

TO: Faculty and Graduate Students
FROM: David Jasnow, Chairperson, Department of Physics and Astronomy
DATE: June 4, 2004
SUBJECT: PhD research conducted outside the department

This document replaces the previous statement on this subject published in December 2002.

The Department of Physics and Astronomy has faculty engaged in internationally recognized programs of research in a wide range of fields. Research activities are described in our brochure, on the departmental web site and through links to material maintained by our individual faculty members and/or groups. Graduate students can also learn about current research activities through the “research talks” which take place during the academic year.

Students entering our program, after completing their “core” education requirements, are expected to find a research advisor within the department and to form a graduate committee to guide their PhD research. The graduate advisor has prime responsibility for mentoring the student and supervising the research. The chairperson of the department as well as the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies must both approve the selection of all graduate thesis committees.

In rare occasions a student, to satisfy specific research goals or interests, may request permission to perform PhD research under the primary guidance of a faculty member outside the Department of Physics and Astronomy. The chairperson of the Department of Physics and Astronomy will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Director of the department’s graduate program and others. Below are some guidelines the chairperson may use in deciding whether or not to approve the formation of a particular thesis committee when the primary research advisor is not in the Department of Physics and Astronomy.

GUIDELINES

- The “primary” research advisor from another department or school within the University will serve as co-chair of the thesis committee. He or she must be a member of the graduate faculty, must have substantial training in graduate-level physics or astronomy, and must have a record of physics or astronomy related research activities.
- A member of the graduate faculty within the Department of Physics and Astronomy must agree to serve as co-chair of the thesis committee.
- It is essential that the departmental co-chair of the thesis committee takes an active interest and commits to active participation and, ideally, collaboration in the research project.
- Thesis committees will not be approved if the departmental co-chair acts merely as a “formal” advisor without active involvement.
- The department chairperson may limit the number of students working outside the department if, in his or her judgment, a further increase is inconsistent with the research goals of the department.
- The “primary” research advisor takes primary responsibility for the financial support of the student. Any GSR contract should conform to university policies described at <http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/gsr.html>. Before signing, it is the student’s responsibility to bring a copy to the graduate secretary in the Department of Physics and Astronomy to initiate the appropriate review.

PROCEDURES

- A graduate student wishing to conduct his or her PhD research under the supervision of a primary advisor outside the department should inform the Graduate Secretary as soon as possible of intentions. After discussions with the respective faculty members, the student should identify the proposed primary advisor from outside the department

and the proposed co-advisor from within the Department of Physics and Astronomy. The student will be informed in writing if there are potential problems based on the guidelines above.

- In consultation with the primary advisor and the departmental co-chair, the student must submit a written proposal describing the nature of his or her anticipated PhD research as soon as possible, but no later than 4 months after the beginning of an arrangement for joint supervision. A provisional thesis committee must approve the proposed research as suitable for a PhD issuing from the Department of Physics and Astronomy. The primary advisor may be requested to submit a CV and list of publications.
- It will be expected that the primary advisor and the departmental co-chair submit a brief statement outlining the plan for advising and mentoring the student and the nature of the anticipated research collaboration.

(original document Dec., 2002)