

Graduate Faculty Advisors of Option II M.S. (non-thesis) Graduate Students

Department of Agronomy & Horticulture Graduate Programs
Advisor Responsibilities – Commitments & Expectations

Introduction

Graduate Faculty in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are responsible for the administration and conduct of the Departmental Graduate Programs, including the conduct of his or her advisees. The purpose of this document is to outline the responsibilities of Graduate Faculty who elect to serve as an Advisor for a Departmental Graduate Program Applicant pursuing an M.S. Option II (Non-thesis) degree. These responsibilities are also listed on the M.S. Option II web page at <http://agrohortonline.unl.edu/option2-nonthesis>.

Many of our M.S. in Agronomy and/or Horticulture, Option II, graduate students already work in the agronomy or seed industries and the knowledge they gain is quickly disseminated into the current work force. If they have a good experience at UNL, they will recommend the program to their colleagues and peers. Good interaction and communication contribute to positive recruitment and retention for the department.

Faculty advisors play an important role in the education of the Option II Master's in Agronomy student. Interaction between faculty members and graduate students provides the opportunity for the student to further develop professional scientific skills and experience.

Advisor Responsibilities

Once you agree to serve as an Advisor to a graduate applicant, you are making an academic and time commitment to your Advisee that you will provide him or her with help needed for their degree objective within a reasonable timeframe.

The Advisee should satisfactorily move towards their degree objective as documented in the Annual Progress Reports submitted by students and advisors in March of each year. The word "commitment" as it is used here is not meant to imply a legally enforceable duty, but it does mean that you will do your utmost to ensure that your particular commitment to your Advisee is a *bona fide* one.

Your commitment is to simply do your best to ensure that your Advisee completes his or her degree.

1. Differences between Option I and Option II

A. Option I M.S. track (traditional research thesis)

- i. Requires 30 credits, of which 6-10 credits are thesis hours.
- ii. Identify a co-advisor in the student's vicinity who will assist with project direction, facilities and research. Co-advisor must have the qualifications to become a graduate faculty associate at UNL (e.g. Ph.D.).

- iii. Provides student with training in the scientific method and results in the student acquiring experience and expertise in conducting original research.
- iv. May continue onto their Ph.D. For more information, please refer to the “Advisor Responsibilities for Students for Option I” document.

B. Option II M.S. track (non-thesis project)

- i. Requires 36 credits, of which 1-6 credits are project hours.
- ii. The Option II track requires one minor (9 credits) and can accommodate two minors. Should two minors be declared, 18 credits are devoted to the major and specialization with 18 credits devoted to the minor(s).
- iii. This track is considered a practitioner, professional or terminal degree because students on this track do not typically pursue a Ph.D.
- iv. MS students who want to pursue a Ph.D. should consider the Option I thesis track. Some universities or programs may accept Ph.D. applicants who have an Option II MS, but many will not (including Nebraska’s Department of Agronomy and Horticulture).

2. Program of Study

The Program of Study for resident students in the Option II track is similar to that of students pursuing the Option I track. The class selection for distance students is somewhat limited by the available online courses. A list of relevant online graduate courses may be found at <http://agrohortonline.unl.edu/graduate-courses>. Resident students may select from numerous department’s specializations. However, online students may only select from three specializations: Plant Breeding & Genetics, Crop Physiology & Production, and Range & Forage. The Graduate Committee has requested that all M.S. students take AGRO 991 Seminar Presentation and Evaluation, 1 credit (currently online), and AGRO 992, General Seminar, 1 credit (not currently online). Popular minors for online students include: Entomology (ENTO), Natural Resources (NRES), Ag. Leadership & Communication (ALEC), and Horticulture (HORT).

Statistics courses, using R, may be taken online at Colorado State University (STATs 511: <http://www.online.colostate.edu/courses/STAT/STAT511.dot> and 512: <http://www.online.colostate.edu/courses/STAT/STAT512.dot>).

3. Project

- A. As an Advisor, you are responsible for directing the Advisee’s M.S. project. Previous projects have included:
- i. Analyzing field studies;
 - ii. Creating a business plan;
 - iii. Developing lesson plans, syllabi, teaching or training materials;
 - iv. Proposing, developing and/or implementing a new website;
 - v. Developing procedures or processes for labs, greenhouses or work;
 - vi. Developing a decision tool;
 - vii. Writing an extensive term or comparison paper;
 - viii. Developing an assessment tool to measure learning;

- ix. Creating animations or multimedia products on subject matter covered in coursework;
 - x. Creating, administering and evaluating a survey;
 - xi. Creating an Extension Education/Resource/Publication;
 - xii. Adapting already-completed research for a new purpose; and
 - xiii. Other projects demonstrating a student's best professional work.
- B. The project is an opportunity for students to apply knowledge learned through coursework to create an original body of work focusing on an area of personal or professional interest. This work should be related to the student's primary area of study. Every student should work closely with their academic advisor and/or major & minor committee members to develop this professional project.
- C. The project does not require original research, but the student and advisor may decide together to collect research and explain the research results. The student and advisor may decide to publish and some projects may be suitable for Extension publications, literature review papers, or white papers. Ultimately, projects should be an example of the student's best professional work.
- D. A literature review should be conducted to determine current topic knowledge prior to selecting a specific project. The project should include sufficient depth expected from graduate students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. If the project is 3 credit hours, the student should plan to spend the same amount of time on the project as he or she would in a 3-credit class. It is highly recommended that Option II students give an oral presentation followed with an oral examination by the student's graduate committee. UNL requires either a written or an oral exam and department faculty often like to have both exam types.
- E. The M.S. project course number is AGRO/HORT 894 and students may earn between 1 and 6 credits toward the project. A webpage that further describes the master's project may be found at <http://agrohortonline.unl.edu/agro-894-masters-project>. In the case of a substantial project, students may also earn independent study credit (AGRO 896).

4. Communication

The advisor should contact his or her advisee by phone or email each semester/summer and more often when the student is working on his or her project. Appropriate times to check in with students is at the beginning of the student's career and when the Annual Progress Report forms are distributed each spring. The goal of this communication is to monitor the academic progress of the advisee towards the degree objective.

5. Financial Aid

Many Option II M.S. students do not receive financial support from their advisor. However, they may earn financial aid from the U.S. government, foreign governments, or their employers. Many pay their own costs.

6. Provisional Admission

If your advisee was granted provisional admission due to a coursework deficiency, you need to

ensure that your Advisee takes the action specified by the Departmental Graduate Committee to clear the provisional admittance within one year of admission. Students are notified in their admission letter that they need to submit a written plan to remove deficiencies to the Graduate Chair within 30 days of enrollment.

7. Forms

The advisor needs to ensure that the advisee completes all forms required by UNL Graduate Studies by the relevant deadlines. Online students may need additional guidance to understand the importance of M.S. forms and deadlines. This includes organizing a Supervisory Committee that the advisor will chair.

A. MOC

This committee should meet and the Memorandum of Courses (MOC) should be submitted about halfway through the program. It cannot be submitted the same semester that the student wants to graduate. UNL Graduate Studies website has more information:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/>.

B. Progress Reports

The Advisee must submit a Progress Report each March to the Departmental Graduate Committee to document the student's progress towards the degree objective. The Advisor should have a phone call, Adobe Connect or Skype meeting between student, advisor, and the Supervisory Committee (either formally or informally) before completing that March Progress Report.

C. Final Examination Reports

This reports is due during the student's last semester. Specific dates and more details are at <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/masters>.

8. Exams

The graduate degree would be incomplete unless the student is provided with the opportunity to present his or her findings via an oral and/or written presentation (defense). The Advisor should ensure a good attendance for the Advisee's final project presentation/seminar by sending a formal announcement of that seminar to the Peer Group faculty and to the Department as a whole.

For MS Option II Project students, UNL only requires one exam (either oral or written); however, the department faculty members prefer both exams. According to Terri Eastin, master's specialist at Graduate Studies: *"All students are required to have either a written comp or an oral comp as part of the requirements for the degree. What either exam consists of is up to the committee."*

The department's Graduate Student Handbook (<http://agronomy.unl.edu/gradhandbook>) reads:

"Written comprehensive exams are required for all Ph.D. and Option I (thesis) M.S. students (not Option II students). The type and format of the examination will be determined by the

student's advisor and examination committee. These examinations are usually taken after the completion of all coursework requirements."

Examples of the written exam could be an extensive paper, a PowerPoint presentation, a 1 page short-answer exam, an essay question, etc. It's up to the advisor and the committee.

Contact the Office Professionals in 279 PLSH to make Oral Examination arrangements.

Conclusion

Many Option II students are mid-level professionals already working in their chosen field. They often work full time and have families so they progress more slowly through the degree than resident students. As with all master's degrees at UNL, they should complete the degrees within 10 years.

The department has two staff members who provide support to graduate students. They help advisors and graduate students navigate the academic requirements and meet deadlines. Danielle Lopez, danielle.lopez@unl.edu, 402-472-1560, helps with resident master's students and all Ph.D. students, and Kathy Schindler, kschindler1@unl.edu, 402-472-1730, helps with online master's students. The department does not have a distance Ph.D. program.

Kathy can help organize initial calls between the advisor and online M.S. student after admission. After that, communication may be directly between advisor and graduate student unless there is a special need for Kathy to become involved. Kathy reviews graduate student files and checks in with online students each summer to verify that students are meeting deadline, turning in paperwork, and to determine whether the student plans to continue in his/her program. The two forms that many online students have the most trouble understanding are the Memorandum of Courses (MOC) and the Final Examination Report. Staff members do explain these forms and processes to students but they also appreciate any additional assistance from the advisor.

The Graduate and Distance Education committees truly appreciate faculty members who advise both resident and online graduate students in the Option II, M.S. in Agronomy degree.