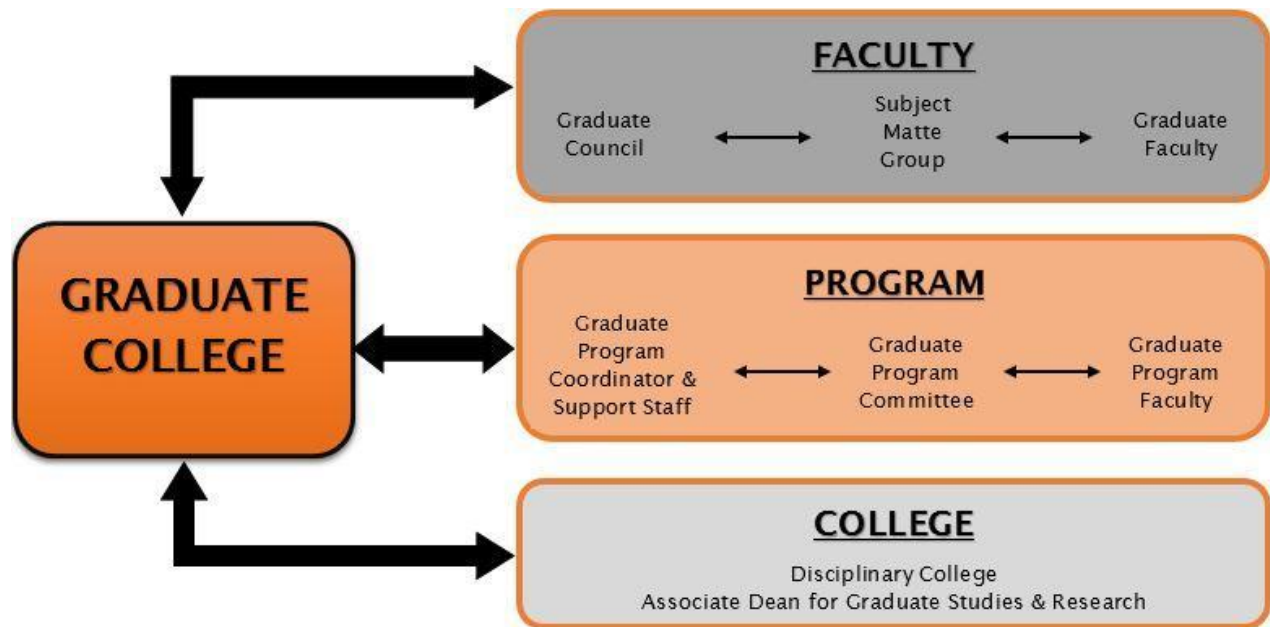


## Graduate Education and Graduate Program Organizational Structures and Functions

Conceptually, the overarching organizational structure for the entities that have responsibilities for OSU's graduate education enterprise is shown below. This diagram and document illustrates the collaborative, team approach necessary to enabling the success of OSU graduate students and Graduate Faculty. It is a companion to the "Best Practices in Graduate Education" and "Best Practices: Advisory Committees and Defenses" endorsed by Graduate Council on April 19, 2013 and August 28, 2015, respectively, that describes the OSU graduate education environment and rights and responsibilities of graduate students, Graduate Faculty, Advisory Committees and the Graduate College.

### OSU GRADUATE EDUCATION



The structure of a graduate program can support and facilitate degree completion, minimize unnecessary time-to-degree delays, improve the graduate student experience and enhance graduate student and faculty interactions, research and scholarly endeavors. This document presents best practices for the local graduate program structure and selection of personnel. It provides overarching guidance with recognition that graduate programs have unique characteristics steeped in the discipline and depend somewhat on program size and complexity of degree options. For the purposes of this document, it is helpful to understand that Oklahoma State University (OSU) graduate programs vary in size from small (6 – 15 graduate students) to medium (15 – 50) to large (50 – 100) to very large (over 100) and complexity (e.g., 6 – 8 options), particularly in umbrella programs. Customization of the graduate program structure will depend on these and other variables mentioned throughout.

### Graduate Program Faculty

Graduate Faculty Mentors and Graduate Advisory Committees composed of Graduate Faculty members are absolutely critical to the success of graduate students, and their responsibilities are detailed in "Best Practices: Advisory Committees and Defenses" ([link](#)). Beyond the Mentor and Advisory Committee, there are three distinct entities that oversee graduate education at the program level: the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPCo), the Graduate Program Committee (GPC) and the Graduate Program Staff (GPS). Members of the Graduate Faculty generally serve in the GPCo and

GPC roles. The GPCo, GPC and GPS are further supported by Graduate Council (the elected body representing the Graduate Faculty), Graduate Faculty Subject Matter Groups and personnel, such as the associate dean for graduate studies and/or research in the disciplinary college and Graduate College staff. Other administrative units, such as the Library and Institutional Diversity, Research and Student Affairs Divisions, in the University also provide support for graduate education at OSU.

### **Graduate Council**

The Graduate Council is the elected body representing the Graduate Faculty and was organized on October 26, 1948 replacing the Committee on Higher Degrees with a chair and vice chair elected from each of the Subject Matter Groups.

### **Subject Matter Groups**

The organization of the Graduate Faculty into common interest groups was initiated by the Graduate School in June 1948 with the naming of five Subject Matter Groups: Group I –Biological Sciences; Group II – Humanities; Group III –Physical Sciences and Technology; Group IV –Social Sciences; and Group V – Education. A sixth Subject Matter Group, Group VI – Biomedical Sciences, was organized in June 2002. The organization of the Graduate Faculty into such groups appears to be unique to OSU, as many graduate faculties throughout the country use the disciplinary colleges for graduate faculty grouping. The structure at OSU promotes interdisciplinarity and the cross pollination of ideas.

The Subject Matter Groups set and implement requirements for Group membership; promote excellence in graduate education; elect officers; hold regular meetings; take action on recommendations of the Graduate Council; and initiate action pertaining to graduate education.

### **Graduate Faculty**

According to the Graduate Faculty Bylaws, the Graduate Faculty have the following responsibilities:

- Develop policies, procedures and activities to promote excellence in graduate teaching, research and creative activity;
- Recommend and approve candidates for graduate degrees and certificates;
- Review and approve the initiation, modification and discontinuation of graduate degree and certificate programs;
- Participate in the academic review process of graduate degree and certificate programs;
- Set the policies and minimum standards for graduate admissions and completion requirements;
- Set and implement minimum requirements for membership in the Graduate Faculty;
- Teach all courses eligible for graduate credit at Oklahoma State University;
- Advise and mentor graduate students and their research, scholarly and creative activities.

### **Graduate Program Personnel**

#### **Graduate Program Coordinator (GPCo)**

The Graduate Program Coordinator (GPCo) is the most important administrative position in a graduate program. The Graduate Council passed a resolution on October 26, 2009 entitled “Graduate [Program] Coordinator Requirement” that discusses the importance of this position and recommends....

- Whereas the title of graduate [program] coordinator is assigned by respective heads of departments, schools, or other academic units, and
- Whereas graduate [program] coordinators must work closely with the Graduate College in matters related to recruiting of potential students, admission processes, matriculation, advising, completion of graduate degree requirements, and other student services for those enrolled in graduate programs, and
- Whereas graduate [program] coordinators are principal persons of contact regarding course actions, curricular actions, plans of study, degree requirements, graduation clearance requirements, and other academic services, and
- Whereas effective service as a graduate [program] coordinator requires a thorough understanding of graduate policies and procedures, as well as an understanding of curricular development, and
- Whereas graduate [program] coordinators must have the status and authority necessary to effectively liaise with faculty, staff and students, and to effectively implement academic policies at the department level,
- Therefore, be it resolved that the Graduate Council recommends that each graduate [program] coordinator at Oklahoma State University must be a Member of the Graduate Faculty at Oklahoma State University, employed by the academic unit for which they serve as graduate coordinator.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the GPCo is a member of the Graduate Faculty. In rare cases approved by the Graduate College, the individual is a professional staff member. In such cases where the graduate program is research based, the staff member typically holds a doctorate. In other cases where it is a large professionally oriented graduate program, the staff member typically reports to a program director or associate dean of the disciplinary college who is a member of the Graduate Faculty. In cases where the GPCo is a staff member, the utilization of a Graduate Program Committee (GPC) is even more important and expected. The aforementioned Resolution outlines the major responsibilities of the GPCo. In addition, the GPCo should actively participate in Graduate College Graduate Coordinator meetings and attend trainings sessions, such as those for new coordinators and on new software for recruitment, admission and matriculation. The GPCo is expected to provide advice to the GPC and work closely with this committee. Depending on the organizational structure, the GPCo may be responsible for the formal leadership of the GPC.

Irrespective of the size of a graduate program, the graduate coordinator should not also be serving as the administrative unit head. When these positions are the same person, this ensures the situation will be evaluated to the next level when there are concerns, and this also undermines the opportunities for the Graduate Faculty to have a voice. The unit head as an impartial third party has an opportunity to work with the affected parties to resolve the issue within the administrative unit. This separation of responsibilities is considered a best practice.

#### GPCo Compensation

The vital work and responsibility associated with serving as the GPCo must be recognized. Like the GPC, the percentage of time devoted to the GPCo will largely depend on how well established the graduate program is, whether any major program changes are being considered, the complexity of the program, the size of the program, the staff support for the program, and the program schedule during breaks and summer sessions. There are numerous models that account for the time and effort devoted to these activities. GPCo service can be recognized as a regular and substantial service contribution as part of the normal faculty workload, through course release, through paid summer salary, through a monthly administrative stipend, or a combination thereof. In many graduate programs, particularly the larger and/or complex ones, serving as the GPCo exceeds the normal service load expected in

faculty workload models. Like the GPC, the GPCo assignment should be accounted for in the annual faculty A&D evaluation.

Special Note Regarding Untenured Faculty Members. Ideally, the GPCo role and membership on the GPC should be reserved for those who are tenured faculty members. While untenured Graduate Faculty certainly have a stake and interest in the success of the graduate program and its students, the GPCo and GPC have to make difficult and sometimes controversial decisions in the best interest of the program, students and/or faculty. In these cases, untenured faculty members can be put at risk. Prior to the assignment of an untenured faculty member to the GPCo role or portions of the role, the discussion with deans of the Graduate College and involved disciplinary college should occur. Significant care should be exercised prior to having untenured faculty members serve in these roles.

### **Graduate Program Committee (GPC)**

The importance of the Graduate Program Committee (GPC) in facilitating graduate student and Graduate Faculty success cannot be overstated. GPCs are tasked with leading the graduate education efforts in a program, and therefore, should be representative bodies. GPC are responsible for a variety of tasks from recruiting, to admissions, to developing academic metrics (e.g., entrance, qualifying and comprehensive examinations) to overseeing program assessment (e.g., time to degree and degree completion), to degree requirements (e.g., courses, Plans of Study and number of degree credit hours), to determining exception requests, to mediating disagreements. Their work should be guided by University and Graduate College policies and procedures, Graduate Council, Graduate Faculty Subject Matter Groups, Graduate Program Handbooks, graduate education best practices, (inter)disciplinary norms, and the local needs of the students, faculty and program.

Unilateral decisions by a single individual, such as the GPCo or unit head, on significant graduate education issues, beyond the usual scope of responsibilities, are not desirable and not considered best practices. The GPC provides a shared governance mechanism with the healthy participation of diverse voices, representing varied opinions and ideas. Ideally, the selection of GPC members would involve significant faculty input in the spirit of shared governance. To aid the functioning of the GPC, program bylaws should be developed and used to support consistency of function of the program across time.

### **GPC Composition**

Individuals serving on the GPC must be members of the Graduate Faculty. The GPC may be led by the GPCo, whose responsibilities are outlined below. Irrespective of the organizational structure, the GPCo should be actively involved and work closely with the GPC. In addition to the GPCo, there should be additional committee members representing the unit. In larger and/or complex programs, such as those with numerous degree options, each subdiscipline or program area may have a representative member selected via election, rotation, assignment or volunteer. Ideally, the GPC would have an odd number of voting members. The composition is affected by whether the GPCo is a voting member; therefore, this should be clarified in the graduate program's governing bylaws and documents. Three to five members is ideal; other sizes tend to be too small to have adequate representation of ideas and opinions or so large as to be unwieldy, undermining participation. An even number of voting members may create an impassable tie in the case of a vote on an issue.

Given the decision making authority that resides in the GPC committee, regular reports to the larger faculty body in the graduate program are critical. In addition, consideration of major program changes, etc. should involve significant input from colleagues and many decisions should come before the graduate program faculty for a vote.

### **GPC Service**

Irrespective of how the GPC is formed, the workload associated with GPC membership should be accounted for as a significant service contribution. The percentage of time devoted to the GPC will largely depend on how well established the graduate program is, whether any major program changes

are being considered, the complexity of the program and somewhat on the size of the program. The assignment should be accounted for in the annual Appraisal and Development (A&D) evaluation for program faculty. In many graduate programs where there is an expectation of the faculty workload including a service assignment, GPC membership would be seen as a major, standing assignment, when the committee is actively engaged throughout the year.

It should also be recognized that there are issues that do come up in the summer that may require the GPC to meet. This is another reason that service assignment should reflect the quality and quantity of work the committee participates in throughout the entire year.

### **Graduate Program Staff (GPS)**

Typically, a graduate program will have professional staff member assigned responsibilities for providing administrative support for the program. Depending on the program size, this may be a full-time staff member or represent a proportion of a staff member's regular assignment. For larger graduate programs, a full-time graduate program staff (GPS) member is a necessity. Like the GPCo, the GPS is critical to facilitating the success of the graduate students and the program. Depending on the program structure, the GPS may provide direct support for some or all of the aforementioned GPCo responsibilities from recruiting to matriculation to graduation. In addition, the GPS should actively participate in Graduate College Graduate Coordinator meetings and attend trainings sessions, such as those for new coordinators and on new software for recruitment, admission and matriculation.

Because the GPS provides the organization structure and local graduate program institutional knowledge and memory, the GPS role cannot be understated. Moreover, the GPS is frequently the first and primary contact prospective and current students will have with the graduate program and OSU. The assignment of the GPS should reflect the professional skills, experiences and qualities necessary to be highly effective in this role.

### **Disciplinary College Graduate Program Staff**

#### **Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and/or Research**

Each disciplinary college has an associate dean assigned responsibilities for graduate education endeavors. While the titles are varied, most are commonly referred to as the Associate Dean for Research (ADR), given the research-intensive nature of graduate degrees. These individuals are the disciplinary college representatives that serve as an internal advisory group to the dean of the Graduate College. As such, the ADRs share in the responsibilities for administrating and communicating graduate education opportunities to the campus communities. For example, ADRs distribute the disciplinary college allocations associated with the Graduate College programs, such as recruiting funds, Top Tier Fellowships, Stipend Enhancement Funding. In addition, many disciplinary college ADRs regularly convene meetings of college-level graduate councils.

Endorsed by Graduate Council on April 24, 2015