Selecting Your Thesis or Dissertation Chair

A Thesis or Dissertation Chair can make or break your academic program and either help or hinder your progression to graduation. This workshop will discuss the following topics:

- The role of a thesis or dissertation chair
- Questions to consider during selection
- Choosing wisely: Interviewing a prospective chair
- Red flags to watch out for

**Role of the Chair: Advocate**
- Champion to your cause
- Believe in competencies of student
- First line of defense against other’s agenda
- Protector against committee members
- Focusses on original premise of proposal

**Role of the Chair: Manager**
- Driver of subordinates
- Track mistakes
- Chart progress
- Engage in transactional relationships
- Can be over critical at times

**Role of the Chair: Leader**
- Fine line between managers and leaders
- Provides intellectual stimulation
- Charismatic and motivational
- A good leader can determine between inspiration and practical help

**Role of the Chair: Judge**
- Gatekeeper ensuring:
  - Personal standards
  - Department standards
  - University standards

**Questions to ask**
When interviewing a potential advisor, make sure to ask the following questions:

1. Time spent with students? How many students?
2. Expectations of student workload?
3. Flexible schedule?
4. Funding type?
5. Lab space and equipment (if applicable)
6. Authorship and collaborative projects?

7. How many students have earned a degree and how long?
8. What are they doing now?
9. Advising non-academic career options?

**Choosing Wisely: Watch out for Red Flags**
When making your final decision on your advisor, make sure to research your faculty and watch out for the following red flags:

- **Overachiever**
  - Higher number than needed publications, committee memberships, and work-in-progress manuscripts.
  - Result: You will be begging for attention and time

- **Underachiever**
  - Always wants you to confer with others
  - Result: Extended time to competition

- **Non-Committer**
  - They play everything by ear and never commit to a firm schedule
  - Result: Could extend your program 3-5 years

- **Criticizer**
  - Will always find fault whether it is major and minor and will ask for arbitrary changes in rewrites
  - Result: Incapable of moving from critical to approval and will extend time to graduation

- **Vacationer**
  - Usually out of town during university breaks, weekends are off limits and will ignore
  - Result: Work comes to a hault if they are out of pocket

Be a diligent investigator and interviewer to find your leader, advocate, and potential colleague.