Guidelines for Selecting Neutral Chairs

Neutral chairs are required for all MSc and PhD examinations, and for PhD Candidacy examinations. Because the department has upwards of 50 examinations over the year, eligible faculty can expect to serve as a neutral chair at least two to four times every year.

Who can serve as Neutral Chair
The graduate faculty guidelines state:

A neutral chair must be a full-time University of Calgary faculty member with experience of University of Calgary oral examinations.

We interpret eligible faculty as full time professors who have graduated at least one MSc or PhD student, or who have served as an examiner on at least two or more examinations.

How Faculty are asked to serve as Neutral Chairs
This is a mandatory departmental service for all eligible faculty, as it is necessary to our everyday operation. All eligible faculty are expected to take their turn. Guidelines for selecting neutral chairs are described below.

1. **Round robin selection.** Eligible faculty will be asked to serve as neutral chair on a round robin basis. That is, if we ask a faculty member, it is because he or she is next in line. A central list recording neutral chair service will be maintained by Graduate Affairs so that no one is asked to serve more than their due.

2. **Who is on this Round Robin list:** All eligible faculty (as above) who are not on service relief (sabbaticals, leave of absences, etc.) are on this list. Those on service relief will be re-inserted into the queue when their service relief is completed.

3. **Deferring turns, or going out of turn.** There are several legitimate reasons why a faculty member may not serve when it is their turn. When this occurs the faculty member will be asked to serve for the next examination.
   a. **Scheduling conflicts.** A faculty member may defer their turn because of valid scheduling conflicts.
   b. **Neutrality conflicts.** Regulations state that the neutral chair should not have a close relationship with the candidate or the supervisor, or be involved in their research. In practice, one’s turn is deferred if one is in the same research area as the student/supervisor, or if a conflict is stated.
   c. **Problem examination.** When problem examinations are anticipated, an experienced faculty member may be asked to serve ahead of their expected turn.
   d. **Reserved for special duties.** The Graduate Affairs Director and the Head will be reserved for special cases and to handle appeals as needed.

4. **Non-response.** If a faculty member does not respond to requests to serve in a timely manner, or continually refuses to serve, the matter will be pursued by the Graduate Coordinator and /or the Department Head. Ignoring requests introduces delays and adds to the work of the graduate secretaries, while refusing to serve is unfair to other faculty.