FP310: Dissertation Committee Policy

1. Purpose

This policy standardizes the committee structure, responsibilities, compensation, and workload allocation for faculty who serve on doctoral dissertation committees at National Louis University. It ensures consistency, equity, and recognition for the substantial mentoring and scholarly engagement required in guiding students through the dissertation process.

2. Definitions

Dissertation: A dissertation is a systematic, scholarly investigation of a significant problem, question, or topic that contributes new knowledge, understanding, or application to a particular field of study. NLU dissertations must include original student research that proposes a methodological approach to the project, a proposal, and final defense of the project with results and discussion sections approved by a faculty committee.
Final Defense: The formal, public oral presentation and examination of a doctoral student's completed dissertation, juried by a committee of faculty members. During the defense, the student summarizes their research, explains their methodology and findings, and answers questions to demonstrate expertise, scholarly rigor, and readiness to earn the doctoral degree.
Load: Credit allocated toward a faculty member's contractual workload.
Milestone: A formal stage in the dissertation process, specifically the proposal defense and the final defense.
Overload: Work exceeding the base contract workload, typically compensated via published faculty load and compensation (FLAC) pay rate.
Proposal Defense: The committee reviews the manuscript content: introduction, literature review, and methodology, provides feedback, and ultimately approves a student's proposed research project to ensure its methodological viability and IRB compliance, as applicable.
Start Date: The date a student's dissertation committee is assigned and the student begins work on their dissertation.
Withdrawal: When a student stops participating in their doctoral program for more than a year.

3. Committee Structure and Formation

Each dissertation committee must include at least three members: one Chair and two Committee Members. The Methodologist role can be fulfilled by any existing committee member (Chair or Committee Member). All members must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in this policy.

Eligibility Requirements

Faculty members who serve on dissertation committees must hold a doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, or equivalent) in the field of study or a closely related discipline. All members should have relevant academic or professional experience to effectively mentor and support the student through the dissertation process. Program leaders may establish additional criteria or approve exceptions as appropriate, particularly for interdisciplinary or practice-based research. All dissertation committee chairs should be affiliated with the University (e.g. faculty, adjunct faculty, or staff). A methodologist should have a variety of methodological experience and an ability to support the students' application of their research study. A committee member can be a person who meets the eligibility requirements but is not currently affiliated with the University.

Appointment and Approval

Committee appointments must be approved by the program leader or designated academic administrator. Faculty should not commit to serving on a student's committee until they receive program approval.

Service Duration and Continuity

Committee service typically begins with the formation of the committee and continues through the final defense. Faculty are expected to remain available to the student throughout the dissertation process. In the case of a committee member going on sabbatical (see FP107-Sabbatical Policy), the committee member will work with the program chair to ensure student support, if the faculty member is unable to support the student (e.g. faculty member is out of the country, etc.).

Committee Chair Cap

To ensure quality and avoid overload, faculty should not chair more than 15 dissertation committees at a time. Exceptions must be approved by the doctoral program leader or academic unit leader. The academic unit leader and doctoral program leader have the authority to approve and deny chair appointments for any reason, including exceeding the cap.

4. Responsibilities by Role

Chair

- Meet regularly with the student and guide progress.
- Provide formative, actionable feedback on the manuscript.
- Guide IRB application process and University formatting requirements.
- Manage committee formation and internal communication.
- Facilitate proposal and final defense meetings.
- Guide the student through final edits after the defense, including in the event of a denied defense.

- Approve final manuscript and ensure academic integrity.
- Guide the student through the submission procedures.

Committee Member

- Attend and engage in proposal and final defenses.
- Provide regular feedback throughout the process, including written feedback at the milestones.
- Offer additional targeted support upon Chair's request.

Methodologist

- Guide design and methodological framework.
- Provide detailed feedback on methodology chapter.
- Support data analysis and interpretation of results.
- Can serve dual role (Chair or Member)

5. Compensation Structure

Stipend Payment Schedule by Role and Milestone

Role	Proposal Defense	Final Defense	Total Stipend	Notes
Chair	1 sh	1sh	2 sh	Receives the largest share due to mentorship and administrative oversight
Committee Member 1	.15 sh	.15 sh	.30 sh	
Committee Member 2	.15 sh	.15 sh	.30 sh	
Methodologist	.20 sh	.20 sh	.40 sh	Serves a dual role and receives both stipends
Withdrawal Fee**	—	—	$250	The chair is paid if the student withdraws or the faculty member leaves the committee at any time during the process

*Faculty who serve two roles (e.g., Chair and Methodologist) receive both stipends.

**All withdrawal fees are approved by the academic unit leader and may not be approved if the situation does not warrant compensation.

After a year of non-registration, the Program Leader determines whether or not to issue a withdrawal fee to the dissertation chair. If the withdrawal fee is issued and the student continues with the same chair at some time in the future, the next milestone will be paid less the withdrawal fee.

Workload Assignment and Administration

Full-time Faculty may elect to receive teaching load in lieu of stipends for dissertation work using the following standardized workload model. If receiving workload for a particular student, a faculty member cannot claim overload for that same student.

Role / Responsibility	Semester Hour (SH)
Chair + Methodologist	0.50 SH
Chair (no methodologist role)	0.33 SH
Committee Member	0.17 SH
Committee Member + Methodologist	0.33 SH
Methodologist (add-on to Chair or Member)	+0.17 SH

Examples of 3.0 SH Annual Workload

Dissertation Mix	Total SH
6 Chair + Methodologist	3.0 SH
4 Chair + Methodologist + 6 Committee Member	3.0 SH
2 Chair + Methodologist + 12 Committee Member	3.0 SH
9 Committee Member + Methodologist roles	3.0 SH

Load must be approved and documented through appropriate academic channels. Once load is selected for compensation for supporting a student's dissertation, the faculty member cannot switch to stipend payment.

Load is typically awarded in the academic year in which the majority of dissertation guidance occurs. Load may be claimed for a maximum of three academic years per student. After three years, no additional load will be assigned for that dissertation unless a formal extension is approved by the Academic Unit Leader or Dean. Faculty will continue to support the student, but since compensation has already been given, additional compensation (i.e. load or stipend) will not be awarded.

Co-Role Compensation

In a situation where there is a co-role (co-chair, for example) the role compensation of roles played by the two people (co-chair, methodologist, and committee member, for example) will be summed and divided by two. Each person will receive half of the compensation, regardless of compensation type.

6. Conditions for Compensation

Committee Payment Release

Payment will be released upon successful completion of a milestone - either “pass” or “pass with revisions.”

Committee Changes

Committee changes must be approved by the program director. If a faculty member is removed from a committee before the student completes either milestone (proposal or final defense), compensation may be the withdrawal fee, at the dean's discretion.

Withdrawal Students

If a student has withdrawn, upon return the committee will be re-formed and compensation will restart from the upcoming dissertation milestone or workload clock.

Milestone and Feedback Timelines

Faculty are expected to return feedback on drafts within a reasonable time frame, typically 2 weeks, and to support student progress in accordance with program expectations for dissertation timelines.

Interaction with Other Policies

Dissertation workload must be managed in accordance with the University’s Faculty Workload Policy (e.g., FP102), including restrictions on overload during academic terms.

- Compensation is issued upon completion of both the proposal and final defenses.
- Partial stipends are paid if the student withdraws before completing both defenses.
- There is no compensation via course enrollment.
- There is no additional compensation during the summer terms, unless the student completes their proposal or final defense. Consequently, because dissertation support is compensated through stipend or workload distributed across an academic year(s), dissertation support is ineligible for a 1/6 or 1/12 summer contract.

- A faculty member serving as the methodologist, as well as a second role (chair or committee member) can receive two stipends, the methodologist stipend as well as the stipend for the other role the member serves on the committee.
- Dissertation work must be tracked through the University's centralized dissertation tracking system.

7. Faculty Support Outside Contract Periods

Faculty who serve on dissertation committees are encouraged to provide consistent and timely mentorship throughout the dissertation process, including during summer months or other periods outside their standard employment contract (e.g., for faculty on 10-month contracts).

The stipend or load assigned for dissertation committee work is not pro-rated by contract duration and therefore compensates faculty for support across the full student lifecycle, including summer and term breaks.

No additional compensation will be provided for summer work related to dissertation committees. Faculty should plan their availability and communication expectations accordingly, in collaboration with their students and program directors.

8. Review

This policy will be reviewed every five years in collaboration with the Academic Cabinet and doctoral program leaders to ensure alignment with faculty workload models, doctoral program design, and compensation standards. Compensation rates will also be evaluated during each review cycle to ensure they remain fair, competitive, and aligned with institutional priorities.