

To: Kelley J. Donaghy, Executive Chair, ESF Faculty Governance

From: Gregory L. Boyer, Chair, Chemistry Department

Re: revision of graduate summer defense policy

At our Feb. 24, 2012 faculty meeting, the Chemistry faculty unanimously voted to propose that the following change regarding graduate program defenses be made to the ESF catalog:

Examinations

Students who wish to complete the doctoral candidacy examination, defense of thesis or dissertation should request formation of their examining committee guided by the schedule provided by the Office of Instruction and Graduate Studies.

To ensure the integrity of the examination process, ~~oral examinations will generally take place during the academic year and~~ all members of the examination committee appointed by the ~~dean~~ Dean of Instruction and Graduate Studies will be present at the oral examination. Students must complete the oral examination within six months from the appointment of the examination committee or the student will be required to request the assignment of a new examination committee. Exceptions may be granted by the ~~dean~~ Dean of Instruction and Graduate Studies.

The examination policy to discourage summer defenses and to require that all committee members be present at oral defenses was adopted by the faculty several years ago. However, we maintain that the current wording, which attempts to limit defenses to the academic year, has no **academic** benefit in the case where the student and committee members wish to hold a defense during the summer months. In support of the proposed change, we note that:

- ESF graduate education and research takes place throughout the calendar year
- Current catalog wording creates the embarrassing impression that graduate education and research is not a year-round undertaking at ESF
- Organizing a committee, including a chair, during the summer can be a challenge because some faculty members are travelling or otherwise not available. However, scheduling a defense during the academic year is also a challenge because of teaching and travel schedules of faculty.
- The current crush of defenses at the end of the academic year may lead to insufficient preparation of the defense document or to insufficient review of that document by the committee. Faculty may give the document a better review when not delivering classes.
- Faculty with academic year appointments who will not serve on summer defense committees should make that position clear to graduate students who request that they be on their committees.
- Last summer (2011), approximately 30 students requested summer defenses. Thanks to Dean Shannon's appeal to the major professors of those students to serve as chairs of other defense committees, nearly all of those defenses were scheduled.