Special Committees

The Rule  The Graduate School requires that all doctoral students have a full special committee no later than the end of the 3rd semester and all masters students no later than the end of the 2nd semester.

What Constitutes a Special Committee?  A minimum of three members of the graduate faculty for a doctoral student and a minimum of two members for a master’s student constitute a special committee.

1. One member, the chair of the committee (major advisor), represents the major field and concentration.
2. One member must represent a minor outside the student’s major field.
3. The third member can either:
   - Represent another minor outside of the field or
   - Be in the major field but represent a different concentration from the major one.

Please note that most faculty members are members of several fields. A student can add additional members and ad hoc members depending on the circumstances (an additional member would be another member of the Cornell Graduate Faculty; an ad hoc member is generally someone from another institution such as a collaborator on a project who is not a member of Cornell’s faculty).

The Philosophy  The selection of the special committee is up to the student in consultation with his/her major advisor. Theoretically, minor/s can be in any field (Russian Literature, anyone?); however, in practical terms, students will want to select faculty who will, in some way, contribute to or support their research goals.

The Power of the Special Committee  The faculty member who represents a particular subject/concentration on the committee determines the specific requirements for that student (e.g. coursework needed). The committee, as a whole, evaluates the student at the time of exams and determines whether they have met the appropriate standards for original research contributing to the knowledge base of the field (approving the thesis or dissertation). Students are encouraged to meet with their full committee at least once a year to ascertain that everyone is in agreement regarding progress toward degree completion.

Acceptable Committee Formations
- Chair, Minor, Minor
- Chair, Minor, Additional Member
- Chair, Minor, Field Appointed Minor Member
- Chair, Co-Chair, Minor Member

Nomination Process  Committee members are nominated through student center (link in advisor box to “Special Committee”). The GFA is the first approver so if the distribution among fields/concentrations is not correct, the GFA should not approve the committee nomination.