

University of Pittsburgh
Department of Psychology
Graduate Student Advising Responsibilities & Expectations
May, 2008

“Training the next generation of professional artists, engineers, scholars, and scientists is a vital part of the academic mission of the University of Pittsburgh. Fundamental to the success of the enterprise are the faculty members who serve as mentors to our graduate students. Ideally, faculty mentors provide intellectual and personal leadership that helps to support, encourage, and promote the personal and professional development of their students. This relationship is expected to provide a foundation for a student’s career long after the degree has been granted.” (University of Pittsburgh, Ad hoc UCGS Committee on Mentoring, 2004)

1. General

Faculty are obliged and should be expected to take academic and research advising seriously and to promote graduate students’ progress, achievement, independence and professional development. Graduate students should be treated with respect and courtesy. Faculty advisors should take an active interest in their students’ progress. They should establish an individual working relationship with each advisee, based on open channels of communication and a proactive approach to advising that is adjusted to the student’s skills and progress in the program. Advisors who leave the University should attempt to make arrangements together with the program for the future of their advisees with respect to continued financial support and continued mentoring.

Faculty are expected to make department milestones a priority (i.e., proposal meetings and defenses), with appropriate and timely mentoring and preparation of the student for each major milestone. They are also expected to promote their students’ scholarly and professional development, adhering to the guidelines herein.

Faculty with secondary appointments in the Psychology Department should have served on at least two student committees (master’s, comprehensive, or dissertation) to familiarize themselves with department norms and standards for student milestones, prior to requesting to admit a graduate student through the department.

2. Availability & communication

a. Number of advisees

Advisors should limit the number of their advisees so that each can be given sufficient and appropriate attention. While the limit will vary according to the circumstances of the individual faculty member, it has been our general experience that an advisor with more than 4 or 5 advisees does a disservice to all of them. Except under unusual circumstances, the number of advisees should not be expected to exceed five.

b. Regular meetings

Advisors should provide the opportunity for regular, uninterrupted meetings with each advisee. The frequency and length of such meetings will vary with the stage of the student’s research and progress toward milestones, but as a general rule, the

student should expect to spend at least 30 minutes per week in consultation with his or her advisor about his or her work, with longer or more frequent meetings early on and during periods of proposal development and data gathering. Although lab meetings may function as a good milieu for such interactions, students should regularly meet individually with their faculty advisors at points in their training when individual meetings are more conducive to student progress.

Faculty and students should schedule these meetings at a mutually convenient time. However, students should feel that they are free to request more frequent or longer meetings as necessary.

c. Communication

The advisor should establish and maintain an atmosphere of respect and collegiality with each advisee. Students should be able to expect their advisor's undivided attention during individual meetings, which should not be shared with phone calls, email, or visits from colleagues or other students. Advisors should communicate their expectations regarding advisees' responsibilities and performance regularly and clearly, with appropriate evaluations of the student's progress. Advisees should feel that they are free to raise concerns and issues regarding their training, progress, and advising with the advisor him/herself without fear of recrimination or negative repercussions.

Advisors should provide ample notice to students regarding periods during which they will be away for any extended period of time, so that plans can be made to minimize any potential disruption this might cause to their students' progress. Advisors who travel frequently or for extended periods, or who are on leave, are expected to establish mechanisms for maintaining their advising and training responsibilities, including regular communication with their students. To facilitate student progress, students should be able to contact advisors by email with questions or concerns and should be able to expect a response within a reasonable period, generally not exceeding a week. Response times may well be longer when faculty are on vacation.

3. Guidance & professional development

a. Feedback on written documents

Advisors should provide prompt and thorough written feedback on drafts of proposals, thesis chapters, or papers. Faculty should make all reasonable efforts to respond expeditiously, especially when students are working on milestones or manuscripts. Specifically, students should normally be able to expect a turn-around time of one to two weeks on submitted material. Advisors who are out of town for extended periods should still normally be expected to provide prompt, considered feedback.

b. Research proposals and plans

Advisors should provide active guidance for their students as students prepare for each of the doctoral milestones. This includes steering them toward feasible projects and away from such pitfalls as overambitious proposals or excessively time-

consuming or risky studies. At the same time, the advisor should refrain from an attempt to clone him- or herself and should permit the student to develop her or his own style and direction.

Advisors should be familiar with department and program standards for performance on each of the major milestones and should actively guide and assist the student in preparing for each milestone within the guidelines and limits established by the student's program. This may include assistance in defining the scope and focus of a project; organizing and preparing proposals; designing, conducting, analyzing, and interpreting the research; preparing the final document to achieve accepted standards of scholarship. The quantity of assistance will decline as the student advances in the program and becomes a more expert and proficient scientist. But the quality of assistance should remain high throughout the graduate student's careers.

Advisors are responsible for ensuring that students' milestones documents are ready for presentation to examination committees (except for cases in which the program prohibits advisor input to a particular document). By permitting a student to distribute a document to the examination committee, the advisor indicates that the document has met the advisor's standards and is ready for defense.

- c. Department & program requirements
Research advisors, including advisors whose primary appointments are outside the Department of Psychology, should be sufficiently familiar with program, department, and FAS degree requirements that they can discuss with their students when courses should be taken and major milestones achieved. Advisors should help students decide which courses and their timing are optimal for the student's training and progress. This applies even though it is fundamentally the student's responsibility to be aware of and to meet degree requirements. Secondary faculty who admit and advise graduate students in the department are encouraged to consult with their advisees' academic advisor or program chair to ensure that they are providing accurate and timely advice to their advisees.

Advisors should make doctoral milestones a priority. They should avoid erecting barriers to progress, and should help students to identify and remove barriers to achieving milestones as these arise.

- d. Opportunities outside the advisor's lab
Advisors should support their students' efforts to broaden their scholarly expertise by participating in research and training opportunities outside of the advisors' lab, and should provide students sufficient independence to pursue such opportunities. At the same time, students should be discouraged from pursuing opportunities that are not likely to contribute to the student's scholarly and professional development, or that will detract substantially from the student's progress toward milestones.
- e. Teaching support & supervision
Advisors should help students gain an appreciation of teaching and assist them in improving their teaching skills as appropriate. They should discuss the timing of the

teaching requirement early in the student's career and the options available for acquiring and improving teaching skills, including serving as a teaching assistant (TA) for a term before taking on the full responsibilities of a teaching fellow (TF). Students should be very strongly discouraged from putting the teaching requirement off until their last year in residence, in part because course availability cannot be guaranteed.

Having another source of funding (e.g., training grant; fellowship) does not exclude students from the teaching requirement. When students are teaching for the first time, advisors should help students manage and balance other demands on their time to permit them to prepare and deliver a quality course, and to learn from the experience.

f. Annual advising meetings & evaluations

Advisors should place student's timely completion of degree requirements among their highest priorities, and should help students establish realistic goals for completing program and department requirements. To this end, advisors should meet with the student at least annually to review and evaluate progress and performance. This will typically occur in conjunction with the program's annual evaluations. In these meetings advisors should discuss students' progress and performance in relation to expectations regarding normal progress and the norms associated with successful degree completion and placement after graduation.

Advisors with a secondary appointment in the department are expected to participate in a formal annual advising meeting with each of their advisees. For programs with an advising committee structure, the advisor must participate in the annual meeting of the student's advising committee. Students' faculty supervisor for their GSR support, if different from the primary advisor, should also participate in this meeting. For programs without an advising committee structure, an annual meeting will be scheduled by the Graduate Studies office with the secondary faculty advisor, the departmental co-advisor, the GSR faculty supervisor (if relevant) and the student before May 1 of each year. This meeting will be chaired by the student's departmental co-advisor and will typically be held in conjunction with the program's annual evaluation of students. The major focus of the meeting should be on student advising needs in conjunction with progress and plans with respect to department and university milestones. In cases where there appears to be an imbalance between emphasis on the advisor's own demands or expectations for the student and the expectations of the department with respect to student progress and performance, this should be explicitly addressed during the meeting by the student's departmental co-advisor and/or other primary faculty member(s) who are present. Department expectations should be reviewed and clarified, and a plan should be made for achieving a satisfactory balance. The advisor should communicate to the program chair that the meeting has taken place. Students will be asked to indicate on their annual self-evaluation when the meeting has occurred. Program chairs should ascertain that these meetings occur annually.

Advisors, including those with secondary appointments in the department, are also expected to attend and participate in the program's annual evaluations of their

advisees' progress and performance. Program chairs should include in students' annual evaluation letters specific details about the department's and program's expectations regarding the next milestone(s), including deadline(s), and if relevant, expectations regarding the faculty advisor's role in preparing the student for said milestone(s).

4. Resources & support

a. Physical resources

Faculty are expected to provide their advisee(s) with office space in the faculty member's lab or in a department office. This must include an individual (not shared) desk; individual file drawers in addition to the desk; individual shelf space for books and journals; telephone (can be shared); a computer for individual use, with email and internet access and permission to load university word processing, data base, and statistical analysis software if not already resident on the computer.

b. Amount & type of financial support

Faculty are expected to provide or to arrange with the Assistant Chair of the department for full-time support for their students, including summers, for a minimum of four years as long as the student is considered in good standing by the program. Support can take the form of a GSR on the faculty advisor's grant or on a colleague's grant, training grant award, fellowship, TA, or TF. Students will typically receive more than one form of support during their training, but it is expected that all students will receive at least some of their support in the form of a GSR or fellowship. That is, a student should not be admitted with the anticipated source of support for the entire training period solely in the form of TA/TF funding.

Faculty are obliged to provide non-teaching summer support for first year students. Together with a request to admit an applicant, faculty must indicate the source(s) of support for the student's first year, including the summer, to be communicated in writing to the program chair and the Assistant Chair of the department.

Faculty with secondary appointments in the department are typically expected to assume responsibility for supporting each student they admit for the duration of that student's training, as long as the student is considered in good standing by the program. Together with a request to admit an applicant, faculty with secondary appointments must indicate the source(s) of support for at least the student's first two years, including the summers, to be communicated in writing to the program chair and the Assistant Chair of the department.

c. Planning & communication

Advisors should be proactive in planning ahead for student funding and discussing funding options in a timely manner with their students. Advisors who support students on their grants should spell out the conditions and length of support as far as they can within the limits of their own funding and likely future funding. Discussions of student support should occur at least twice per year, no later than the middle of fall and spring terms. At each point, students should be able to anticipate their potential funding options approximately a year in advance. Changes in student funding should

be anticipated by the advisor and discussed with the student well in advance of deadlines for TA/TF sign-ups, which is typically about midway through the prior term.

d. Summer funding

Summer TA/TF stipends are reduced, by university regulations, relative to academic year levels. Advisors should never plan to support a student exclusively on TA/TF funding every summer. Planning and discussion of summer funding should be initiated by the advisor and should begin early in the Spring term or before. The advisor and student should explore and discuss all possible sources of summer funding and the advisor should be open to the student taking a GSR position in another lab for the summer. When a student is supported with a TA/TF position in the summer, the advisor should make up the shortfall in funding with research funds whenever possible.

e. Special conditions

Research advisors who also provide financial support for their advisees within their own grants need to be very careful that the demands of their own projects do not interfere with the timely progress of their students or with their students' publication options. Under no circumstances should students be expected to devote more than 20 hours per week on average, for a full-time GSR (proportionately less for part-time appointments) to GSR-related research activities that do not contribute to the completion of degree requirements and/or will not result in publication.

Advisors who leave the university are expected to plan together with the student's program inasmuch as possible for continued funding of their students, whether on their own ongoing grants and projects, or a colleague's.

5. Publishing & presenting

a. Opportunities

Advisors should provide early and frequent opportunities for co-authorship on papers and presentations, within the limits of the student's current expertise. They should encourage students to present their research at professional meetings and provide financial support for conference attendance from grant funding when this is possible. Students should also be actively encouraged and supported in publishing their research in the field's primary journals, with the student as first author when warranted (see below).

When students are supported on advisors' grants and the research activities involved in the grant are unlikely to result in publications, the advisor must make other opportunities available to students for work expected to lead to publication. Moreover, the advisor should allow time and provide support for the student to participate in the publication process, recognizing that this will vary by student, by program, and by year in the program.

b. Authorship: Responsibilities and guidelines

Advisors should discuss authorship opportunities and authorship order as they work on papers together with their students. Advisors should adhere to the guidelines for authorship credit and order presented in the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (1992), Section 6.23, Publication Credit:

- (a) Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have contributed.
- (b) Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publication are appropriately acknowledged, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement.
- (c) A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is based primarily on the student's dissertation or thesis.

6. Career guidance & placement

a. Planning

Advisors should help students plan toward employment goals as early in their course of study as possible. This includes helping students to identify a core set of research interests that will provide the student an “identity” upon completing the program. It also includes helping students to consider career interests and opportunities in research vs. teaching positions, and in college or university settings vs. non-university settings.

b. Opportunities

Advisors should provide students with information about employment and postdoctoral opportunities and encourage exploration of various options. Advisors should introduce students to key figures in the field who are relevant to their interests, or make such introductions possible, and should encourage students to establish professional relationships with them and/or their students.

7. What should students do when advising responsibilities are not met?

a. Advisor & Program Chair

Students who feel that their advisor is not providing adequate mentoring, as evidenced by the advisor's failure to respect the guidelines herein, are encouraged to discuss such issues concretely, honestly, and respectfully with the advisor him/herself and to develop a plan for remedying the problem(s). Advisors should listen and respond honestly and respectfully, and should work with the student to address and resolve the issues raised.

It must be recognized that solutions to such problems require the participation and commitment of both parties and rarely occur overnight. It is thus unlikely that a single such conversation will solve everything. However, if the advisor is willing to

cooperate with the student to identify and solve problems, and if progress is being made, even if slow, then it is usually in the student's best interests to remain with the advisor through at least the current milestone.

The program chair can provide the student with perspectives on the situation within the broader expectations for graduate student progress within the program and department. Program chairs will never discuss individual students with other students, or provide any information that could identify individual students.

The program chair is the person who is likely to know the faculty member best in his or her advising role. The program chair also knows the program requirements, details about the student's progress and difficulties in the past, and the program's expectations for advising responsibilities. Next to the student's advisor, the program chair is also likely to know the student and his/her capabilities and performance best. The program chair can therefore provide help or advice about how to manage specific advisor-advisee situations, including how best to approach the advisor, the range of reasonable solutions, and when it might be advisable to change advisors.

b. Other resources

Students who wonder whether a concern is worth discussing with an advisor, whose discussions with their advisor fail to produce progress toward a solution, or who feel that they cannot be honest with their advisor about their concerns, are encouraged to consult one or more of the following resources in addition to the program chair. These are not listed in any particular order. Each one can provide a slightly different perspective, and the student should consult whichever one(s) best fit their needs.

1) Psychology Department Graduate Student Ombudsman

This individual, a senior faculty member in the department with many years of successful graduate student mentoring, provides a supportive, confidential, impartial setting for airing and working out any question, difficulty, or issue with graduate student training. This person can help the student identify general or specific strategies, opportunities, and resources to resolve advisor-advisee problems as well as other graduate training issues.

2) Assistant Chair of the Department of Psychology

This individual, a PhD psychologist and experienced teacher and supervisor, manages the day-to-day operations of the department, monitors and implements graduate program policies and TA/TF assignments, and probably has the widest familiarity with graduate students. Without a program affiliation, this person can provide a range of impartial, confidential advice and support about advising issues.

3) Psychology Department Director of Graduate Studies

This individual, a member of one of the primary training programs in the department and a successful teacher and mentor of graduate students, establishes and monitors graduate program policies together with the chairs of the individual training programs and the Assistant Chair of the department. Like the Assistant

Chair, this person can provide a range of confidential, impartial advice and support about advising and training issues, particularly from a department-wide perspective.

4) Chair of the Psychology Department

This individual, also a member of one of the primary training programs in the department and a successful mentor of graduate students, is familiar with all of the individual faculty, their history of training students, and the range and substance of student evaluations. This person is the only one in the department who sees students' written evaluations of advisors, with the benefit of having seen many such evaluations across the entire department, for many years. This person can provide confidential, impartial advice and support from both a faculty-specific and a department-wide perspective.

8. Evaluation of advising and mentoring

Formal evaluation of the quality of graduate student mentoring and training is conducted as part of the annual review of faculty by the department's Faculty Evaluation Committee. Graduate student evaluations, which are treated confidentially, are obtained by the department chair as part of this process.

For faculty advisors with secondary appointments, this evaluation should be conducted in conjunction with the renewal process. Program chairs are expected to perform this review in concert with program faculty in preparation for presenting the reappointment request to the faculty. To facilitate this evaluation, secondary faculty members should provide a written self-evaluation of their graduate student advising and mentoring as part of their renewal package, using a standard form provided by the program chair. Graduate student evaluation of the advisor, which will be treated confidentially, should be obtained annually by the department or program chair, and should be included as part of this evaluation.

Unsatisfactory mentoring should result in suspension of graduate student admitting privileges until standards are met with continuing students. This should be a decision made by the full department faculty based on the program's formal evaluation and the program chair's recommendation to the department chair. The department chair will decide whether to obtain additional input from the Executive Committee prior to bringing the recommendation to the full faculty.