

Dissertation Advisory Committee Guidelines

Molecules, Cells and Organisms Training Program
Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology

About the Dissertation Advisory Committee and DAC Meetings

MCO PhD candidates discuss their project(s) with a dissertation advisory committee (DAC) at the beginning of each academic year to encourage forward thinking. The DAC may require more frequent meetings depending on the student's progress, especially in the completion phase. The Dissertation Advisory Committee membership must meet the same guidelines as outlined below. A student may request a change in their DAC composition at any time by submitting a request to the MCO Graduate Program Office. All changes are subject to the approval of the MCO Leadership Team.

- The DAC must contain at least 3 faculty members.
- The DAC Chair must be a senior MCO faculty member.
- At least 2 of the 3 committee members must be MCO faculty members.
- Any member of your DAC outside the training program is subject to approval by the MCO Leadership Team.

Goals and Responsibilities of the Dissertation Advisory Committee

- 1) To serve as an **advisory committee** that will provide professional advice on all aspects of the dissertation project, from experimental paradigms to project feasibility and timing, to the scientific impact of the work.
- 2) To help **monitor** the student's progress and ensure that major objectives and standards for completion of the dissertation are being met. In this capacity, the DAC determines whether the student's research meets the requirements of the program and when the student may begin writing the thesis.
- 3) To help **resolve** any conflict between student and advisor or other lab members.
- 4) To serve as a **liaison** to the department and training program leaders as well as graduate administration.

The Student DAC Report

Students submit a DAC Report to each committee member and to the MCO Graduate Program Office **at least one week** in advance of their meeting. The report's cover page should be signed by both student and advisor and include the date, time, and location of the meeting. Detailed guidelines for the format of the DAC report, as well as samples, can be found on the [Intranet](#).

DAC Procedures and the Advisor's Role

The advisor is not a member of the Dissertation Advisory Committee. However, it is critical that the advisor briefs the committee privately (ideally in person) on the student's activities ahead of time. If the advisor is unable to attend the DAC meeting, this can be done via email, but preferably in a private session with the committee prior to the student's presentation. After the DAC is briefed by the advisor, the Committee Chair should set a time with the advisor to return to the meeting (generally 15 minutes prior to the meeting's conclusion). After the advisor leaves, the DAC consults with the student and the student delivers their DAC report. At the agreed time near the conclusion of the meeting, the advisor should return. Here the committee summarizes impressions and concerns and discusses the way forward until the next meeting. It is possible for an advisor to stay for a DAC meeting; however, the student, committee chair, and advisor must be in agreement about this arrangement prior to the meeting.

Feedback and Outcomes

The Committee Chair is required to complete a [Faculty DAC meeting report](#) at the conclusion of the meeting. This link will also be included in the confirmation and reminder emails sent by the MCO Graduate Program Office. If a student's progress is not satisfactory, a specific set of milestones should be outlined for the student and a follow-up meeting scheduled. A date for this meeting should be indicated on the DAC report. In addition to the narrative on the report, the DAC Chair may elaborate matters of concern directly to the MCO team. Please see below for an explanation of progress at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS).

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Definition of Satisfactory Progress

All students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences must be making satisfactory progress in order to be eligible for any type of financial support. The following five provisions are the general definition of satisfactory progress, according to the [policies set by the GSAS](#): Specific program modifications are indicated below.

Students are considered making satisfactory progress if they:

- Complete expected requirements
 - Achieve a minimum [grade-point average](#) of B (3.0)
- Programs may require additional conditions. See [Departmental Requirements](#) for more information.
- GSAS students must make satisfactory progress to be eligible for financial aid.

Unsatisfactory Progress will result in the following consequences as outlined by the [policies set by the GSAS](#):

- Students making unsatisfactory progress may not teach or receive financial aid (including federal Title IV funding).
- Students making unsatisfactory progress are considered to not be in good standing with the University.
- Students may not remain in “unsatisfactory” progress and those who do may be withdrawn from their program.

Ordinarily, by the end of the 2nd year, graduate students in the MCO Program must have successfully taken and passed all required coursework, passed the Candidacy Examination, completed their teaching requirement, and have obtained approval for their dissertation research project. Additional requirements may be outlined by the Dissertation Advisory Committee in consultation with the student’s advisor.

A student who has not met degree requirements or an established deadline may, with department endorsement, be granted the status of “**GRACE**” for up to one year and remain eligible for institutional aid (not federal Title IV loans and/or work-study) during this period. At the end of this grace period the student must have rectified the deficiency and be in compliance with all other established criteria in order to be considered to be making satisfactory progress. **Ordinarily, only one such period of grace will be granted to a student during graduate studies.** If a student continues to not make satisfactory progress, a department may withdraw the student. Only students making satisfactory progress are eligible for federal Title IV funding. **Students in “grace” status are not eligible to hold teaching appointments.**

Faculty members with concerns regarding a graduate student’s academic or personal welfare should contact the Office of Student Affairs in The Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Campus Center 3rd Floor; or 495-1814. This office is directed by the Dean for Student Affairs, who has general responsibility for the welfare of graduate students and monitors students’ academic status. The Dean represents students in disciplinary cases before the Administrative Board of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and advises students on sexual harassment complaints. Ordinarily, graduate students who have not met satisfactory progress requirements or who have not maintained contact with their departments for more than two terms are subject to withdrawal from the program at the discretion of the department. The department will make a reasonable effort to contact the student to determine the steps necessary to obtain satisfactory progress. If the effort to make contact is unsuccessful or if the student continues to not make satisfactory progress, the student will then be withdrawn.