

**Minutes**  
**MS AFLS Steering Committee**  
**January 24, 2007, APC Conference Room, 3:00 pm**

**Members Present:** Diana Bisbee, Donna Graham, Don Herring, Wayne Kellogg, Terry Kirkpatrick (via conference call) Randy Luttrell, Gene Milus, Teddy Morelock, Hennie Popp, Steve Ricke

A proposed agenda and previous minutes were distributed via email and at the meeting. Minutes of the October 30, 2007 were summarized and approved with a few minor editorial comments. A copy of the agenda follows these minutes.

The Steering Committee reviewed the edited Program Description and agreed that it was time to finalize some of the discussions. The edited version of the document was used as a working draft. The following additional changes were suggested and made:

- The Steering Committee will be chaired by the Dean and his/her appointee – statement about elected representative of the Steering Committee was removed.
- The statement about duties of the advisory committee was amended to reflect that the committee approves the special problem project or research topic.
- The document was restated to confirm that the student's advisory committee assessed the need for deficiency courses and administer the final oral examination.
- The statement about off-campus courses was reworded to indicate that approved distance courses and approved courses at off-campus centers were resident courses.
- Transfer courses should be approved by the student's advisory committee when the Program of Study is prepared.
- Broad emphasis areas were listed as agricultural education, animal science, plant science, pest management and food safety. The statement indicated that emphasis areas of study were not limited these defined broad categories.
- Statements that an acceptable thesis project in one of the academic departments would substitute for the special problem and that total special problems and internships was limited to 6 hours was added.
- A student may take one 3 hour special problem in addition to a thesis project.
- The Graduate School format for developing a thesis is recommended for writing the special problem report, and the students will provide the advisory committee with a copy of the report two weeks in advance of the final oral examination.
- The final examination will be oral.
- Transfer student section changed to Change of Degree Programs.

Numerous other editorial comments were made, and Luttrell agreed to draft changes and circulate proposed revisions to the Steering Committee.

An edited version of the current description for the Graduate Catalog was distributed and further edited. The Steering Committee made several helpful comments and include: (a) a statement that thesis credits in one of the academic departments could substitute for the require 3-hr special problem project, (b) that the final examination would be oral, (c) that

a maximum of 9 hours of thesis, special problem and internship credits was allowable, (d) that a maximum of 6 hours of special problems and internships was allowable, and (e) that each special problem would be limited to 3 hours of credit (i.e. if 6 hours of special problems are taken, it should be in at least 2 different courses).

Luttrell provided the group with a general statement of the program developed for the Assessment of Student Academic Achievements. The Steering Committee agreed with the general statements of student outcomes drafted by Luttrell, N. Anthony, and R. Norman at the December 15, 2007 college-wide workshop, with minor editorial revision. The statements were:

**Statement of Overall Program Objectives:**

- MS AFLS students will develop a depth of expertise in a defined area of scientific emphasis.
- MS AFLS students will develop research skills in reading, understanding and interpreting technical and scientific information.
- MS AFLS students will exhibit strong communications skills to effectively teach and interact with a broad agricultural, food and life sciences clientele.

**Specific Actions to Address Defined Program Objectives:**

- Written project proposals based on a search of the literature and a demonstrated knowledge of the defined emphasis area will be orally presented to the advisory committee in advance of the special problem project.
- The final special problem project will be written and orally defended in the final comprehensive examination.
- MS AFLS students will be encouraged to make at least one professional presentation at a scientific meeting or academic seminar.
- MS AFSL students will demonstrate an awareness of cultural, societal, economic and environmental impacts/influences on their special topics problem in a defined area of agricultural, food and life sciences.
- MS AFLS students will demonstrate an awareness of specific discipline knowledge in their report of the special project and in their final comprehensive examination.

The Steering Committee also discussed some of the key issues impacting progress with program organization and generally agreed to the attached and edited summary. These issues deserve additional discussion before they are added to the program description, but they will become general operating guidelines immediately.

Summary of Meeting prepared by R. G. Luttrell, January 26, 2007

**Agenda**  
**MS AFLS Steering Committee**  
**January 24, 2007, APC Conference Room, 3:00 pm**

- I. Review, revise and approve minutes of October 30, 2007 meeting**
- II. Review, revise and approve Program Description**
- III. Review, revise and approve Catalog Description**
- IV. Consider draft assessment plan and revise accordingly**
- V. Discuss key issues impacting program organization and provide Coordinator with advice on future direction. Draft statements of policies are attached and intended to encourage your critical assessment of these issues.**

**Key Issues Impact Program Organization**  
**(as edited 1/24/07 by Steering Committee)**

**a. Standardized writing guidelines**

**Proposed Draft Statement:** *All MS AFLS students will prepare a written description of their special problem project in a format consistent with that of thesis preparation guidelines or a scientific journal in defined area of academic emphasis. The written report will provide a clear description of the project and the learning outcomes achieved. Since this is a Master of Science degree, the document should demonstrate an awareness of scientific methods, a familiarity with scientific literature in the defined area of emphasis, and an ability to assimilate information and formulate solutions to real world problems. The written document should be acceptable to the Major Advisor and submitted to the Advisory Committee at least one week prior to final comprehensive examination. Students will describe and defend this written report to their Advisory Committee at the final comprehensive examination.*

**b. Expectations of a three versus six hour special problem project**

**Proposed Draft Statement:** *The MS AFLS degree requires that students complete at least one three-hour special problem of directed, independent study in a defined area of academic emphasis. This project is supervised by the Major Advisor with approval and subsequent review by the Advisory Committee. The purpose of the project is to demonstrate a depth of scientific understanding in one of the agricultural, food and life sciences. Ideally the project would mimic the scientific method with a demonstrated knowledge of scientific literature, a clear statement of a hypothesis or project goal, appropriate data collection or assimilation of information, and reasonable conclusions based on appropriate scientific inference and statistical tools. The MS AFLS program requires that this special problem project result in a written report that will be reviewed and defended at the final comprehensive examination. Since the number of credit hours may vary from three to six, expectations of the effort involved should be reflective of the credit assigned. A typical three hour lecture course would involve ~ 45 hours of class time and an additional 90 to 135 hours of preparatory study. Expectations of graduate projects will vary with Major Advisors and Advisory Committees, but Advisory Committees are expected to reasonably account for variable credits assigned to the required MS AFLS special problems project.*

**c. Options for thesis research with an academic department**

**Proposed Draft Statement:** *The MS AFLS degree does not require a thesis, but students interested in completing a traditional thesis research project may substitute an acceptable six hour thesis project in one of the agricultural, food*

*and life sciences for the required special problem project. This would require approval of one of the academic departments, and a student awareness of specific expectations of thesis research in the chosen department. Some departments require that at least two committee members be faculty of that academic program. The Advisory Committee would need to be structured to meet these requirements and the committee structure requirements of the MS AFLS degree program.*

**d. Assigning major advisors, impact of course availability**

**Issue and Advice Needed:** *Major advisors are assigned by the Program Coordinator in consultation with the student. Guidelines suggest that the Major Advisor should be from the student's defined area of emphasis and that students must complete at least nine hours of course work in the defined area of emphasis. Does the nine hours include the special problem project? If it is nine hours of definable course work, do we have limits on who can serve as a major advisor (i.e. those areas with at least three course offerings within a reasonable time frame...M.S. students must complete degree within six years?*

*Needed Courses Within A Four-Year Cycle:*

- *General Courses -- statistics, oral and written communications, data interpretation, orientation to agriculture and graduate studies?*
- *Agricultural Education – (need to define courses)*
- *Animal Science – one course in animal nutrition, one course in animal reproduction or breeding, one production level course, two to three additional courses as opportunity develops*
- *Food Safety – food microbiology, food safety, food law courses, all proposed courses for the web-based program need to be finalized*
- *Pest Management – one course in entomology, one course in plant pathology, one course in weed science, two to three additional courses as opportunity develops.*
- *Plant Science – one course in plant physiology, one course in plant breeds, one production level course, two to three additional courses as opportunity develops*
- *Food Safety – food microbiology, food safety, food law courses, all proposed courses for the web-based program need to be finalized*

**e. Increased student interaction with major advisor and advisory committee**

**Proposed Changes:** *The Program Coordinator has previously served as the primary contact for off-campus student and has functioned as an advisor in many roles. We plan to increase the responsibilities of the Major Advisor and encourage a closer working relationship between the student, the advisor and the advisory committee. More emphasis will be placed on timely selection of a committee, involvement of the committee in developing a program of student*

*and a suitable special problem project, and overall interaction of faculty with AFLS students. Increased involvement in faculty research programs, encouraged participation in professional meetings, and more purposeful involvement with academic departments would enhance the student experience.*

**f. Critical routine evaluations of student progress**

**Proposed Change:** *In the past, student progress toward degree requirements has been tracked unofficially, primarily through conversations between the student and the Program Coordinator. We propose that all major advisors and students submit an annual evaluation of progress to the Advisory Committee and Program Coordinator and that the Program Coordinator be alerted to major changes in the proposed plan of study. The plan of study should be developed within the first semester of enrollment or no later than successful completion of 12 hours of graduate credit.*

**g. Internships, special problems, thesis credits**

**Clarification:** *The Graduate School allows no more than 20% of total graduate course work in special problems. This has been an issue in the past and one that the Program Coordinator was cautioned about from the Graduate Dean. Recently a student expressed an interest in taking 6 hours of special problems and a 3 hour internship. The Program Coordinator interpreted special problems, internships and thesis credits all as forms of individualized study and suggested that it was not consistent with the guidelines for the program. However, the Graduate School later responded that internships and thesis credits were not included in the 20% rule. For clarification of MS AFLS expectations, the Steering Committee provided the following guidance (1/24/07):*

*Each student will complete one 3-credit hour special problem from which a technical paper will be developed. A student may substitute an approved thesis project in one of the agricultural, food and life science departments for the required special problem project. No more than 9 hours of thesis, special problems and internships are recognized for degree requirements. No more than a total of 6 hours of special problems and internships may be taken. Each special problem course should be limited to 3 hours of credit.*