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**CHOOSING AND
MANAGING YOUR THESIS
COMMITTEE**
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Lots of folks confuse bad management with destiny.

—KIN HUBBARD

WHEN THE OTHER SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BEGAN changing his draft around, Thomas Jefferson got upset at what he termed "mutilations," so Ben Franklin gave him some good advice. "I have made it a rule, whenever within my power, to avoid becoming the draftsman of papers to be reviewed by a public body." This is a great idea, but unfortunately your committee can mutilate your thesis if they want to. And they will. As H. G. Wells said, "No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft." To keep the mayhem to a minimum, you need to keep firm but subtle control of your committee.

• **WHAT DOES THE COMMITTEE DO?** •

The thesis committee's formal obligations are to approve your thesis proposal and to judge the quality of your thesis and its defense. They also have a less clearly defined obligation to guide you in your research. Your thesis adviser (the committee chairperson) will be highly involved with the development of your thesis throughout the process, while the other members will vary in how involved they become. Some will be glad to let you go your own way, while others will want to exercise a high degree

of control. Their involvement will depend both on their personal styles and on the degree to which their own research interests are related to your topic (the research of some committee members is likely to be only marginally related to your own).

Ph.D. committees are typically composed of four or five members, including the chairperson, while master's have fewer, generally a total of two or three. It is common for departments to demand of doctoral committees that at least one member be from outside your home department, and often one must be from entirely outside the university. In theory this puts one or two people on the committee who are not prejudiced by departmental politics or a personal relationship with you.

For doctoral students, the committee is often set up in two stages. First, at the time you write your thesis proposal, a core committee is formed, usually with three members, including your adviser, who are responsible for approving the proposal. A couple years later, when it comes time to judge the thesis and its defense, this core committee is expanded to four or five members, including the member (or members) from outside the department. Because the core committee of three faculty will go through the entire thesis process with you, ideally you will be able to make allies of them so that they will protect you against problems with the late-coming members when it comes time to defend your thesis.

WHAT DOES YOUR COMMITTEE • EXPECT OF YOU? •

It will help to minimize problems with your committee if you understand what they will expect from you and what you can fairly expect of them. Your committee expects you to:

- *Develop the ability to do independent work.* Developing this ability is the ultimate goal of your graduate program. Of course, when you first start working on research you will need to ask your adviser and secondary committee members for considerable guidance, especially during the creation of your thesis proposal. However, you should not become dependent upon them to make decisions for you, manage your time, or prod you to get work done. Do not become the person one committee member described: "He can't make a decision without me. If there's a problem with the laboratory equipment, and we're waiting for repairs, I have to

- tell him to start on something else. Otherwise he'll just waste time."
- *Keep in contact.* As a novice researcher, your committee will expect you to inform them regularly of progress and to ask their help in overcoming obstacles.
- *Make constant progress.* Committees dread seeing their students becoming dead in the water—it means that conflict and unpleasantness lie ahead. Therefore, not only must you actually make progress, you must also *let them know* that you are making progress by reporting to them regularly.
- *Be honest about progress.* It won't do you any good to pretend that things are fine if you haven't written a page in months. Let your committee (or at least your adviser) know about problems so they can help you.
- *Be responsive to their advice.* There is nothing that will irritate your committee as much as your ignoring their directions. If someone says, "Read this article," read it and report back so that they know you have done as they asked. Obviously you can't follow all advice, particularly when it clashes with your own perceptions about how your thesis should be done, but give in wherever it's not crucial. Often if you cheerfully give in on several minor points, they are more likely to let you win on a big one.
- *Develop professionalism, personal maturity, and a strong work ethic.* Show your committee you take your work seriously by meeting deadlines and honoring other commitments, keeping up on the literature in your field, and responding positively and rapidly to their guidance.
- *Remain friendly and cheerful.* Because your committee feels responsible for your success, they will resent it if you appear miserable, whiny, and unable to get the job done. Avoid making your committee members feel guilty about their own mistakes or shortcomings.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT • FROM YOUR COMMITTEE? •

You have the right to expect certain things from your committee. These include thoughtful guidance, timely fulfillment of obligations, consistent orders, respect for your dignity, and help in finding a job. You are more likely to get these if you try hard to fulfill your committee's expectations.

• CHOOSE YOUR COMMITTEE CAREFULLY •

The first step to avoiding trouble with your committee is to choose them carefully. Most departments will allow you to choose your own committee members (in consultation with your adviser). In a minority of departments the chairperson or some other official power will assign your committee, which gives you much less control over potential problems. However, even in cases where you can't choose your own committee, you should still investigate the faculty members assigned to you and lobby for changes if it looks like some will be troublesome or otherwise unhelpful. Your adviser may be able to lobby on your behalf if you need to make changes.

If you want to get done on time, you must have a committee composed of good-willed members whose objections and suggestions will be motivated by a genuine desire to improve your thesis, and not by antipathy for other committee members, distaste for graduate students in general, personal dislike of you, or a desire to appear brilliant at your expense. This last is particularly common with young professors, themselves recent graduates, who believe that the best way to put distance between themselves and the graduate student pack is to judge graduate students harshly. One mature professor said: "Younger professors are more vicious because they need to show off—they try to appear brilliant and rigorous at the student's expense. At your thesis defense, they especially like to ask questions that are so abstruse you can't understand them."

THE CHAIRPERSON

Your adviser will be the chairperson of the committee, and his or her qualities are therefore more important than those of the other committee members. You need your adviser behind you 100 percent if you want to be sure that your full committee will approve your thesis. You need him or her to prod tardy committee members into action, mediate disputes, and make sure that everyone treats you fairly. If your chairperson is unwilling to play a strong role, you are likely to have problems. Here is one master's student's tale of woe:

I made a big mistake by accepting my adviser's early abdication of responsibility. He's very big in my field, very busy, so he told me when I started to write my thesis, "I don't want to read your drafts

until the other committee members have passed on them." This made me fantastically worried, because the whole time I was writing my thesis I couldn't show it to him and had no idea whether he would like it. To make matters worse, the other two committee members squabbled interminably. First one would tell me to write it one way, and then the other would demand it be put back like it was in the first place. Because neither one had authority over the other, no resolution was possible, and I had to rewrite over and over again. For six months I tried to make the best of the situation by trying to write chapter drafts that met both of their demands at once, but it was impossible. Finally, because I was ready to quit the program anyway, I got the nerve to do what I should have done in the first place—I went to my adviser and demanded that he take charge. Then he finally took over. He told me to do a whole new thesis structure, different from what either of the other two had been telling me. I wrote a final draft under his direction, which the other two people signed off on, but this final version took four more months of writing, and altogether I wasted nearly a year. This experience told me that no way was I going on for the Ph.D.

Although you need your chairperson's help in ironing out difficulties, realize that there may be cases where even he or she can't help you. Office politics can make it impossible for even your committee chairperson to stand up to another powerful person who is making difficulties. This is a strong incentive for trying to choose committee members who won't make trouble.

THE SECONDARY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

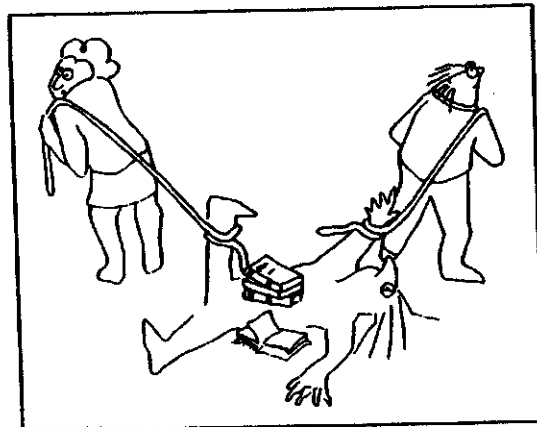
Most likely your committee will have several core members (including your adviser), who will be involved with your thesis from the proposal stage, and an extra person or two added late in the process to bring the committee up to strength for the thesis defense. Even though the judgments of the late additions are likely to carry less weight than those of the long-term members, these marginally involved faculty members are in some ways even more dangerous because they will not understand the evolution of your thesis; nor will they have any emotional or professional investment in your successful defense.

Ideally, all your secondary committee members will share the same

positive traits that you look for in an adviser. Make sure they won't be leaving in the middle of the process to go on sabbatical or retire, aren't involved in departmental feuds with any of the other members, and have reputations for dealing fairly with grad students. They should be well-respected experts in your field, and ideally each should have knowledge and skills that complement the others, so that if one can help you with methodological design, another can help you understand the theoretical underpinning.

Particularly note the theoretical or philosophical orientation of each committee member to judge whether they will be receptive to the type of research you want to do. If you are an economist, want to do your thesis from a classical point of view, and one of your committee members is a Marxist, you are likely to have trouble.

The most important trait to look for in secondary committee members is an obliging and generous attitude. It won't do you any good to include a luminary professor on your committee, thinking that her stamp of approval on your thesis will help you get a job, if she is so irascible that you can't finish. Given a choice between a less prestigious committee member who will be a positive, flexible presence on the committee and a brilliant obstructionist, pick the pleasant person every time.



TWO COMMITTEE MEMBERS HAVING A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

to your adviser. If each committee member tries to ensure that your work perfectly fulfills his own theoretical and methodological viewpoints, you may never be able to reach compromise.

Try to choose secondary members who will contribute good suggestions for improving your thesis and otherwise assisting you professionally, but who will limit their role to this advisory capacity. Ideally, you want secondary committee members who recognize that their role is to be counselors and not judges, leaving the major decisions about your thesis's structure and suitability

SELECTING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Once you have decided on an adviser, you can begin to evaluate candidates for the secondary positions on your thesis committee by talking over possible choices with your adviser and *asking other students and recent graduates about their experiences*. Do not include anyone who has a reputation for being difficult no matter how illustrious his academic reputation.

Don't put someone on your committee just because you're afraid to say no to them. Patty, a master's student in nutrition, made this mistake:

I was warned. One of my friends told me that Professor Thomas was so condescending, hostile, and generally unreasonable that when he was on her committee he made her cry all the time. But I put him on my committee anyway because I was afraid that I would insult him if I went outside the department for a statistics expert. What a fool! I thought because I had worked for a big corporation that I was tough enough to handle him. But I ended up crying too. I didn't anticipate how helpless you can feel when someone you have no control over sets out to treat you like dirt. At least I didn't give him the satisfaction of crying in front of him like she did—I'd wait until I was safe in my car.

Several graduate students told me about being blindsided by hostile committee members who were added a week or two before the thesis defense when one of the regular members wasn't able to attend. To avoid this, leave yourself plenty of time to choose candidates so that you don't end up with last-minute additions whom you know nothing about. Also have a substitute chosen in case one of your first choices is unable to serve. If you do find yourself without enough time to properly scope out an addition, consider deferring your thesis defense until you do.

Once you and your adviser have decided which faculty members you want on your committee, you still face the hurdle of persuading them to serve. Faculty are by no means obligated to sit on your committee, so you need to convince them that they can do you a tremendous amount of good with relatively little work on their part. The best way to do this is to have your adviser approach them. He or she can speak objectively about your abilities in a way that you cannot. It will also make them more receptive if you have already created an image for yourself within the department as a serious, well-organized student.

Finally, remember that even after you have set up a committee, so far as you are concerned the members are on probation. Even if they are nominally permanent, you can still replace them if problems arise. Obviously changes are easier if you make them early in the process. Therefore, try to evaluate any committee members whom you don't know well as soon as possible, so that you can identify potential troublemakers and find substitutes before they have time to slow down the process.

• MANAGE YOUR COMMITTEE •

DRAW THEM INTO THE THESIS PROCESS

Despite the nominal obligation of the committee to guide you, remember that the system is set up so that professors have little incentive to spend much time helping you. One difficult history professor who was advising a master's student on her thesis told her on several occasions, "I don't get paid extra for this, you know." An engineering professor said seriously, praising his own performance as an adviser, "I only need to meet with my students three times per year in order to keep them on the right path." Needless to say, his students felt underadvised. Finally, there is the internationally famous biologist who says that "the ideal student should be invisible, detectable only a few times a year when he quietly slides a thesis chapter under his adviser's door and scurries away."

Despite their preference that you remain invisible, you must draw the committee members into your thesis process as soon and as thoroughly as possible. You want them to identify with your success. You must lobby them, making allies for the final defense confrontation.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

The best way to involve your committee members is with meetings. It is *your* responsibility to keep the lines of communication open by meeting regularly one on one with your adviser and other members. Even if you belong to a research group that holds regular planning meetings, you still need private meetings as well to deal with your personal needs.

Consult with your adviser and other committee members on how often you should meet. Remember that the purpose of the meetings isn't to make occasional presentations of major accomplishments; the purpose is



MANAGE YOUR COMMITTEE CAREFULLY

to check in frequently about your progress and to build a relationship within which problems can be solved as they arise. I suggest that you meet with your adviser at least once a month, although more often is better; you can meet with the secondary committee members less often, perhaps once every couple of months.

Most of these meetings will focus on the nuts and bolts of your thesis. However, it is also essential that you regularly and openly discuss your working relationships with your committee members, particularly with your adviser in order to avoid the hid-

den strains that build up in the adviser-student relationship over time. Discuss the nature of your interactions, the expectations you both have, and how well these expectations are being met. Ask: Do you meet regularly enough? Does your adviser feel that she has adequate information on your progress? Does she need more frequent progress reports? Are you devoting enough time to research versus your other duties, such as teaching? Does she feel that you are maturing professionally? Are there ways the two of you can improve how you work together? Does she feel that you are responsive enough to her criticisms?

If your adviser gives you answers to these questions that are too general, follow up by asking for specifics. For example, if your adviser says that she is disappointed with how slowly your thesis is coming along, ask how she feels it can be speeded up. Has she noted where the problems lie?

These questions about your working relationship are often awkward to bring up, and both you and your adviser will have a tendency to avoid them. However, because it is so easy for misunderstandings to subtly poison a good relationship, you must make sure that these issues are raised *before there are problems*. If you find it awkward to bring them up casually during your normal progress meetings, it may be useful to tell your adviser that you want to schedule a special meeting to explore whether there are ways that you can be more responsive to her expectations.

Usually, your thesis committee will meet in its entirety with

two, often just for your thesis defense. However, additional meetings of the full committee may be helpful from time to time in order to get approval for your progress to date and to iron out disagreements involving multiple committee members. If you think such a meeting would be helpful, approach your adviser to see if he will agree to arrange one. A good way to structure the meeting is as an annual progress report from you, in which you present your completed work and plans for the future and ask for the committee's suggestions. This presentation can help you get accustomed to speaking in front of your committee. More important is that you and your adviser can use the meeting to make sure that everyone is in agreement on the direction you are taking and use peer pressure to herd troublemakers into line. If the committee members agree "on the record" that your research is on track, it will be more difficult for them later to change their minds as you near completion of the thesis. Many graduate students have had a committee member orally approve research in private consultation, only to later renege and demand substantial revision.

CIRCULATE MEMOS AND REPORTS

Whenever you meet with your adviser or another committee member, take notes and write a memo that reflects your understanding of the meeting. Say, "I plan to do X based on your recommendations." This will minimize misunderstandings. One student had typical problems with an adviser who couldn't remember what orders he had given from one meeting to the next:

My adviser continually contradicted himself when he gave me instructions on my thesis drafts. First he would say, "Take out everything remotely editorial and leave only results." Then in the next meeting he would say, "This is so boring. It's only results. Why isn't there any commentary?" This back-and-forth craziness went on for months, and whenever I would tell him that he was contradicting what he'd said before, he would say something like "Oh, but that wasn't what I meant," so the whole problem was turned around to be my fault because I didn't listen closely. Finally, I started giving him notes of our conversations, so that he would recognize how contradictory he was. After that, things went smoother, and he even ended up apologizing. He wasn't a bad guy, just a poor communicator.

Whenever there is a full-scale committee meeting, make sure that the decisions taken are clearly spelled out and mutually agreed to. You can guide the committee toward clear decisions by asking, for example, "So what you want me to do is X. Correct?" Once decisions have been made, there should be a clear, written record of what was decided (often different committee members will come away from a meeting with very different ideas about what has been decided). Either write a memo yourself, summing up the major conclusions of the meeting, or ask your adviser to write one to circulate to all the members.

You should also make regular written progress reports, approximately one a month, to be circulated to your committee members. These reports act like newsletters, informing them of your existence and convincing them that you are moving ahead. They can also be used as the basis for discussion in regular meetings with your adviser and to help you plan and review your own performance.

PRESENT YOUR THESIS AS YOU GO ALONG

Avoid the temptation to show your committee how good you are by going off somewhere (I chose Texas) and writing your complete thesis, presenting it with a flourish and expecting applause. Suddenly presenting a complete thesis is a real bonehead move, both practically and politically. If you pull this, you will almost certainly be told to do serious revision. One master's student told me:

After my proposal was accepted, I charged off and wrote the whole thesis in three months without checking in with my adviser at all. When I presented it, my adviser was very angry because I hadn't asked her for advice, even though my thesis was good enough to pass and finally did. I think she thought up extra revisions for me to make just to teach me a lesson.

I made the same mistake myself. I wrote my entire thesis without getting any chapters reviewed as I went along. Between the time I started writing and the time I finished, my committee changed their minds about how my thesis should be structured, so I ended up rewriting all nine chapters. To avoid these sorts of problems, you should present chapters one by one as you finish polished drafts. This way you can involve the committee early and get each chapter certified as you go along. This is particularly

important if your research direction changes substantially after your proposal has been approved.

You should make certain that the drafts you give your committee for review are *polished* drafts. First impressions will stick with your committee.

One of the most common reasons students are slowed down is that professors sit on manuscripts for long periods without reading them. In my own case, my first adviser took fourteen months to read my thesis proposal, losing three copies before I gave him a fourth and forced him to read it in my presence. To deal with this problem, when you give chapter drafts to your committee members, ask them to finish their reviews by a set date. Obviously you can't force your advisers to read your work, but you have more hope if you can get them to set firm deadlines with you, rather than accepting an "I'll read it during the next few weeks."

When your adviser or other committee members read your drafts, make sure you ask them for detailed written instructions on what should be changed. Not only will these give you clear understanding of what changes to make, but also they will be documentary proof that a committee member actually told you to do what you did.

If one of your committee members is inadequately explicit in his written comments, tactfully suggest how much more helpful it would be if he were to annotate throughout, pointing out areas where clarity is poor or there are other faults. If his comments are too generalized or unclear, ask questions to focus the criticisms. If your reviewer says, "This section is weak," probe to discover exactly how it is weak. Is it lack of clarity in the writing or the logic of the point itself? Ask him how he would rewrite it so that you can understand exactly the type of changes he has in mind.

SOLVING PROBLEMS WITH • YOUR COMMITTEE •

CONFLICTS BETWEEN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

If there are substantial conflicts between committee members, you will feel the pain. Animosity between the committee members will rarely be directly expressed, but they will attempt to win a personal or theoretical battle using your thesis for a tug-of-war. Peter, an economics doctoral student, told this story:

I'm in my fifth year and hung up because I can't seem to take control of my committee. They just keep fighting. The chairman is a neoclassical economist and the second person, influential in the department, is a Marxist. Of course they have totally different interpretations of how my thesis should go. I can't see any end in sight because my adviser keeps asking me to write more and more chapters, saying, "Gee, now you understand this, how about a new intellectual problem?" Meanwhile, the Marxist demands that I rewrite everything from his perspective. When I do this, the chairman finds it unacceptable and refuses to sign off. The worst thing is that now they are both getting angry with me for doing what the other guy says.

Another student's committee got along fine until her adviser refused to publish a second member's article in a book he was editing. The unpublished professor transferred his anger to the student. Jane said:

I felt like I was wearing a sandwich board with a target on it. He kept treating me badly in class, and we finally had a scene where he actually told me that he hadn't even wanted me in the department, that my adviser had pulled strings to get me in, but that I wasn't good enough to have been admitted.

If this type of feuding begins affecting your ability to finish, you need to act as soon as possible, because things rarely get better without intervention. Your first recourse is your adviser—ask him or her for help. If your adviser can't solve it informally, a meeting of the full committee may be in order to try to find an amicable way around any academic differences. If the problem stems from political or personality conflicts, rational discussion is less likely to work and your best option is probably to jettison one of the troublemakers.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

If you have trouble with your adviser or another committee member, you've got to act quickly before negative impressions solidify. As a first approach, talk openly with the person to try to find out where the disagreement lies and how to resolve it. Most problems are simple misunderstandings. If you can't resolve the problem on your own, seek mediation. If your problem is with a secondary committee member, discuss

it with your adviser. If the problem is with your adviser, or if he or she can't help, seek an outside mediator, perhaps the department chairperson or university ombudsman.

Your final resort is to replace an adviser or committee member you can't get along with. Booting off a secondary committee member is likely to have only minor repercussions, particularly if you do it early in the thesis process. Firing an *adviser* is another matter. If you have invested several years in building a relationship with the adviser, breaking up is like a divorce, replete with rancor. Added to whatever bad feelings made you decide to remove him or her, the professor will now feel rejected. In my own case, I changed advisers toward the end of my second year after a nightmarish experience with my first one. I foolishly thought I could placate him by keeping him on as a committee member, but he remained so hostile and obstructionist that I finally had to remove him from the committee. My advice to you is that if you do fire an adviser, don't leave him on your committee where he can sabotage you. Also, if you do remove a committee member, hide your ill feelings and help him save face. Don't tell him (or anyone else in your department) your negative reasons for the personnel change.

• OTHER TIPS FOR SOLVING CONFLICTS

- *Nip problems in the bud.* Peter, who was caught between the Marxist and the classical economist, waited much too long to deal with a destructive situation. He should have moved quickly to make the committee confront the problem, and if there was no resolution, should have replaced one combatant.
- *Be assertive.* The committee owes you professional behavior, including regular meetings, fast readings of chapter drafts, and rapid resolution of conflicts. Don't be afraid to ask for what you are paying for.
- *Be flexible.* Don't lose sight of the fact that your thesis isn't going to be perfect; nor will many people read it. Therefore, don't be stubborn about changes (unless they require a huge amount of reworking). Don't squabble about how many angels can sit on the head of a pin and other picayune theoretical points. Don't take issue with larger-scale theoretical orientations of your adviser and committee members (if you must debunk them, you can do it *after* you have your degree).
- *Get perspective.* It is easy for the average graduate student facing committee problems to be temporarily insane from stress. Therefore, talk

extensively with other people about the problems you are facing. The other grad students in your support group may help, as could the ombudsman, close faculty friends, or the counseling center. However, be discreet about whom you talk to—word can get back.

• DISAPPEARANCES •

LOSING AN ADVISER

If your adviser—the committee chairperson—retires, dies, or leaves for another department, you are in a career-threatening predicament. Here is what happened to Pauline, who lost *two* advisers while at one of the country's top biology departments:

My first adviser left to teach in England during my second year when I had just started my thesis, so I had to start over with a new adviser and a new thesis topic. This put me a year behind. My second adviser, Greg, was wonderful at guiding us (there were four graduate students in his lab, all working on fish population genetics). But Greg didn't get tenure, so he left for a job where he couldn't have graduate students, leaving all four of us students orphaned. Because he took his grants with him, we didn't even have money to buy the chemicals we needed for our research. At this stage I was too far along to start over, even though there was no one else in the department doing my type of research. Fortunately, I did find a wonderful professor who was willing to be my adviser, but the only thing we had in common was that we both worked on fish. Our research areas were miles apart—he was a paleontologist and I was a population geneticist on totally different groups of fish—so he couldn't help much professionally. I finally finished, but my career was definitely set back, and I did not end up with the teaching job I wanted.

Given the importance of an adviser who actively supports your research, if your adviser leaves for another university your best option is usually to go with him. This is common practice, and many professors who take new jobs stipulate as part of the deal that their present students come along. It may seem that moving across the country to follow an adviser is a painful option—and it is—but in most cases it will give you more

chance of success than staying behind with an unsuitable replacement.

If you are unable to follow your adviser, you have three options, depending on how far along you are in your research. First, if you are just starting on your thesis, you may need to follow Pauline's example and find both a new adviser and a new thesis topic. Remember that you need to find an adviser who has wholehearted enthusiasm for your topic, and it will not do to merely substitute a marginally interested committee member. Therefore, the person you choose may not turn out to be an existing member of your committee, and you may even need to change schools if you can't find someone appropriate in your present department.

Second, if you are nearly through with your thesis, you definitely don't want to choose an adviser who will change the direction of your research. Therefore, your best bet is probably just to push ahead with your present committee, naming one of the members as chairperson, although you essentially want him or her to play only a caretaker role. Your new chairperson is more likely to play this role without making your life difficult if you have kept your committee well involved in your thesis development all along.

Third, your department might let you retain your old adviser as committee chairperson even though he or she is at a new school. This would only be sensible if you are nearly finished with your thesis. The greatest drawback to this solution is that your adviser's relations with the other department members are likely to be soured, whether because she didn't get tenure or because she left for a better job. Also, a long-distance academic relationship takes extra work. You will have to be very strict about sending drafts on a regular basis, making regular phone calls, and visiting as necessary.

There is one final pitfall for students who have lost their advisers. Many refuse to let go of the old adviser's expectations and values. They fail to recognize that any new adviser, even one who was on their committee and therefore was involved in the development of their thesis, will have different standards and expectations than their old adviser. Mary, an economics doctoral student, ran into this problem when her adviser died suddenly. She had been well along in her thesis, with excellent relations with her adviser. She says:

I made a big mistake in assuming that because I had Tom's approval for my thesis, the new adviser would also approve. After all, he was one of my old committee members, and he'd never voiced any substantial objections when Tom was alive, so I made the mistake of

taking him for granted. I assumed that if I continued in the path my old adviser had laid out, I was doing my part and everything would be okay. But there were real problems when it came time to get my thesis approved. It turned out that my new adviser had had reservations all along about the methodology. Now that it was his responsibility, he demanded substantial revisions. This caught me by surprise at the last minute, so I didn't graduate when I expected.

REPLACING SECONDARY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

When a secondary committee member leaves for another job, your options are to retain the person as an outside committee member or to replace him or her. The choice is not as crucial as it would be if you lost your adviser, but you should still manage things with an eye toward minimizing trouble. If you must find a replacement, think of the new person as a student enrolling late in class who needs extra exposure to the material. You need to involve her in the process as quickly as possible, sell her on your thesis, and identify and defuse any problems right away.