

Graduate Faculty Representative Resource Frequently Asked Questions

Why a FAQ?

As TAMU-CC continues to graduate individuals who hold doctoral degrees, the need for Graduate Faculty Representatives (GFRs) has grown. In addition to new GFRs being added as faculty members obtain tenure, TAMU-CC also has faculty members who have long served as dissertation committee members in their own programs. These faculty members have been previously excluded as GFRs. We also have seasoned faculty members who joined TAMU-CC after being at another university where the whole dissertation process may have been different, including the role of the GFR.

Finally, the DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice) degree has been utilizing GFRs for the past couple of years. The DNP, a terminal doctoral degree, requires a DNP project. While the project is not research according to federal guidelines, the same need for fairness and rigor is present in the DNP project process.

What are the essential roles of a Graduate Faculty Representative?

The role of the GFR is two-fold. The GFR helps ensure that

- the quality of the degree is appropriate for TAMU-CC by examining the quality and rigor of the dissertation/final project,
- the policies of the College of Graduate Studies and of the University are upheld, and
- the student receives fair and reasonable treatment in and that student rights are upheld.

It is *not* part of the GFR's role to be a content expert or to have content expertise.

What are the basic expectations for a Graduate Faculty Representative?

The GFR must participate in the proposal hearing and dissertation defense/final examination. The GFR is not required to attend or evaluate materials related to the comprehensive examination.

Is the GFR a voting member of the doctoral student's advisory committee?

Yes. The GFR has the same standing on the committee as the discipline-specific committee members.

How much time is involved with being a GFR?

That depends, largely on the interest and commitment of the GFR. However, the GFR should keep in mind that they are a voting member of the committee and participate to the extent their background allows. Some GFRs read both the proposal and dissertation documents closely and ask questions about the proposed/completed study. They may offer edits or raise issues in areas where they have expertise. Other GFRs, while they read the documents, do not raise issues or questions unless they are aware of something substantive. In addition, the communication or lack thereof from a dissertation committee chair can impact the engagement of the GFR.

How can I best communicate with the dissertation chair?

There is no one right way to be a GFR, just as there is no one right way to be a dissertation chair. It is absolutely acceptable for a GFR to reach out to the dissertation chair to talk about how the process works in a particular program and what the GFR can expect in terms of communication from the chair or student.

If the GFR has concerns about content or the design of the study, it is generally a good idea to talk to the chair prior to a proposal or defense meeting if possible. Otherwise, fair and reasonable treatment may rightfully be questioned.

What if the GFR does not understand common research designs in the discipline?

As with content expertise, it is not critical that the GFR understand research designs used in other disciplines. It is important for the GFR to recognize that different disciplines use different methodologies and may even have different philosophical views about what constitutes research.

What if I am not willing to sign off “as is” at a defense?

While it will hopefully happen only rarely, there are times when a GFR may have strong doubts about a proposal or a defense. For example, a GFR may have specific content knowledge and be aware of errors or important missing information that, despite expressed concerns, have not been addressed. The best time for design or other concerns to be expressed is at the proposal. However, problems are not always evident at that time. The GFR is not required to approve either an oral defense or the final document.

Graduate Faculty Representatives should keep in mind that students (and their chairs) should be informed before the final defense about serious concerns.