GUIDE FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

Northern Michigan University

Approved by the Department of Biology
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Foreword

Graduate students should be familiar with the contents of the current Northern Michigan University Graduate Bulletin at the time of their admittance into a degree program. The NMU Graduate Bulletin is available online at <http://www.nmu.edu/gradstudies/>. This guide for graduate students expands on the Graduate Bulletin with respect to requirements and policies pertinent to students admitted to the graduate program in the Department of Biology.

**Mission:** The Graduate Program in Biology provides quality graduate education through student-faculty collaboration in biological research and scholarly activity. Graduates will have a strong understanding of biology and the principles that guide the design and execution of high-quality research. Graduates will have substantial research experience and will be able to successfully communicate scientific information to the public and the scientific community.
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ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

Applicants for admission to the Northern Michigan University College of Graduate Studies and the Biology Department Graduate Program must submit the following directly to the College of Graduate Studies:

- Completed Application for Admission
  (This form can be obtained from the College of Graduate Studies, Biology Department or at http://www.nmu.edu/gradstudies/admission.htm.)
- Application for Assistantship (if desired)
- Official transcripts from all previously attended colleges
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores1
- Three letters of recommendation.
- Letter of Application describing your background, research interests and career goals.
- Memorandum from Biology Department faculty member indicating their willingness to serve as your graduate thesis advisor.

International Students must also:
  - Hold or obtain an F-1 or J-1 visa
  - Submit official transcripts through an acceptable clearinghouse
  - Present a Declaration and Certification of Financial Responsibility
  - Submit evidence of proficiency in English (a minimum TOEFL score of 550 is required)

International students are encouraged to consult the International Affairs office by telephone (1-906-227-2910) or at OIA@nmu.edu.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND STATUS

REGULAR DEGREE ADMISSION

Applicants are required to comply with the regular admission requirements of the College of Graduate Studies, which includes an undergraduate grade point average of 3.0. In addition, students must have either: a) a bachelor’s degree in the biological sciences, or b) a minimum of 24 credit hours in undergraduate Biology courses, or equivalents, with a

1 The GRE is the preferred exam, and at least some standardized exam is required of all applicants. At the discretion of the graduate faculty, other standardized professional school exams (e.g., MCAT, VCAT, DAT) may be substituted for evaluation of graduate admissions and assistant applications.
minimum GPA in these courses of 3.0. Transcripts of applicants will be evaluated on an individual basis.

Applicants are also expected to have a background in other sciences, with a total of 16 credits of coursework from at least two of the following areas: chemistry (general chemistry, organic chemistry, or biochemistry), geography (geographic information systems), geology (physical geology, soils or hydrology), physics or statistics. At least 12 of these credits are expected to be accompanied by a lab. Other courses may be accepted with the approval of the department.

Applicants and/or their potential advisors may request special consideration for admission of students with backgrounds that do not meet these expectations. Written requests should be directed to the Biology Graduate Committee, which after consideration will make recommendations to the Department for final approval of admission recommendations. The Department may admit students with deficient backgrounds with conditions that need to be met in a defined period of time.

Students must have regular degree status in order to be considered for a graduate assistantship or to graduate.

Additional information may be obtained from the Department Head of Biology, 2001 New Science Facility (phone 906-227-2310).

**CONDITIONAL ADMISSION**

Applicants with an undergraduate or graduate grade point average of less than 3.00, or with numerous deficiencies in course work may be granted conditional admission.

The conditions that must be met for a change to regular admission status will be specified in the letter of acceptance. Students who fail to meet the conditions of their admission by the completion of 12 graduate credits will be denied further registration.

Conditional admission can also be granted to undergraduate students in their final semester before graduation, which will allow enrollment in courses for graduate credit.

**PROBATIONARY NON-DEGREE STATUS**

Probationary non-degree status is granted to students who do not qualify for regular or conditional admission or who fail to meet acceptable academic standards in graduate course work. Graduates of non-accredited institutions are initially placed in non-degree status. Graduate students whose grade point average drops below 3.0 will be placed on probationary status and have a maximum of two semesters to raise their grade point average to 3.0 or above. Students cannot receive a graduate degree while on probationary status. Policies of the College of Graduate Studies concerning academic probation are found in the Graduate Bulletin under “Academic and Retention Standards”.

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NON-DEGREE ADMISSION

Students admitted to the College of Graduate Studies, but not admitted to the departmental program have non-degree status. A student classified as a non-degree student may petition the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research for regular degree status after the completion of 12 but no more than 20 hours of graduate credit by completing a “Request for Change of Curriculum” form. Only students with a minimum grade point average of 3.00 may file such a petition. No assurance can be given to a student that any credits earned under non-degree status will be accepted in a degree program or used to meet the requirements for graduation. To be applied toward a degree program, courses completed during non-degree standing must be recommended by the assigned advisor and approved by the department head and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

MAINTENANCE OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

The provisions specified in the Graduate Bulletin section titled "Grading," apply to students in Biology. Grades received in any undergraduate deficiency courses are not included when calculating graduate GPAs.

GRADUATION AND DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

MASTER’S DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Degree requirements for Graduate Students are listed in the current graduate bulletin. Pertinent to the graduate program in the Biology Department are the following degree requirements:

- Satisfactory completion of a minimum of 32 credit hours that have been submitted as a Graduate Plan of Study and approved by the student’s advisory committee, Head of the Biology Department and Dean of Graduate Studies.
- A minimum of 20 credit hours of biology courses.
- A minimum of 16 credits at the 500 level, including BI 500 (Planning & Proposing Scientific Research).
- A maximum of 16 credits earned through a combination of courses of unspecified content including, but not limited to, Research (BI 589; 4 credits maximum), Thesis (BI 599; 4 credits maximum) and Directed Studies (BI 598; 8 credits maximum).
- A maximum of 10 credits transferred from another institution.
- All credits must be earned within the seven-year limit (credits earned beyond the seven-year limit may be counted toward the degree upon recommendation of the student’s advisory committee and the approval of the Dean of the Graduate College).
GRADUATE PLAN OF STUDY AND ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

GRADUATE ADVISOR

All graduate students in the Biology Department must have a thesis advisor. This individual must be identified and agree to act as the thesis advisor prior to admission to the Biology Department Graduate Program. In order to act as a thesis advisor a faculty member must have level 2 or level 3 Graduate Faculty Status and be employed full-time in the Department of Biology. The primary role of the thesis advisor is to chair the student’s graduate advisory committee, have the primary role in overseeing the academic progress of the student and the planning, execution and completion of the thesis.

If the student wishes to change thesis advisors or the thesis advisor determines that he/she can no longer act in that capacity, the student and advisor should try to identify a new thesis advisor that would be willing to serve in that role. If the student and advisor are unable to come to a mutually agreeable solution the Graduate Committee will be asked to make a recommendation to the Department and the Department Head. If the Department is unable to resolve the situation, the student may be dismissed from the Biology graduate program.

GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

All graduate students in the Biology Department should choose a graduate advisory committee and meet with that committee before they have completed 12 hours of their graduate program. The graduate advisory committee consists of the thesis advisor (who chairs the committee and must have Level 2 or Level 3 Graduate Faculty status) and at least two additional faculty members. A minimum of two members of the committee (including the thesis advisor) must be from the Biology faculty. Non-NMU faculty, adjunct faculty and non-faculty experts may serve on graduate advisory committees as either voting members or as advisory experts. All voting members of the committee must have level 1, 2 or 3 Graduate Faculty status. The voting majority of the committee must be tenured or tenure-track Biology faculty.

PLAN OF STUDY

The student and advisory committee will develop a proposed plan of study that specifies the course work that is required for each student to complete the master’s degree. The Proposal Evaluation and Plan of Study form must be signed by the thesis advisor, members of the thesis committee, and must be submitted to the Department Head of Biology and to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research. Forms for this process are available on the Biology web page and/or in the Biology Department office. This form and the signatures are the official indicator of your graduate advisory committee and your successful completion of the proposal requirement for your degree.
The Biology Department Graduate Committee will maintain records of all graduate students to insure that there is compliance with this policy. Failure to form an advisory committee and complete a proposal and plan of study within the specified time may result in forfeiture of credits earned in excess of 12 semester hours and the termination of an assistantship appointment and/or denial of future registration.
ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Admission to the College of Graduate studies and to the Graduate Program in the Biology Department does not imply admission to candidacy for a graduate degree. Admission to the College of Graduate studies and to the Graduate Program in Biology indicates that you are a graduate student; admission to candidacy indicates that you are a candidate for a graduate degree. Admission to Candidacy will be granted upon the recommendation of the Graduate Advisory Committee, Department Head and approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Requirements for admission to candidacy include:

- Regular degree status
- Cumulative graduate grade point average of 3.0 or better.
- Approved Proposal Evaluation and Plan of Study Form signed by graduate advisory committee.
- Application for candidacy during the semester in which the 12th graduate credit will be earned.

Changes in the student's program require submission to the College of Graduate Studies either 1) an amendment using a “Course Substitution Form” (available on College of Graduate Studies Website) to the student's currently approved Graduate Plan of Study signed by the graduate advisor.

THESIS

1. All graduate students in the Biology Department are required to carry out a plan of study that includes research and thesis. The research must be original and carried out under the direction of a graduate research advisor. This research should be conducted using the scientific method, but does not preclude a student from forming a hypothesis and testing that hypothesis through collection and synthesis of data from the literature.

2. Theses shall be prepared in accordance with the “Guidelines For The Preparation of Master’s Theses.” The Guidelines can be obtained in the Biology Department or the College of Graduate Studies Web Page (http://www.nmu.edu/gradstudies/thesis/).

3. Prior to registering for or receiving thesis or research credit, a formal research proposal providing a literature review and clear explanation of the methods to be used must be presented to the Advisory Committee for approval.

4. Each student will present a public seminar and prepare a thesis based on the research at the conclusion of their program.

5. Subsequent to the presentation of the public seminar the thesis will be defended by
the candidate at an oral examination conducted by the members of the candidate’s
graduate advisory committee. A majority of voting members on the committee must
approve the thesis.

6. At the time of the thesis defense, the graduate student’s thesis committee will
complete the Graduate Thesis Defense Evaluation Form and indicate the assessment
of the three elements to the thesis defense (seminar, written thesis, oral
examination). This form must be signed by the thesis committee and submitted to
the Department and the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at the time of the
defense. For each element, the student may receive a pass (acceptable), resubmit
(not acceptable, but resubmission is allowed) or fail (not acceptable and no
resubmission is allowed). Students are allowed one resubmission on elements for
which resubmission is allowed.

6. After the successful thesis defense, a copy of the corrected version of the thesis will
be submitted for review by the Department Head at least three weeks before
submission to College of Graduate Studies.

7. Following completion of the thesis defense, the original thesis and one copy must be
submitted to the College of Graduate Studies. The original thesis should be signed by
the student’s Graduate Advisory Committee, the Department Head and the Dean of
Graduate Studies. This approved document must be in the College of Graduate
Studies no later than 30 calendar days prior to graduation.

8. The data collected by the student in preparation of a thesis is the intellectual
property of the student, the thesis advisor and the funding agency. Students that
leave the university prior to completion of their thesis, or prior to publication of
their data should see that adequate documentation is filed with the thesis advisor
and/or funding agency. Prior to leaving the university, it is wise that clear
expectations for publication of data be discussed with the thesis advisor. These
expectations should include a timeline for publication (by the student or thesis
advisor), authorship and author affiliations.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

This timeline is provided as a suggested guideline for students to complete a Master’s
degree in two years. Students should consult their advisor to derive modifications
appropriate to individual research programs, but generally, students should plan to
complete major tasks close to the following schedule:

1. Prior to admission
   Identification of thesis advisor and general research area
2. First semester
   Definition of research project and formation of thesis advisory
   committee
3. Second semester
   Approval of research proposal, filing of Proposal Evaluation
   and Plan of Study form, and advancement to candidacy; begin
collecting data or prepare for full field season
4. Third semester  Finish data collection and data analysis; start writing thesis
5. Fourth semester Complete thesis; seminar and defense completed one month prior to graduation; filing of *Thesis Defense Evaluation Form*; use last month to prepare manuscripts for submission for publication
RESEARCH FUNDING

Students conducting original research as part of their plan of study should apply for funding to help offset the cost of the proposed research. Applications for funding can be from internal campus and external sources. Campus funding sources include:

- **Charles C. Spooner Student Research Program.** Spooner grants can provide up to $500 dollars. Application deadlines and application procedure can be found on the College of Graduate Studies website at http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/charles_spooner.htm.

- **Excellence in Education Research Grant Program.** Excellence in Education Grants provide up to $1,500 dollars for summer research. Application deadlines and application procedures can be found on the College of Graduate Studies website at http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/excellence_education.htm.

- **Department of Biology Development Fund.** Development fund grants are administered by the Department’s Budget Committee. Deadlines for proposals are October 15 (for fall semester) and March 15 (for winter semester and spring and summer sessions). The application should include a statement of intent and the objectives, the plan and timetable, and a budget justification. Complete guidelines for development fund grants are available in the Department Office.

GRADUATION

1. Completion of requirements or the enrollment in all required courses does not automatically make a student a candidate for graduation. A candidate for graduation shall make an application for graduation by registering for graduation using the appropriate code from the course scheduling booklet in the same manner as registering for a class. The last day to register (apply) for graduation is the fourth day of the semester in which the student plans to receive the master’s degree.

2. At the time of registration for the semester in which the student expects to complete their work they must pay a one-time graduation fee to Financial Services. If a student plans to attend commencement ceremonies and rent a gown, an apparel rental fee must be paid at the NMU Bookstore.

3. A candidate for graduation must check with the Placement and Career Planning Office to make certain that all placement forms have been completed if they wish to use their services.
4. A candidate for teacher certification must check with the Registrar’s Office to make certain that all requirements and application forms have been submitted.

6. All requirements for the degree, except for current course enrollment, must be completed 30 calendar days prior to the date of graduation. This includes filing the completed thesis and removal of all “I” or “R” grades, which are commonly given while completing research and thesis. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation has been filed and received prior to graduation.

**PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

- Students are expected to maintain scientific integrity and not to engage in scientific misconduct as described in the NMU Student Handbook and Graduate Bulletin.

- Students conducting research with animals or humans are expected to comply with all IACUC and IRB requirements for those experiments, including completing designated training and following all procedures specified by the IACUC protocol(s) associated with the research. Students are required to abide by all required permits and permissions, including state and federal permits.

- Students are expected to make satisfactory progress towards completing their research and thesis.

**POLICY FOR GRADUATE STUDENT GRIEVANCES**

The student should first review and discuss with the faculty member the problem or allegation. If not satisfied with the results of such a meeting, the student should then go to the department head.

The NMU Graduate Programs Committee (GPC) is authorized to review requests for exceptions to certain graduate policies. The Committee does not hear grade appeals; a separate procedure exists for those (see the Northern Michigan University Student Handbook). The GPC’s primary authority lies within the sphere of the policies governed by the Office of Graduate Education (e.g., admission, matriculation and retention). However, in specific cases it may serve as an appellate body for academic matters deriving from the rules and practices of the departments and colleges. One function of the committee is to review petitions for academic reinstatement from graduate students who have been dismissed from graduate programs and/or courses. It will not review academic decisions that are based upon the expertise of
the faculty in a particular field. However, the committee may examine the equity of
the processes by which such academic decisions have been made. It will hear
appeals of dismissal decisions.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A limited number of graduate assistantships (teaching and research) are available each
year. These assistantships are awarded to highly qualified graduate students on the basis of
academic merit.

To apply for a teaching assistantship, the following steps are necessary:

1. Submit a completed application for admission to the Graduate School. See
   application procedures in this guide.

2. Complete an application for graduate assistantship
   (http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/forms/ga_app.pdf)

For teaching assistantships beginning in the fall semester, these materials should be
submitted and available in the Graduate Studies Office by March 1. Normally the
department will act on applications and announce the awards by April 1. For assistantships
beginning in the winter semester, the corresponding dates are October 15 and November
15.

Applicants for research assistantships should:

1. Submit a completed application for admission to the Graduate School. See
   application procedures in this guide.

2. Submit a letter directly to the faculty member for whom the research will be
   conducted. Additional application materials may be requested by the faculty
   member.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT

1. An applicant must have completed all application processes.

2. An applicant must be enrolled in a degree program and have regular admission
   status.

3. Once appointed, the Graduate Assistant must:
   - Be enrolled in at least six (6) credit hours of graduate work that is relevant to the
declared program of study (courses that are or will be included in the Plan of
Study), but no more than ten (10) credits. A six (6) credit load does not
substitute for the required number of credits to be a full time student. A minimum of eight (8) credits must be taken during the Fall and Winter semesters to qualify as a full time student. [N. B. Students enrolled in 6-10 credits receive the same benefits and have the same responsibilities by NMU's standards. “Full-time student” status may be of concern for other reasons to students.]

- Maintain an overall graduate grade point average of 3.0.
- Meet the qualifications as determined by the nature of the particular assignment.
- Satisfactorily perform the duties assigned as evaluated by the faculty supervisor.

4. All Graduate Assistantships are awarded for one academic year and can be renewed for a second year. Renewal is not automatic and is dependent on:
   - Maintenance of a 3.0 or higher GPA.
   - Satisfactory performance in assigned duties.
   - Adequate progress toward completion of degree.
   - Admittance to Candidacy.

CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

1. Scholarship (Undergraduate GPA):
   Applicants for graduate assistantships will be evaluated primarily on their academic performance. Their undergraduate GPA, particularly in biology and other science courses, will be reviewed and rated. Emphasis will be placed on the applicant’s most recent academic performance.

2. Deficiencies:
   Applicants will be rated more favorably if they have no undergraduate deficiencies.

3. Letters of Recommendation:
   Applicants will be evaluated on the basis of three letters of recommendation, requested by them, from people familiar with their background and potential for graduate study.

4. Teaching Ability:
   The major duty of our teaching assistants is to teach laboratory classes. Preference will be given to applicants with academic preparation that qualifies them to fill the needs of the department and who have the potential or skill for good teaching.

5. Graduate Record Examination (GRE):
   GRE scores will be assessed as part of the overall application.

6. Application Deadline:
   All applications are normally due by March 1. Under extenuating circumstances, the graduate committee may extend the deadline to enable students to complete their applications. A notice will be sent informing the applicant of incomplete
applications resulting from delinquent letters of recommendation. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to see that all letters of recommendation have been forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies by March 1. The same policy applies to the October 15 application deadline for Winter semester applications.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT STIPENDS

1. Graduate Assistants receive a stipend standardized for full time appointments.

2. Full time graduate assistants normally receive tuition waivers for the period of time that they are appointed. Full appointments during the Fall and Winter Semesters allow for 8.0 credit hours of tuition waiver per semester.

3. Graduate Assistants who have completed one academic year’s appointment and will be appointed to an assistantship in the Fall, may elect to use part of their tuition waiver from the upcoming appointment to pay for summer credits.
   • The maximum that can be “borrowed” is 2.0 credits hours from each semester of the second year’s appointment.
   • In order to “borrow” the credits the student must file a petition with the department requesting the tuition waiver and indicating the number of credits “borrowed” and the semester from which they are being “borrowed”.
   • The Department Head and the Dean of the College must approve this petition before being forwarded to the College of Graduate Studies.
   • The completed petition must be in the College of Graduate Studies by March 1.
   • Failure to enroll in summer courses by June 1 will result in forfeiture of this process and the credit waiver will revert back to the academic year.
   • All credits paid for under this tuition waiver must be required graduate program credits.

4. A limited number of assistantships may be available during the Summer Semester. Students interested in a summer assistantship should contact the Department Head in writing early in the Winter Semester.

ACADEMIC LOADS FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

1. Normally, the course schedule for graduate assistants will be limited to eight (8) credits per semester.

2. Graduate assistants may be allowed to take up to 10 credits, provided the student has the written consent of his or her advisor and the head of the Department of Biology, and the approval of the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research. Generally, no more than 8 credits are taken per semester unless a student has established a record of success (GPA over 3.00). Tuition remission is for a maximum of 16 hours per academic year for courses relevant to the student’s plan of study.
3. Auditing a course through an official enrollment is the same as enrollment for credit.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT RESPONSIBILITIES

The duties of a Graduate Assistant will be designed to complement the student’s graduate program and to advance the program of the department.

1. A Graduate Assistant’s workload consists of 20 hours per week during the Fall and Winter semester.

2. The 20 hours should include preparation time for materials used in the classroom, teaching, office hours, grading, clerical duties, development of curricular materials, research assignments, etc.

3. Graduate Teaching Assistants are expected to hold regular office hours each week. Typically each teaching assistant should have four (4) office hours each week. These times should be included in their syllabi and posted on their office door. It is expected that the teaching assistant will be available at these times.

4. Graduate students are expected to attend invited meetings, especially those that occur prior to the start of classes each semester.

5. It is recommended that students treat their assistantship and their graduate program as their primary responsibility and are discouraged from obtaining additional employment. Students seeking additional on-campus employment must inform the Department Head.

DEPARTMENTAL THESIS POLICY

DEFINITION

A thesis is a thorough report of original scientific research. It is a requirement for BI 599 credit.

STANDARDS

The standards of quality of graduate research and thesis preparation are determined by the graduate faculty in the Department of Biology and the head of the College of Graduate Studies and Research.
ADVICE ON PREPARATION OF A THESIS

The following advice is offered concerning preparation of a thesis.

1. Begin your first draft early, even if all work is not completed. Your advisory committee may wish to offer suggestions on your early drafts.

2. When your thesis supervisor approves the final rough draft, distribute this draft to your advisory committee for their use at least two weeks prior to your oral examination/thesis defense.

FORM OF THE THESIS

There are extensive instructions for formatting a thesis on the College of Graduate Studies Website. Students should check that site for the most up-to-date format requirements. Also at that website is a link to electronic versions of previous theses, which are a good guide for formats.

THESIS SUBMISSION

Paper copies of the thesis may be required by the graduate advisory committee prior to the thesis defense. A final paper copy, signed by the committee and the Department Head, must be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies.

Students must submit an electronic copy of their thesis as required by the College of Graduate Studies. Students are also required to send an electronic copy of their final approved thesis to their Graduate Advisor and to the Department Head.

DATE OF SUBMISSION

The final copies must be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office 30 calendar days prior to graduation. Please see the Graduate Bulletin for additional information on thesis preparation.

PROCEDURE FOR ACCEPTANCE OF A THESIS

1. At least 4 weeks before the end of the semester in which graduating, the student will give a seminar or summary of his/her thesis work before taking an oral examination and defense of thesis. The main purpose of this examination is to test the student on the content and conclusions reached in the thesis. The examination, however, may also test the student’s general academic capabilities in science.

2. The examining committee typically consists of the student’s graduate advisory committee. Other members of the faculty or guest examiners may
be invited by the major advisor. The examination is presided over by the chair of the student's graduate committee. The examination usually begins with the student presenting a brief summary (5-10) minutes of their research followed by questions from the committee.

3. After the examination, the examining committee recommends a grade for the thesis or they may recommend alterations to the thesis. In cases in which the thesis is judged by the examining committee to be unacceptable, the committee will make suggestions for improvement. The student will be asked to make improvements and to resubmit the thesis for final approval. A majority of voting members on the committee must approve the thesis.

4. Upon final acceptance of the thesis, the members of the student's graduate committee must sign an acceptance form (the "Signature Page") in quadruplicate. The copies of the signature page are forwarded to the Office for Graduate Studies for signature by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research. A copy of the acceptance form will then be attached to each copy of the thesis.