Frequently Asked Questions about Forming Your Committee

Q: When should I start forming my committee?

A: Usually in your second or third year, when you are close to being ready to write your qualifying or comprehensive examinations (for Doctoral students), or when you are ready to write your thesis proposal (for Masters’ students).

Q: How many committee members do I need?

A: In the Doctoral dissertation and Masters’ thesis processes, students form a committee of faculty to guide their research. Committees are minimally comprised of a chair and two other members from inside the department, and one other member from outside the department (this outside person can be from inside the college, or from any other department/college on campus). Committees can have more than four people, and additional members can also be from off campus, but all additional members must have at least graduate faculty affiliate status (if they are on campus) and a terminal degree (if they are on or off campus).

Q: Who can be on my committee?

A: Committee members must have graduate faculty status. Students are typically assigned a faculty advisor in their program of study when they are admitted—this advisor can become your committee chair or a committee member, but does not have to become either.

Q: What should I keep in mind when forming a committee?

A: Your committee is YOUR COMMITTEE so exercise your will to put together the committee you want to guide and support your success! In choosing committee members, consider faculty who can contribute robustly to your graduate student journey—either in terms of the content expertise, their research expertise, their social and cultural capital/knowledge of how things work/status on campus (i.e., tenure, full professor, etc.), their availability (willingness to make time for/give time to you to scaffold your success).

Q: How do I decide on a committee chair or co-chair?

A: While it is generally assumed (and in the case of some programs of study, required) that students choose a chair or a co-chair in their program area, that may not always be in the students’ best interest, so, in CSEIME, we try to be flexible to the extent that it makes sense to be, all things considered (e.g., if you can find another faculty member inside the department who is willing to assume the chair/co-chair role and has the content area expertise to serve effectively in this role).
Q: How do I approach potential committee members?

A: Send an email to any faculty member you are considering asking to join your committee asking for a meeting time to discuss your research interests. Alternatively, you can stop by the faculty member’s office hours. Be prepared to share your research interests (content and methodological approach) in broad strokes (where you think you might be heading). Ask them for their perspectives on your interests and see how they respond. Ideally, you should get a lot of resource referrals from the conversation! If the meeting goes well (however you define that), make the ask for them to serve on your committee (as chair, inside member, or outside member (the outside member is also known as the Graduate College Representative)).

Q: The faculty member said YES to serving on my committee! What forms do I need?

A: If a faculty member accepts your invitation to serve on your committee, ask them to sign your committee formation form (see: Benchmark-Forms Overview (Doctoral) OR Benchmark-Forms Overview (Masters) on the CSIEME site).

Q: What if I want/need to change a committee member?

You can change committee members, at almost any time and for almost any reason ☀️; sometimes you will have to change committee members unexpectedly if one of the members of your committee leaves UNLV and/or retires. It is always a good idea to speak to your committee chair about how to go about making committee member changes before you do so (timing, politics, etc.); if it is your committee chair you want to change and you do not feel that you can speak directly to your chair about this, speak to one of your committee members and/or to the department chair.