation of a thesis or dissertation, there is therefore no obligatory linkage between the accumulation of credit hours and an expectation that a degree be awarded.*  
*As a guide to monitoring the timely completion of the degree within the present enrollment framework, the accumulation of 80 credit hours for a M.S. degree and 180 credit hours for a Ph.D. degree can be taken as a reasonable measure. These credit hour totals refer to degree programs requiring the preparation of a thesis or dissertation. Unless explicitly stated, the figures cited above apply to Master of Science (M.S.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs offered by the School of Medicine.*

## **POST-BACCALAUREATE PRE-PROFESSIONAL BASIC SCIENCES CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

*This program is designed as a two-semester didactic program offering six departmentally based curricula in the basic sciences. Curricula consist of a total of 27 credit hours of graduate courses offering students an advanced level of training in subject areas critical to professional (M.D., D.D.S.) degree programs. The certificate degree is offered by the Department of Anatomy, Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Human Genetics, Microbiology and Immunology, Pharmacology and Toxicology and Physiology.*

*Completion of the program and awarding of the certificate degree requires that students complete a minimum of 27 credit hours of course work, maintaining an overall*

*grade point average of 3.0. Course requirements and elective options are defined by departments.*

*The program has been structured on a disciplinary basis to allow the accumulation of didactic credit hours, which may be applicable to advanced degree training at the M.S. or Ph.D. level in programs offered by the departments of the School. Students interested in this potential option must formally apply to the program of interest. Enrollment in and/or completion of the program are not a guarantee of admission to either the M.D. or advanced degree programs offered by Virginia Commonwealth University. However, the curricula have been structured with the counsel of the Office of Admissions of the VCU Medical School to offer training, which enhances performance on standardized admissions tests and provides a grounding applicable to a variety of career options.*

### **MASTER OF SCIENCE**

1. *Advanced graduate study leading to the master of science degree is offered in the departments of Anatomy and Neurobiology, Biochemistry, Biostatistics, Human Genetics, Microbiology and Immunology, Pharmacology and Toxicology and Physiology. The Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health offers the Master of Public Health degree and the Department of Human Genetics offers the Master of Genetic Counseling degree.*
2. *A minimum of 24 semester course hours is required, exclusive of research credits. In practice, it is found that two years of study are usually necessary to complete the requirements. A time limit of five calendar years, beginning at the time of first registration, is placed on work to be credited toward the master of science degree. Generally a maximum of one-third of the hours required for a master's degree may be transferred from another VCU program or outside institution and applied toward the degree upon recommendation of the student's director of graduate programs with the concurrence by the chair of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee.*
3. *Each student must conduct an original investigation under the supervision of the permanent adviser, prepare a thesis reporting the results of this research and analyzing its significance in relation to existing scientific knowledge. This study is reported in a thesis prepared in acceptable form and style.*
4. *The body of experimental work to be incorporated into the thesis is subject to the approval of the student advisory committee members. The advisory committee should, therefore, be formally consulted as the research project nears completion to ensure that there is agreement with respect to the material deemed necessary and sufficient for incorporation into the thesis. Such consultation will normally occur in the form of a meeting of the advisory committee with the student. The faculty advisor has a responsibility to advise the student when the meeting of the advisory committee for this purpose should take place.*
5. *The thesis is prepared in an acceptable form and style with the counsel of the faculty advisor. The faculty advisor determines when the thesis document can serve as the basis for the final oral examination (or thesis defense). With the approval of the faculty advisor, the final oral examination by the advisory committee is scheduled and the thesis document is distributed to the advisory committee. Distribution of the thesis document to the advisory committee should*

*take place at least ten working days in advance of the final oral examination. The Office of Graduate Education is to be informed of the scheduling of the final oral examination ten working days in advance of the scheduled date. The Office of Graduate Education then identifies a representative of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee to chair the examination and provides an announcement of the final oral examination, which includes the name and department of the candidate together with the title of the thesis and the day, place and time of the final oral examination.*

6. *The final oral examination is conducted by the student advisory committee at the designated time and place and is open to the faculty. A representative of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee serves as the chair of the examination committee and is a voting member of the examination committee. The subject matter of the examination includes the subject matter of course work as well as the content of the thesis. A favorable vote of the advisory committee with no more than one negative vote is required to indicate that the candidate has passed the final oral examination. All members of the examining committee must vote. The outcome of the final oral examination is reported to the Office of Graduate Education. If the outcome is negative, the final oral examination may be retaken with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. Advance approval is required in writing by the department on behalf of the candidate.*
7. *The student advisory committee approves the thesis document as acceptable after the final oral examination has been successfully completed. Approval of the thesis as acceptable is indicated by the signature of all members of the advisory committee on the signature page of the thesis. Approval of the thesis by the advisory committee must be unanimous.*

*A thesis is not required for completion of the Master of Genetic Counseling Program. In lieu of the thesis, students in this tract are required to successfully pass comprehensive oral and written examinations. Similarly, a thesis is not required for completion of the Master of Public Health Program*

In the normal course of the development of the thesis project, the Faculty Advisor will indicate to the student a point in time when the project has reached sufficient maturity that the writing of the thesis should be initiated. At this point the candidate should complete and file the Graduation Application form (see following page for an example). This form indicates an anticipated completion date; **THE FORM MUST BE CO-SIGNED BY THE CANDIDATE AND THE FACULTY ADVISOR.**

Receipt of the thesis is indicated by the signature of the Advisory Committee members on the Notice of Final Defense Examination form. Submission of the form to the Office of Graduate Education along with a copy of the thesis should take place at least ten working days in advance of the desired date of the defense. For the final defense of the Ph.D., the Chair of the examining committee collects the candidate's file in advance of the defense. Attached to the file is a form used to formally report the outcome of the examination to the Office of Graduate Education. The examining committee signs this form at the conclusion of the examination to validate the outcome. This form, along with the student's file is returned to the Office of Graduate Education. This form is **NOT** the signature page that must appear in the final version of the thesis. At this stage the Advisory Committee has **NOT** approved the document as final but that the candidate has completed an examination on the content of the document. Corrections/modifications

of the document may be required by the Advisory Committee. The Office of Graduate Education reviews the draft copy of the thesis for compliance with institutional guidelines and returns the copy to the student with a "CHECKLIST" indicating areas in which corrections are required.

The Office of Graduate Education provides as a guide/reference, a correctly formatted version of the thesis signature page to the candidate at the time of the final defense. The signature page for the thesis is signed once the Advisory Committee has approved the thesis document as complete. Two copies of the completed signature page with the signatures of the Advisory Committee and Department Chair must accompany the final version of the thesis submitted to the Office of Graduate Education. The Office of Graduate Education secures the signature of the Dean of the School and the Dean of Graduate Studies on behalf of the candidate.

The form for payment of the thesis can be completed on line and forwarded directly to the James Cabell Library. The form can be found by clicking here: <https://www.library.vcu.edu/cfapps/tdp/login.cfm>. The delivery of the thesis copies, including the signature page, and requisite forms to Cabell Library is the final step in meeting the requirements for completion of the degree. (See also "Degree Completion" section).

**Notice of Final Defense M.S.**

The form for scheduling the M.S. Final Defense can be found on the School of Medicine web page.

Click here: <http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/gp/examposting.html>

## Check List

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The draft version of your thesis/dissertation has been reviewed for compliance with format standards required by the University as described in the School of Graduate Studies Thesis and Dissertation Manual. Check marks indicate pages requiring your attention.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Signature page
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Title page
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3) Acknowledgements
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4) Table of Contents
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5) List of Tables
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6) List of Figures
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7) List of Abbreviations
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8) Abstract
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9) Pagination for pages beginning chapters
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10) Figure Legends
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11) Table Titles
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12) Cover Sheet for References
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13) References
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14) Cover Sheet for Appendices
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15) Appendices
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16) Vita
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17) Other

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thesis Signature Page**

The Office of Graduate Education will provide a sample signature page (see next page). **Please do not copy or scan this sample.** The student is responsible for generating the signature page.

Virginia Commonwealth University  
School of Medicine

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by entitled "" has been approved by his/her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

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**(Put in name of director)**, Ph.D., Director of Thesis

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name of chair)**, Ph.D., Department Chair

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H. H. Newsome, Jr., M.D., Dean, School of Medicine

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F. Douglas Boudinot, Ph.D., Dean, School of Graduate Studies

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Date

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

- 1 *Advanced graduate study leading to a doctor of philosophy degree is offered in the departments of Anatomy and Neurobiology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Biostatistics, Human Genetics, Microbiology and Immunology, Pathology, Pharmacology and Toxicology, Physiology and Preventive Medicine.*
- 2 *A minimum of 30 credit hours exclusive of research credits is generally required. In practice, a minimum of four years of study, including research, is necessary to complete all requirements.*
3. *For all Ph.D. programs, a period of residence of at least two consecutive semesters is required. In the context of Ph.D. training, “residence” refers to full-time enrollment, equivalent to enrollment for nine or more credit hours in a given academic term. The School of Medicine recommends that doctoral students maintain “residency” status for one academic year (Fall and Spring terms), usually during the initial year of study. This recommendation is intended to ensure that the didactic component of training is not prolonged. Students should register in each academic term as a means of ensuring that timely progress toward degree completion is being achieved. The specific requirements for residency will be detailed by the individual programs. A time limit of seven calendar years, beginning at the time of first registration, is placed on work to be credited toward the doctor of philosophy degree.*

## **ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY**

*The development of the individual as an independent research scientist is a critical component of the Ph.D. degree. The potential for such development is assessed on the basis of both mastery of subject matter and research competency as judged in the context of written and oral examinations administered at the level of department or program. Students are admitted to candidacy by the Dean on the basis of completing examinations as required and the recommendation of the faculty advisor, student advisory committee and graduate program director.*

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

*In order to advance to doctoral candidacy, the student must pass both written and oral comprehensive examinations. The written examination(s) generally focus(es) on the subject matter deemed critical as a foundation in the particular program. The written examination is largely based on material covered in required course work and its application to theoretical and practical problems. The oral examination, which follows successful completion of the written examination(s), is administered to assess the ability of the candidate to integrate information and display an appropriate mastery of problem-solving capabilities.*

1. *To advance to candidacy, the student shall take written and oral examinations designed to determine the potential of the individual for development as an independent scientist. Advancement to candidacy should preferably take place prior to initiating the third academic year in the program.. The written examination is administered by the student's department\program. In the event of failure of the written comprehensive examination, the student, with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee, may be permitted to repeat the written examination.*

2. *After passing the written examination(s), the student is eligible for the oral examination. The oral examination is conducted by the student's advisory committee and is chaired by a graduate faculty member representing the MCV Campus Graduate Committee who serves as a voting member of the examining committee. The oral examination is to be administered no later than six months after passing the written examination. (Department/programs may require a shorter interval).*
3. *The oral examination is scheduled through the Office of Graduate Education. An announcement of the candidate's name, department/program and the time and place of the examination shall be posted at least 10 working days in advance of the examination. If a written document prepared by the candidate is a component of the examination, the document shall be provided to the members of the examining committee at least 10 working days in advance of the examination. The oral comprehensive examination is open to all members of the faculty. Faculty members in attendance may ask questions of the candidate, but their questions shall not be presented until after the advisory committee has completed its questions. Faculty members other than those on the advisory committee shall not vote on the success or failure of the candidate. If a student fails the oral examination, the student may be reexamined with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee.*
4. *A favorable vote of the examining committee (all members of body being required to vote) with no more than one negative vote, is required to pass the examination. Members of the examining committee must vote on the performance as either pass or fail.*
5. *The oral examination must be completed successfully at least six months before submission of the dissertation.*

### **DOCTORAL CANDIDACY**

To be admitted to doctoral candidacy, the student must complete a written\oral qualifying examination(s) as administered by the department\program. The format of such examinations are determined at the department level and are usually administered during the second year of the program.

Within six months of the successful completion of the qualifying examination(s) the oral comprehensive (candidacy) examination is administered. The examination is scheduled by submission of the Notice of Comprehensive Examination form to the Office of Graduate Education at least ten working days in advance of the scheduled examination date. Along with the completed form, a copy of material (e.g. a research proposal) as may be used in the conduct of the oral comprehensive examination should be provided to the Office of Graduate Education. The Office of Graduate Education identifies a representative of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee who serves as the Chair of the examining committee. The representative is provided with a copy of written material as appropriate in advance of the examination. Prior to the examination, the representative obtains the student's file from the Office of Graduate Education for use as warranted at the examination. Attached to the file is a form used to report the outcome of the examination. On completion of the examination, the completed form, signed by the examining committee, is returned to the Office of Graduate Education by the representative.

On occasion, circumstances limit the availability of a member of the Advisory Committee for the administration of the oral comprehensive examination. With the concurrence of the Faculty Advisor, Graduate Program Director and the involved member of the Advisory Committee, a member of the Graduate Faculty may act as a substitute. The Office of Graduate Education should be provided with a memorandum indicating the substitution bearing the signatures of the Faculty Advisor and the member of the Advisory Committee who will be absent and identifying the member of the Graduate Faculty acting as a substitute. The Faculty Advisor must be present for the examination.

The examining committee must judge whether the student has passed or failed the oral comprehensive examination. The Oral Comprehensive Signature Page obtained from the Office of Graduate Education will be used to indicate the committee's decision. A "conditional" pass is not an acceptable outcome. The assembled Advisory Committee may, however, use the occasion of the examination and the performance of the student as a basis for requiring that the student take specific action to remedy identified areas of limited capability.

Should the student fail the oral comprehensive examination, the examination may be retaken only on approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The request for such approval is brought to the MCV Campus Graduate Committee by the Graduate Program Director. The Faculty Advisor is responsible for consulting with the Advisory Committee (and the department as appropriate) to determine if the request for approval is appropriate and communicating the request to the Graduate Program Director. The Graduate Program Director is responsible for informing the Office of Graduate Education of the intent to seek the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The Committee renders a decision on such a request in the course of its regularly scheduled meetings.

Formally, the request for permission to retake the oral comprehensive examination is submitted by the department\program on behalf of the student. Implicit in the request is the support of the department\program that the request be granted. As a general guide, the re-examination, provided that approval is gained, should be administered within three months of the approval date.

## Notice of Comprehensive Exam Form

The form for scheduling the Oral Comprehensive examination can be found on the School of Medicine web page.

Click here: <http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/gp/examposting.html>

## DISSERTATION RESEARCH

1. *The student must conduct a substantial original investigation under the supervision of the permanent adviser and prepare a dissertation reporting the results of this research and analyzing its significance in relation to existing scientific knowledge.*
2. *The body of experimental work to be incorporated into the dissertation is subject to approval of the membership of the student advisory committee. The advisory committee should, therefore, be formally consulted as the research project nears completion to ensure that there is agreement with respect to the material deemed necessary and sufficient for incorporation into the dissertation. Such consultation will normally occur in the form of a meeting of the advisory committee with the student. The faculty advisor has a responsibility to advise the student when the meeting of the advisory committee for this purpose should take place.*
3. *The dissertation is prepared in an acceptable form and style with the counsel of the faculty advisor. The faculty advisor determines when the dissertation document can serve as the basis for the final oral examination (or dissertation defense). With the approval of the faculty advisor, the final oral examination by the advisory committee is scheduled and the dissertation document is distributed to the advisory committee. Distribution of the dissertation document to the advisory committee will usually occur at least ten working days in advance of the final oral examination. The office of Graduate Education is informed of the scheduling of the final oral examination ten working days in advance of the examination. The Office of Graduate Education will then post an announcement of the final oral examination to include the name and department of the candidate together with the title of the dissertation and the day, place and time of the final oral examination.*
4. *The final oral examination is conducted by the student advisory committee, chaired by the faculty advisor and is open to all member of the faculty. The subject matter of the examination is limited to the content of the candidate's dissertation and related areas. A favorable vote of the advisory committee with no more than one negative vote shall be required to indicate that the candidate has passed the final oral examination. All advisory committee members must vote. The outcome of the final oral examination is reported to the Office of Graduate Education. If the outcome is negative, the final oral examination may be retaken with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. Advance approval is requested in writing by the department on behalf of the candidate.*
5. *The student advisory committee approves the dissertation document as acceptable following the final oral examination. Approval of the dissertation as acceptable is indicated by the signature of all members of the advisory committee on the signature page of the dissertation. Approval of the dissertation by the advisory committee must be unanimous.*

## **DEGREE COMPLETION**

In the normal course of the development of the thesis/dissertation project, the Faculty Advisor will indicate to the student a point in time when the project has reached sufficient maturity that the writing of the thesis/dissertation should be initiated. At this point the candidate should complete and file the Graduation Application. This form indicates an anticipated completion date; **THE FORM MUST BE CO-SIGNED BY THE CANDIDATE AND THE FACULTY ADVISOR.** A complete Graduate Application form must be on file before a request for an exemption to the requirement for registration for the normal number of graduate credit hours will be entertained.

Appearance of the student before the Advisory Committee on a periodic basis to report on the development of the thesis/dissertation project is critical to the timely completion of degree work. The Advisory Committee should be formally consulted as the project nears completion to ensure that all bench work/data acquisition deemed necessary and sufficient for the preparation of the thesis/dissertation is agreed upon prior to scheduling the final defense. This penultimate meeting of the Advisory Committee is initiated by the Faculty Advisor.

Students routinely underestimate the time required to complete the writing of the thesis/dissertation document and the creation of a version conforming to the University policy. As the process of creating the document is initiated, a copy of the VCU Thesis Manual should be consulted for guidance. Copies of the manual can be obtained from the Office of Graduate Education and are available on the University web site. Current policy affords considerable flexibility in the format of the document but certain requirements, particularly those describing page margins, **MUST** be followed. Candidates should consult with the Office of Graduate Education to ensure that an acceptable format is being followed in the creation of the document.

The determination of the point at which the dissertation is in a form suitable as a basis for the Final Defense is the responsibility of the Faculty Advisor. At this point the Final Defense is scheduled. The Notice of Final Examination form (obtained from the Office of Graduate Education), along with a completed draft of the dissertation as submitted to the members of the Advisory Committee, is delivered to the Office of Graduate Education ten working days in advance of the desired date of the defense.

Signature of the Advisory Committee members on the Notice of Final Defense form is not an endorsement of the dissertation document. The Faculty Advisor has the responsibility of ensuring that the document is in a form that can adequately provide a basis for the defense. Scheduling of the defense carries the assumption that the Student Advisory Committee has agreed that a body of work that can serve as the basis for the thesis/dissertation has been performed.

Signature by the Advisory Committee membership is an acknowledgement of receipt of the dissertation and the arrangements for the Final Examination. The advance notice ensures a minimum time period for a review of the dissertation by the members of the Advisory Committee and the Office of Graduate Education in advance of the Final Examination. (On occasion, members of the Advisory Committee may require a time period greater than two weeks to review the document.)

When the final examination is formally scheduled (by submitting the completed posting form with the Office of Graduate Education) a copy of the dissertation is turned in at the Office of Graduate Education. The document is reviewed for compliance with

the VCU Thesis/Dissertation Manual; the Office of Graduate Education returns a Checklist indicating specific modifications to the student with the draft version of the document. Once the examination has been successfully completed, final copies of the dissertation along with the check list and original draft of the dissertation is brought to the Office of Graduate Education.

For the final defense, the Chair of the examining committee (for defense of a doctoral dissertation, the Faculty Advisor serves as Chair) collects the candidate's file in advance of the defense. Attached to the file is a form provided by the Office of Graduate Education used to formally report the outcome of the examination. The examining committee signs this form at the conclusion of the examination to validate the outcome. This form, along with the student's file is returned to the Office of Graduate Education. This form is NOT the signature page that must appear in the final version of the dissertation. At this stage the Advisory Committee has not approved the document as final but has reported the outcome of the examination of the candidate on the dissertation content. Corrections/modifications of the document may be requested by the Advisory Committee.

The Office of Graduate Education provides, as a guide/reference, a correctly formatted version of the dissertation signature page to the candidate at the time of the final defense. The signature page for the dissertation is signed once the Advisory Committee has approved the dissertation document as complete. The completed signature page with the signatures of the Advisory Committee and Department Chair must accompany the requisite number of copies of the dissertation submitted to the Office of Graduate Education. The following forms are also to be delivered with the final copy of the dissertation, the Survey of Earned Doctorate form and the University Microfilm International Agreement form. These forms will be given to students prior to the defense date. The Office of Graduate Education secures the signature of the Dean of the School and the Dean of Graduate Studies on behalf of the candidate.

The form for payment of the dissertation can be completed on line and forwarded directly to the James Cabell Library. The form can be found by clicking here: <https://www.library.vcu.edu/cfapps/tdp/login.cfm>. The delivery of the dissertation copies, including the signature page, and requisite forms to Cabell Library is the final step in meeting the requirements for completion of the degree.

The delivery of the dissertation copies, including the signature page, along with requisite forms to the Cabell library on the Academic Campus is the final step in meeting the requirements for completion of the degree.

Degree Completion Workshops are held three times per year (January, June and September). It is strongly suggested that candidates who are close to or nearing completion of their degree attend these workshops.

**Check List**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The draft version of your thesis/dissertation has been reviewed for compliance with format standards required by the University as described in the School of Graduate Studies Thesis and Dissertation Manual. Check marks indicate pages requiring your attention.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Signature page
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Title page
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3) Acknowledgements
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4) Table of Contents
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5) List of Tables
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6) List of Figures
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7) List of Abbreviations
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8) Abstract
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9) Pagination for pages beginning chapters
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10) Figure Legends
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11) Table Titles
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12) Cover Sheet for References
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13) References
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14) Cover Sheet for Appendices
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15) Appendices
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16) Vita
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17) Other

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*School of Graduate Studies*  
**Thesis and Dissertation Manual**  
**Approved by the Graduate Council**  
**Revised June 2000**

The Thesis and Dissertation Manual can be found on the School of Graduate Studies web page.

Click here: <http://www.vcu.edu/gradweb/pdfs/thesis.pdf>

**Notice of Final Defense (Ph.D.) Form**

The notice of Final Defense form can be found on the School of Medicine's web page.

Click here: <http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/gp/examposting.html>

**Dissertation Signature Page**

The Office of Graduate Education will provide a sample signature page (see sample next page). **Please do not copy or scan this sample.** The student is responsible for generating the signature page.

Virginia Commonwealth University  
**School of Medicine**

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by **(YOUR NAME)** entitled "**(TITLE OF DISSERTATION)**" has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Science/Doctor of Philosophy.

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**(Put in name of Director)**, Ph.D., Director of Dissertation

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name of committee member)**, Ph.D., School of

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**(Put in name)**, Ph.D., Department Chair

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H. H. Newsome, Jr., M.D., Dean, School of Medicine

---

F. Douglas Boudinot, Ph.D., Dean, School of Graduate Studies

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Date

***TERMINATION OF ENROLLMENT***

*The university reserves the right to terminate the enrollment of any student for unlawful, disorderly, or immoral conduct or for persistent failure to fulfill the purposes for which the he or she was matriculated.*

*A student enrolled in a graduate program under the supervision of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee may be dismissed from the School in which he is enrolled for failure to meet academic requirements prescribed by his school or failure to exhibit the attitudes and skills deemed necessary to function within the chosen scientific discipline.*

*Any action by a graduate student in a program under the supervision of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee considered to be unprofessional conduct shall constitute cause for disciplinary action.*

*Unprofessional conduct includes, but is not limited to:*

- 1. fraud or deceit in gaining admission to the University, i.e., false or obviously misleading representations on the admission application,*
- 2. an act that violates the established legal standards regarding conduct of one person towards society (i .e. stealing, lying, cheating and slander),*
- 3. conviction of a felony involving moral turpitude, and*
- 4. plagiarism or other scientific misconduct*

## **Appendix Materials**

Appendix I	Faculty Advisor Responsibilities
Appendix II	Degree Completion/Admission to VCU Medical School
Appendix III	Recognition of Student Achievement
Appendix IV	Graduate Faculty/School of Medicine
Appendix V	Duties of Representative for M.S. and Ph.D. Comprehensive Examinations
Appendix VI	Appointment of the Graduate Student Committee
Appendix VII	Intellectual Property Issues Related to the Thesis/Dissertation
Appendix VIII	Use of the School of Graduate Studies Special Action Form

## Appendix I

### Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

#### **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISOR**

1. To exercise leadership and direction in the student's choice of a worthwhile research project, which is likely to lead to the generation of new knowledge in a particular field of biomedical science.
2. To direct the student's research of background literature salient to the proposed experiments, and to accept responsibility for training (or making arrangements for training) the student in techniques essential to the project.
3. To educate the student concerning scientific integrity, and the appreciation and respect for the work of others; to acquaint the student with rules of copyright and patent, as well as definite of plagiarism.
4. To educate the student in the proper care and usage of laboratory equipment, and to make the student aware of laboratory safety procedures, and the handling of hazardous or toxic agents/materials/substances; to make the student aware of the proper usage and handling of laboratory animals, and, where applicable, appropriate surgical procedures.
5. To investigate extramural and intramural (department, University) sources of financial support, and, where appropriate, assist the student in applying for support.
6. To plan an appropriate curriculum for the student to provide essential knowledge of his area of research interest, and to make the student aware of, and monitor his/her progress, through departmental curricular (course) requirements, teaching requirements, as well as departmental, school, and university deadlines (having to do with the appointment of graduate advisory committee, scheduling of comprehensive examinations, and final defense of thesis).
7. To advise the student in choosing the members of his/her graduate advisory committee appropriate for his/her principal research interests, and make arrangements for the appointment of the student's committee by submitting the official form to the Dean's office no less than six months prior to the Ph.D. candidacy: A doctoral (Ph.D.) committee consists of: the student's advisor, plus 2 members from the student's major department and 2 members from departments outside the student's major department – each of whom is a member of the graduate faculty (if a desired faculty member is not on the graduate faculty, the advisor may petition, by memo to the MCV Campus Graduate Committee, for his/her appointment for the purpose of serving on this one student committee, i.e. not a permanent appointment).  
A Master's committee consists of: The student's advisor, plus one additional member from the student's major department one member from outside the student's major department – each of whom is a member of the graduate faculty (see above). A Master's Committee must be appointed no less than six months prior to the final defense of the thesis.
8. To guide the student in his preparation for the written and oral comprehensive examination, and to conduct the student's oral comprehensive examination (the MCV Campus Graduate Committee representative is present only to assure that proper procedures are followed)

9. To supervise the conduct of the student's research and have regular updates from the student on his/her progress.
10. To call a regular meeting of the student's graduate advisory committee no less than once per year, and to submit annual progress report to the person appointed by the Dean to supervise graduate affairs of the school.
11. To guide the student through the organization and writing of the thesis (dissertation), preferably in publishable form, and to meet School and University requirements for the proper format (see Guidelines from VCU Thesis/Dissertation Manual).

The principal responsibility for correcting major problems (technical scientific writing, proper English, proper style, proper format, and proper references) in the thesis is the advisor's, NOT the other members of the student's committee. The committee should be primarily concerned with the content, accuracy, and thoroughness of the presentation and discussion of results.

Upon satisfying the completion of the thesis, the advisor must post the form for the final defense of thesis with the Office of Graduate Education no less than 10 working days prior to the planned date of defense.
12. To have the student file the application for graduation no less than 10 working days prior to the University's deadline within the semester in which he/she plans to graduate. Should the student miss the deadlines for a particular graduation, he/she must submit a new application for the next semester.
13. To assist the student in organizing the seminar which introduces the defense, and to conduct the final defense (no Dean's Representative present for the final Ph.D. defense; final M.S. defense has a Dean's Representative)
14. To assist the student in making final (post-defense) corrections in text or format of the thesis, and submission of the appropriate number of copies to the Office of Graduate Education within 5 working days after the defense and BEFORE the student leaves the University for postdoctoral training or a faculty position.

## **Appendix II**

### **Degree Completion/Admission to VCU Medical School**

In some cases students enrolled in the advanced degree programs of the School of Medicine seek admission to the VCU Medical School as a career objective. Students enrolled in advanced degree programs must complete all degree requirements before enrollment in the Medical School is permitted. The schedule for the academic calendar is such that advanced degree requirements must be completed by August 1 to allow enrollment for the Fall term of Medical School. The Office of Admissions of the Medical School will confirm the completion of degree requirements with the Office of Graduate Education to ensure compliance.

Students, Faculty Advisors and Advisory Committees should maintain an awareness of this policy in coordinating the terminal phases of degree completion. Acceptance into Medical School in no way reduces the requirement for compliance with existing standards of scholarly achievement for awarding of the advanced degree.

### **Appendix III**

#### **Recognition of Student Achievement/Watts Research Symposium/Forbes Graduate Student Honors Colloquium/Degree Completion Ceremony**

The School of Medicine sponsors events to recognize and reward student's achievement in scholarship in the Fall and Spring semesters. In the Fall graduate students are invited to participate in Watts Research Symposium wherein poster presentations of ongoing research are assembled to inform the faculty and fellow students. In the Spring term the Forbes Research Colloquium is held featuring selected oral presentations describing ongoing research by students. Presentations are selected by the faculty on the basis of written descriptions of the projects with a parallel program identifying outstanding examples of proposed research. The Forbes Colloquium proceedings also include the announcement of departmental awards to students recognizing outstanding achievement.

At the conclusion of the Spring term, the School of Medicine hosts a ceremony individually recognizing advanced degree graduates who have completed degree requirements during the academic year (Summer, Fall and Spring semesters).

## **Appendix IV**

### **Graduate Faculty**

#### **School of Medicine\Virginia Commonwealth University**

Policy and protocol followed in the School of Medicine with respect to the designation of members of the Graduate Faculty is consistent with institutional policy as stated in the Bylaws of the School of Graduate Studies.

#### **Rights and Responsibilities:**

Members of the Graduate Faculty are eligible for service as the Permanent Advisor for students enrolled in advanced degree programs administered by Departments in the School of Medicine and are also eligible for service as a member of the Student Advisory Committee, a body appointed to serve in both an examining and advisory capacity for each advanced degree student.

The responsibilities of the Permanent Advisor and members of the Student Advisory Committee are described in detail in the University Graduate Bulletin and a separate document listing the duties of the Graduate Student Advisor. Members of the Graduate Faculty hold voting rights at meetings of the Graduate Faculty and are eligible for participation in the election of members of University Graduate Council. Membership in the Graduate Faculty is a requirement for service on the University Graduate Council (as representative or alternate), an elected position which represents the School of Medicine in this institutional body. Nominees for election to University Graduate Council are drawn from the Directors of Graduate Programs to ensure an awareness of issues arising within the School which impact on advanced degree education and to facilitate communication to and from the members of the Graduate Faculty in the School of Medicine.

#### **Appointment to the Graduate Faculty:**

New and continuing membership on the Graduate Faculty is designated on an annual basis by the Chairs of Departments offering advanced degree programs. A list of Departments administering advanced degree programs is appended to this document. Chairs may nominate fulltime members of the University holding the rank of Assistant Professor or above who hold full or affiliate membership in the concerned Department. The list of nominees is submitted to the Office of Graduate Education\School of Medicine for the approval of the Dean and is forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies for concurrence.

Affiliate membership on the Graduate Faculty may be requested for individuals not satisfying the criteria for membership but who hold special skills or knowledge relevant to activities in advanced degree education. This is a situation, which often arises in the constitution of Student Advisory Committees. Affiliate members of the Graduate Faculty may serve on Student Advisory Committees but are not eligible for service as a Permanent Advisor. Affiliate members of the Graduate Faculty may be either designated by the Chair for continuing service on an annual basis (see above) or appointed for a specific role according to the process detailed below.

Appointment for a period of service as an Affiliate member of the Graduate Faculty occurs as follows. The Chair (usually acting through the Program Director)

submits a written request to the Office of Graduate Education indicating the nominee, the objective of the requested appointment (e.g. service on a specific Student Advisory Committee) and a justification of the suitability of the nomination along with a copy of the curriculum vitae of the nominee. On consultation with the Program Directors (acting through the MCV Campus Graduate Committee), a recommendation regarding the request is forwarded to the Dean. Approved requests are forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies for confirmation. Such appointments as an Affiliate member of the Graduate Faculty are linked to a defined service activity and continue for the duration of that activity as confirmed annually by the Chair.

In cases where continuing participation in advanced degree program activities is deemed to be appropriate, an invitation for affiliate membership in the Department should be extended to the individual by the Chair of the Department.

### **Graduate Faculty Appointments School of Medicine**

In 1995 the School of Medicine adopted our present policy wherein the authority to designate individuals for graduate faculty status is restricted to the Chairs of departments housing advanced degree programs. In addition, Chairs may only designate faculty for graduate faculty status who hold a primary or secondary appointment in that department and also meet the eligibility criteria expressed in the Bylaws of the School of Graduate Studies.

Appointment to the graduate faculty is performed on an **annual** basis. Graduate faculty status is thus not permanent. Graduate faculty status endows the faculty member with the ability to chair thesis and dissertation committees. As applied in the School of Medicine, the list of graduate faculty defines the faculty whom the Chairs and Dean approve as appropriate for the essential function of directing and mentoring advanced degree students.

The criteria on which govern the eligibility of faculty whom a Chair may designate for graduate faculty status are summarized below:

#### **The faculty member must**

- 1. Hold a primary or secondary appointment in the Department\***
- 2. Be a full-time member of the University\***
- 3. Be at the rank of Assistant Professor or above**
- 4. Have earned the terminal degree (normally the Ph.D.)**

Faculty meeting these criteria are eligible for appointment as graduate faculty.

In the School of Medicine, we require that faculty serving on graduate student committees hold graduate faculty status, either by appointment to the graduate faculty or by virtue of an ad hoc request for appointment of service for a specific committee. Such ad hoc appointments, which are restricted to the student committee identified in the request to the School of Graduate Studies, expire on dissolution of that committee. In addition, the School of Medicine requires that individuals who chair oral comprehensive (Ph.D.) examinations and Master's defense/final examinations hold graduate faculty status (MCV Campus Graduate Committee representative). Similarly, substitutions of committee members when the student committee functions as an examining body are restricted to faculty holding graduate faculty status.

\*The record of reference for the purpose of identifying faculty satisfying criteria 1. and 2.

is the listing of faculty appearing in the current Graduate Bulletin. Individuals holding appointments in a VCU department but who do not have a primary appointment at a VCU department or McGuire VA are “external” and are not eligible for Graduate Faculty designation.

Departments Offering Advanced Degree Programs\School of Medicine

Department of Anatomy

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.\*

Department of Biochemistry Molecular Biophysics

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.

Department of Biostatistics

M.S.

Ph.D.

Department of Human Genetics

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.

Master of Genetic Counseling

Department of Microbiology and Immunology

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.

Department of Pathology

Ph.D.

Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.

Department of Physiology

Cert. Bas. Sci.

M.S.

Ph.D.\*

Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health

Master of Public Health

Ph.D. (Epidemiology)

\*includes interdisciplinary Ph.D. program with Physical Therapy

## Appendix V

### **DUTIES OF REPRESENTATIVE FOR M.S. AND Ph.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

A Representative of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee Serves as the Chair of the final examination for the awarding of the M.S. degree and the oral qualifying examination for students enrolled in Ph.D. programs. The Representative supplements the Student Advisory Committee in constituting the examining body. The principal role of the Representative is to ensure that the examination process is conducted equitably and in conformity with University, School and Department/Program guidelines. While scholarly expertise in the disciplinary area for a particular examination is of some advantage, this is not a requirement for service as a representative. The primary responsibility of the Representative is to ensure that the process of the examination is appropriate, equitable to the student and consistent with the maintenance of standards of excellence in our programs.

Particularly in the case of the Ph.D. oral comprehensive examination, departments and programs have evolved distinct formats for the examination process. In many cases, a written document in the form of a research "proposal" is prepared by the student and distributed in advance to the Committee. This document then serves as a vehicle for initiating the questioning phase of the examination. The Representative will be provided with a brief description of the examination format as employed by the department/program at the time of appointment; the Representative shall be supplied with a copy of any written document employed in the conduct of the examination in advance, following the protocol applicable to other members of the examining committee. Irrespective of format, the subject matter appropriate for questions at both the M.S. level examination and the Ph.D. oral comprehensive examination includes general knowledge relevant to the disciplinary area, including the subject matter of course work undertaken by the student. While committee members may not elect to question the student in these areas, these remain legitimate areas of inquiry.

Specific responsibilities associated with the conduct of the examination are listed below noting that these responsibilities are borne by the Student Advisor for the conduct of the final Ph.D. examination.

1. In advance of the examination, the Representative shall collect the student's file and examination signature page from the Office of Graduate Education.
2. The Representative shall preside at examinations and
  - a. shall instruct the committee on purpose of exam,
  - b. shall have the student's folder available for circulation or for questions concerning student's background,
  - c. should briefly review student's academic career, including comments on undergraduate and graduate record.
3. After these introductory remarks, the Representative may turn the meeting over to the advisor during the questioning period and shall see that examination is of, and for, the student keeping discussion and interruption by the examiners to a minimum.
4. At this stage the advisor or Representative shall set the order of questioning (traditionally, other committee members, advisor,

- Representative, visitors), establish any general protocol (i.e. 10-15 minute time period for questioning by an individual; the presentation of a summary statement by the candidate prior to the questioning period, etc.).
5. At the end of a complete round of questioning, the committee membership is asked if there are further questions. A full round of questions followed by a focussed second round will occupy approximately two hours.
  6. As the duration of the examination approaches two hours, the advisor or the Representative may call for a brief recess (10-15 minutes). Fatigue and stress, experienced over a prolonged time, have an effect on both the examiners and the examinee. In general, the quality of the examination process deteriorates if extended beyond two and half-hours. It is appropriate for the advisor or Representative to ensure that the extension of the examination period does serve to assist the committee in arriving at an appropriate recommendation.  
Once initiated, an examination may not be continued at a later date. The student will either pass or fail the examination administered on that date.
  7. At the conclusion of the questioning the Representative shall excuse the student and request for a motion and second as to the examination outcome. The Representative shall then elicit discussion of the performance ensuring that the duration and focus of the discussion is appropriate. The Representative then calls for a vote on the motion by show of hands. All committee members and Representative must vote on the performance of passing or failing and are the only persons allowed to vote. More than one negative vote on M.S. examination, a Ph.D. oral or a Ph.D. final examination constitutes failure of the examination.
  8. The Representative shall recall the student and, before the committee informs the student of the outcome, offering congratulations or condolences as appropriate. The student should be informed (if the examination has not been passed) what recourse might be appropriate. The Representative should remind the student, faculty advisor, and student committee members that should the opportunity for a re-examination be deemed appropriate, approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee is to be sought by the department/program on behalf of the student. The Student Advisory Committee has the primary responsibility of formulating a recommendation and communicating the recommendation to the Director of Graduate Programs in the student's parent department.
  9. The signature page indicating the student passed/failed shall be signed by all committee members, the Representative, and visitors and returned to the Office of Graduate Education with the student's folder at the conclusion of the examination.

## Appendix VI

### Appointment of the Graduate Student Committee

Continuing questions regarding appointments to Graduate Student Committees indicate that the School of Medicine policy has not been clearly stated. The points below are listed to clarify this matter. Please bear in mind that the Faculty Advisor (not the student) is responsible for constituting the Student Committee.

1. The minimum Student Committee for the M.S. student is composed of two faculty members holding a primary appointment in the department housing the program and one additional member from outside the parent department.
2. The minimum Student Committee for the Ph.D. student is composed of three faculty members holding a primary appointment in the department housing the program and two additional members from outside the parent department.
3. The Faculty Advisor of the student serves as the Chair of the Student Committee.
4. To maintain standards of academic integrity, students are obligated to follow defined curricular requirements. The curriculum normally defines the parent department of the student. Should circumstances arise in which identical curriculae are offered by more than a single department, the parent department will be defined as the department of the Faculty Advisor.
5. If the Faculty Advisor does not hold a primary appointment in the department administering the advanced degree, an affiliate appointment to the department is required.
6. For clarity, Affiliate appointment in a department shall not disqualify an individual for service as an "outside" member of the Student Committee. Conversely, affiliate membership in a department will not be interpreted to qualify an individual as holding a primary appointment in the department, even when the individual serves as the Faculty Advisor. Thus, if, for example, an affiliate member of a department serves as the Faculty Advisor for a Ph.D. student, the Student Committee must have three faculty holding primary appointments in the department and one additional "outside" member.
7. In order to serve on a Student Committee, an individual must be a "full" or affiliate member of the Graduate Faculty. Temporary appointment as an affiliate member of the Graduate Faculty for the purpose of serving on a Student Committee is granted by the School of Graduate Studies following review and approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee and the recommendation of the Office of the Dean. (The current version of the By-Laws of the School of Graduate Studies is not specific with respect to criteria for temporary appointments as affiliate members of the Graduate Faculty. Until and unless this is changed, the determination of Department Chairs in requesting such appointments and the collective judgement of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee in approving such recommendations will be followed.)

### **STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (Addendum)**

The role of the Student Advisory Committee is detailed in the preceding document. Current policy and practice within the School of Medicine on issues which periodically arise regarding the appointment and function of the Committee are given below.

### **COMMITTEE COMPOSITION**

The composition of the Student Advisory Committee requires a combination of faculty holding a primary appointment in the department of the degree program and faculty from outside the department. We allow faculty members holding an affiliate appointment in the student's department to serve as a "departmental" member, recognizing that (particularly for departments with a small number of faculty) appointment of the requisite number of departmental faculty may, on occasion, be difficult. However, we do not permit a member of the student's department (primary appointment) to serve as an "outside" member of the Student Advisory Committee on the basis of an affiliate appointment held in another department. To do so would de facto compromise the intent of the rules regarding Committee composition. A significant number of our faculty holds affiliate appointments in one or more departments. Allowing a department member to be identified as an "outside" Committee member on the basis of such an appointment would permit Committees composed entirely of the members of a single Department. This is contrary to the desirable cross-fertilization of scholarly expertise and administrative experience that is a very real strength of our Committee architecture. Until and unless we change our rules formally, allowing such a precedent is unwise. Committee size is not restricted; a Ph.D. Committee with four "internal" members and two "external" members is within the bounds of our guidelines.

### **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTIONS/PARTICIPATION**

On occasion, faculty schedules create irresolvable conflicts in the timely scheduling of Student Advisory Committee functions including the conduct of candidacy examinations and thesis/dissertation defense examinations. In such cases, a substitute may be appointed as a visiting member of the Committee for the specific activity subject to the following conditions:

- The substitute must be a member of the Graduate Faculty
- The faculty member for whom the substitute is appointed provides a written agreement in advance indicating his/her approval of the individual serving as a substitute
- The Office of Graduate Education is informed of the intended substitution in a timely fashion. In emergency situations, the Office of Graduate Education should be consulted before proceeding.

As a point of information, participation by a Committee member does not require his/her physical presence. There is precedent for participation by teleconferencing, as an example.

## **COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION BY INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NOT GRADUATE FACULTY**

Individuals who are not full-time VCU faculty (and therefore cannot hold appointments as Graduate Faculty) may serve as voting members of a Student Advisory Committee on approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee and the School of Graduate Studies. Such approval is restricted to service on the specific Student Advisory Committee identified in the request for approval, expiring on dissolution of the Committee. Approval must be obtained for each such appointment.

Submission (to the Office of Graduate Education) of the completed Graduate Student Advisory Committee and Course Plan form naming the individual to the Committee along with a current curriculum vitae (required as a means of verifying the suitability of the requested appointment) is sufficient to request a particular appointment. Such requests are reviewed at the monthly MCV Campus Graduate Committee meeting and, if approved, forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies to complete the approval process.

Such approval is required for all individuals who do not hold Graduate Faculty status. Appointment as an “external affiliate” of a department is not required for such special appointment for service on a Student Advisory Committee nor does holding an “external affiliate” appointment supercede the requirement for special approval of the individual; it is not necessary that the individual hold an academic appointment.

## **DIRECTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT BY AN INDIVIDUAL WHO DOES NOT HOLD GRADUATE FACULTY STATUS**

In special circumstances, the direction of the thesis/dissertation research may occur under the mentorship of an individual who is not a member of the Graduate Faculty. The most common instance of this special circumstance occurs when a member of the VCU Graduate Faculty relocates to another institution and has been identified as the Faculty Advisor of a student. Other possible examples (for which there is precedent in the School of Medicine) include research projects conducted at an “off-campus” site under the direction of a suitably qualified individual. Such sites may include the laboratory of a collaborator with VCU faculty, a laboratory in the private sector or other sites. In all such circumstances, prior written approval of the arrangement is required to ensure that compliance with academic standards and mentoring of the student will take place.

In all such cases, an Advisor of Record shall be appointed who is a member of the VCU Graduate Faculty. The Advisor of Record (usually a member of the Student Advisory Committee) holds the responsibility of representing the interests of the student, the department/program and the School of Medicine by providing liaison and guidance to the student and mentor at the off-campus location. The Advisor of Record is the local point of contact should questions regarding progress or compliance arise.

The conduct of research training at an off-campus location in no way alters the requirement for regular Student Advisory Committee meetings to monitor timely progress, registration as a student or any institutional or departmental obligations. Because the scholarly activity is conducted off-campus, registration for 1 credit hour each semester fulfills the requirement for continuous enrollment. The conduct of examinations performed in fulfillment of degree requirements in such circumstances will take place at VCU. In any such cases, the following procedure is required.

- Prior to the initiation of the research conducted at the off-campus location a written description of the arrangement, including a justification and endorsement from the Chair of the department housing the student's program shall be submitted to the Office of Graduate Education for approval.
- The description of the arrangement will be accompanied by the Graduate Student Advisory Committee and Course Plan approval form, identifying the Advisor of Record and requesting approval of the proposed mentor for service on the Student Advisory Committee

With the above approvals in place, the individual directing the thesis/dissertation research may be so identified on the thesis/dissertation document. There is no requirement to indicate the Advisor of Record in the thesis/dissertation. The process outlined below is the recommended procedure to follow should faculty relocation from VCU be involved.

- Forward a letter to the Office of Graduate Education, School of Medicine requesting that the faculty member be allowed to serve on all currently active student committees (if desired) including those on which the faculty member is the advisor. List all student names. Include a current curriculum vitae for the faculty member.
- For those students for whom the faculty member is the advisor, an "Advisor of Record" who is a full-time member of the University in the home Department should be indicated. A member of the current Student Advisory Committee can so serve.

## **Appendix VII**

### **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ISSUES RELATED TO THE THESIS/DISSERTATION**

The thesis/dissertation is the written statement of the research conducted in satisfaction of degree requirements, which forms the basis of the final examination and (in its final form) is intended for dissemination to the scientific community and the public. The content of the thesis/dissertation must be sufficient to allow the Student Advisory Committee, in its function as the examining body, to judge the appropriateness of the work and its description as a satisfactory fulfillment of the requirements for the degree. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for a thesis/dissertation project to be research conducted under aegis of proprietary agreement which precludes the timely release of such information. This would limit the information content of the thesis/dissertation to a degree compromising the ability of the Student Advisory Committee to render judgement, and potentially restrict the career development of the student. This does not imply that research involving proprietary information and/or content for which intellectual property protection is desirable is excluded from consideration as thesis/dissertation projects.

In most cases, there is an expectation that sensitive information be held in confidence for a defined period (usually twelve months or less) to allow for the implementation of intellectual property protection, which would be compromised by the release of information into the public domain. A procedure to accommodate such circumstances is described below.

However, the details of any particular circumstance will vary and are difficult to anticipate. Ultimately, the Student Advisory Committee holds the authority and responsibility for assessing the content of the thesis/dissertation in satisfying the requirements for the degree and serving as the basis for judging the qualification of the student. It is thus imperative that the Student Advisory Committee be consulted by the Faculty Advisor as soon as such issues arise.

### **INCLUSION OF PROPRIETARY INFORMATION IN THE THESIS /DISSERTATION**

Should circumstances arise wherein the thesis/dissertation document includes information deemed proprietary, restriction of the use and dissemination of such information may be arranged by the advance written consent of the involved parties. This would normally include the student, the Faculty Advisor, members of the Student Advisory Committee including individuals who are privy to such information by virtue of their participation in the conduct of the Final Examination and the Office of Graduate Education. Such written consent should include constraints on the dissemination or use of information as appropriate and may take the form of a Confidentiality Agreement, recognizing that signatories to such an agreement undertake any legal obligations entailed.

To protect the proprietary nature of the information, the completed and approved thesis/dissertation document will not be released for archival storage in the institutional library system pending written approval by the Advisor and Student, nor will the document be submitted for public dissemination. The completed thesis/dissertation, including all signature pages and forms required for archiving the document (including

the submission of copies for binding) will be held in the Office of Graduate Education, School of Medicine pending receipt of the written release. The Advisor and Student remain responsible for the submission of the document to the University Library System. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the delay in submission of the document for release into the public domain should not exceed 12 months from the date of the successful completion of the Final Examination.

## Appendix VIII

### **Use of the School of Graduate Studies Special Action Form**

A copy of the “Request for Special Action” Form is appended. Use of the Special Action Form is required for a variety of actions, including those listed on the form (e.g. extension of time limit for degree, level of absence, etc.). Please note that a justification for the action for which approval is sought should accompany the form as a letter/memorandum. The justification can be brief but should provide a rationale for the action taken.

The Special Action Form should be employed as the means of documenting changes in student status (e.g. change in degree program from M.S. to Ph.D., change in department in which the student is enrolled, etc.) Use of the “Other” category is appropriate for such changes in status.

The Special Action Form is also employed to secure permission to register for one-credit hour in the final term of a degree program. Such permission is based on the assumption that completion of degree requirements is imminent and would take place early in the term. This expectation should be reflected in the request.