Graduate School Guidelines

- **Advising and Mentoring Graduate Students**
    - **Good Practices**[1]
    - **Assessment**
    - **Graduate Program Commitment**

Overview

The following guidelines for fostering positive and productive advising and mentoring practices between faculty and graduate students come from Ohio State faculty members. The suggestions and sources below are based on successful strategies and current research. Developed over the past two years from faculty panels, workshops, and discussions sponsored by the Graduate School at Ohio State, this document is part of an ongoing conversation concerning how to improve the quality of graduate education.[2]

Good Practices

A. Invest Time

The consensus among excellent mentors is that good mentoring requires a significant time commitment on the part of both the mentor and the mentee. By making a commitment to devote time to your students, you are helping to ensure their success. Strive to find ways that maximize efficiency and thus save time but not at the expense of a student's progress. Also, expect mutual commitment: time put into advising and mentoring should correspond with the time the student devotes to his/her work.

B. Communicate Consistently and Frequently

1. **Communicate face-to-face as much as possible**, especially for difficult conversations. For communication between regular meetings or on last-minute issues, e-mail and phone are fine, but there is no substitute for face to face communication. It is prudent for both parties to follow-up "in-person" meetings with written summaries and confirmations. This technique allows both parties to clarify, summarize, and document all important interactions.

2. **Clarify expectations and requirements early and explicitly, preferably in writing**. (See also: **Assessment**)

3. **Give the student as much information as possible, as often as possible**. Explain to students the **context of their progress within the program** and how their progress affects or is affected by departmental decisions, especially when it comes to budget considerations, appointments, and long-term strategic planning. Such **transparency** can avoid misunderstandings based on assumptions and can help a student plan and be motivated to make progress.

4. **Give written feedback on student writing quickly and consistently**. Without regular and timely feedback the student's momentum can be disrupted, which is detrimental to his/her progress. Consistent feedback encourages students to maintain an active level of

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[1] The term, "Good Practices," (inspired by the University of Nebraska Lincoln's "Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education") is intended to convey the variability of "Best Practices" among disciplines. UNL's "Guidelines" articulate general standards for student and faculty interactions within the context of graduate education.
[2] For help and ideas with the development and implementation of such initiatives, further resources on mentoring graduate students, and/or to add your own advice, ideas, references, and examples to this document, please contact the Graduate School (614/247-7416).

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production and accountability. A 2-week maximum turn-around on a dissertation chapter is one suggested example.

5. **Stay in contact** with your colleagues. The graduate studies committee chair, department chair, and TA supervisors or administrators may have valuable information about a student or an important process that can save you time.

6. **Make students aware of travel/research plans and be available to them while away**, especially for extended periods (summer research, sabbaticals, etc.) so as not to interrupt their momentum. Use e-mail, fax, phone, whatever it takes.

7. **Develop and enforce a "No hiding" policy for your students *and* yourself.** Unexpected things happen both in professors' and students' lives. A quick explanation or notification (crucial deadline, illness, accident, childcare, etc.) can prevent a lot of misunderstandings.

8. **Problems can arise and must be addressed**. The mentoring relationship is a relationship like any other; it is supposed to be fun and satisfying but isn't always so. Sometimes a face to face conversation between regular meetings is necessary to address specific problems, real or perceived.

C. Maintain a Structured and Predictable Environment
Effective communication, efficient use of time, and consistent progress are best fostered by developing and maintaining a structured and predictable environment. When both parties have a clear idea of what to expect and when, it is easier to prepare for exchanges.

1. **Hold regular frequent meetings**.

2. **Set students' expectations for regular meetings explicitly and from the start**. Make it clear that if an individual wants you to be his/her advisor, s/he must commit to regular meetings as standard procedure. Explain and demonstrate the rationale and usefulness of such meetings. Get feedback on and assess the relevance and usefulness of meetings; act on feedback and let the student know how you are doing so.

3. With input from your advisee, **develop a written plan** or progress agreement document, in which to list goals, deadlines for each goal, and steps for achieving each goal.

   a. Example: Michigan State University's Graduate Student Progress Report templates

4. **Help students divide larger goals and projects into small manageable tasks**.

   a. Example: University of Minnesota's "Dissertation Calculator"

   b. Sometimes it is helpful to divide large projects into units of time worked (i.e. 2 hour blocks with a 10 minute break in between) than by task (i.e. finish chapter 2).

5. At the end of each quarter, **review the written plan and discuss which goals were met and unmet**. Based on that discussion, begin to develop goals for the next quarter's progress. (See Assessment)

6. Documentation: **early communication regarding potential problems and written documentation of all related interactions is essential**. All communication, especially written, should be deliberate and considerate. Remember that **e-mail is a public record.** Do not hesitate to contact the **Graduate School (614/292-6031) or Legal Affairs (614/292-0582)** with questions or concerns.

D. Demonstrate Your Interest in Developing Your Advisee

If you devote time to your students and communicate with them clearly and regularly, your interest will be evident. There are other things you can and should do to help advisees become well-rounded and competitive colleagues.

1. **Model and maintain professional and ethical standards of conduct** with students, colleagues and staff at all times. Unethical behavior such as **discrimination, harassment, or lack of civility is unacceptable** under any circumstances.

    a. [Review Ohio State's official policies on ethical workplace conduct](#)

2. Maintain and educate students about **ethical research practices**. Keep up to date on Institutional Review Board (human subjects research) & Institutional Lab Animal Care and Use Committee (ILACUC) requirements. There have been cases where a student's *completed* research was found to be not in compliance with federal standards. The student could not use any data for his/her dissertation project, effectively negating years of research. In such cases, students have had no mentoring in the rules and regulations governing these issues. This is the advisor's responsibility as Principle Investigator.

    a. **[The Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP)](#)** web site helps faculty and students stay current on issues of conducting ethical research.

3. **Professional Development**: Provide students with as much information and assistance as possible regarding programmatic and professional opportunities and decisions. Such support includes networking and document/skill development. The Graduate School, Faculty & TA Development, The Office of Responsible Research Practices, Career Connection, and Counseling and Consultation Services regularly offer free workshops and services for graduate students. **If you are interested in similar workshops focused on your department or college's specific needs, please contact the Graduate School.**

    Resources for Professional Development at Ohio State:

    a. **The Graduate School's [Professional Development Web Page](#):** (workshops, programs, and resources for graduate students and faculty on topics related to the dissertation process, academic career development, careers outside academia, publication and other scholarly pursuits, IRB guidelines, soft skills and the Preparing Future Faculty mentorship program)

    b. **[University Center for the Advancement of Teaching](#):** (assessment and consultation services for faculty and TAs, workshops and services on teaching techniques and portfolio development and documentation)

    c. **[Career Connection](#):** (on-line tools, resources and personal consultation services for self and career exploration, academic and non-academic job searches, document development, interviewing, and negotiation)

      d. **Counseling and Consultation Services:**
         (ABD Support Group; stress management workshops; personal and group
         psychological and psychiatric counseling)

      e. **Human Resources:**
         (insurance, benefits, leave policies)

      f. **Ohio Union Activities Board:**
         (graduate student social, professional, & wellness programming)

4. Students come into graduate programs because they want to contribute something to the discipline and to society. **Be aware of these external motivations** and prepared to help them identify other career paths if graduate studies do not work out. (see 2.a. & c. above)

5. **Help locate the best resources** for your students, academic and beyond.

    a. **The Graduate School's Forms and Publications Web Page:**
        (Graduate School Handbook; Exam, Dissertation and Thesis Information; Graduate Studies Committee Chairs Guidelines; Graduation Policies & Procedures; GA Appointment Policies & Benefits [sick & maternity leave]; Registration; Financial Support; Faculty & Student programming)

6. Help teach students about **the importance of networking** outside the lab, outside the subfield, outside the department, etc.

7. Encourage students not to get too compartmentalized and isolated during their graduate studies both in a personal and in a disciplinary sense. **Encourage them to be a part of a supportive community**. This may be in their graduate student cohort or department, a student or community group.

8. Organize a weekly departmental brown bag for interested students to keep in touch about projects and progress; this is a great way for students (and faculty!) to stay in the loop and become aware of needs, concerns, and questions *before* they become a problem.

Assessment

A. Develop and Communicate Appropriate Expectations

1. **Develop reasonable expectations for yourself in terms of time and effort**. One suggestion is to view one advisee as one credit hour's worth of work per quarter (1 hour/week interaction plus prep and follow-up time). If you think an issue is beyond your capability or training, refer a student to an appropriate person or service or work together to investigate possible solutions.

2. **Set clear goals and reasonable expectations for your student's progress**. To help predict and keep track of a student's academic progress, consider what work will need to be done for a student to complete their program and break it down into number of years, then quarters, months, etc.

3. **Make transparent your expectations for the quality of student work**. Communicate to your student what constitutes high quality work. Find examples and describe the characteristics of the caliber of work you expect.

4. **Identify areas for improvement**. Although it can be difficult to discern and confront the line between appropriately providing resources and help, and identifying a student who may lack the ability to succeed in a program, sometimes perceived shortcomings can be related to cultural or other differences. In such cases, an advisor may need identify areas which need improvement and help build up a student's skills.

   a. **Writing** style and ability is a common area of concern. **The Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW)** offers multi-faceted approaches to address writing development. However, every advisor/mentor should be able to assess what may seem to be poor writing and determine whether the problem lies with editing issues or with the student's ability to perform.

   b. **Dissertation Writing Groups offered through CSTW**
   Groups are open to Ph.D. students and candidates in any discipline who are at or approaching the dissertation stage of their scholarship. Each group will be comprised of 2-4 writers that will meet one hour per week at an appointed time, determined by their availability. These regular, collaborative, and collegial meetings are a great way to stay motivated, find out what other Ph.D. students are doing, and get careful, individualized feedback on your work from colleagues and a WC Consultant simultaneously. For more information, send an E-mail to the Writing Center at **wcenter@osu.edu, or call 688-4291**

   c. **Cultural differences** can also lead to **miscommunication** with regard to expectations and procedures. Contact the Graduate School (292-6031), the Multicultural Center (699-8449) or the Office of International Education (688-5482) for help.

B. Follow up on Evaluations

Periodically assess your own processes and abilities. Ask: "Where can I make this   process better for students?" "What additional training do I need to be a better advisor and mentor?" "How do I know my methods are working?" (For more resources on assessment, see bibliography/links section)

Graduate Program Commitment

A. Provide Adequate External Support and Incentive

1. **If programs wish to improve their advising and mentoring practices, formal recognition of the time and effort faculty spend on these duties is recommended.** No matter how obvious the inherent value of good advising and mentoring is, it can be difficult to make such time- and energy-intensive practices a priority if they are unrecognized by your department or college or if they take time away from other more visible activities. However, the long-term benefits of quality mentoring to the progress of your field, to the competitiveness of your program, and to your personal development as a scholar and educator are worth the investment.

   a. Start a conversation in your department about how better to inform colleagues of advising responsibilities and how to recognize and support each other in these major commitments.

   b. Be sure to **include all stakeholders** in these conversations. There is often a disconnect between departmental TA supervisors/mentors and these same

students' faculty advisors. Look for ways for faculty, staff, individual advisors and Graduate Studies Committee Chairs to work together seamlessly when communicating about students.

Examples:
One program held a **one-day faculty retreat** on graduate recruiting, advising, standards, mentoring, baselines, and college level commitment. Peer pressure by faculty resulted in full attendance. The program was instrumental in helping faculty confront and deal with these issues. Ask if funding for such initiatives is available.

Another department developed **"area group meetings"** between faculty and students within their larger program. These area groups would have regular meetings with students on mentoring and departmental progress issues. At one point, this initiative lost steam, the group meetings became lax, and it clearly showed in terms of slowed student progress and unmet expectations.

c. **Foster a departmental culture of recognition for excellence in advising and mentoring**. Recognize the time and effort it takes to be a good advisor or mentor through such activities as a departmental or college-level award and documented consideration of mentoring and advising activities in tenure, promotion, and hiring decisions.

Examples:
The CGS James M. Siddens Award for Distinguished Faculty Advising

The Rodica C. Botoman Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching and Mentoring in the College of Humanities

Selected Bibliography & Links

General

University of Nebraska – Lincoln Graduate Council

"Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education"

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, The Rackham School of Graduate Studies

"How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty"
"How to Get the Mentoring You Want: A Guide for Graduate Students"

University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies

"Graduate Supervision: Guidelines for Students, Faculty, and Administrators"

Council of Graduate Schools publications

On the Right Track : A Manual for Research Mentors (2003)

Graduate Education for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2006)

Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Policy, Numbers, Leadership, and Next   Steps (2004)

Preparing Future Faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences: A Guide for Change (2003)

National Academies Press (National Academy of Science; National Academy of Engineering; Institute of Medicine)

Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering (1997)

Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers: A Guide for Postdoctoral Scholars, Advisers, Institutions, Funding Organizations, and Disciplinary Societies (2000)

Diversity in Engineering: Managing the Workforce of the Future (2002)

Achieving XXcellence [sic] in Science: Role of Professional Societies in Advancing Women in Science: Proceedings of a Workshop, Achieving XXcelence in Science 2002 (2004)

Bridges to Independence: Fostering the Independence of New Investigators in Biomedical Research (2005)

Assessment

The following links come from the "Resources" section of The Ohio State University Colleges of the Arts and Sciences assessment intranet site. Any member of the faculty, staff, or student body with an Ohio State e-mail account and log-in password can access this portal. It offers general information on the process of assessment as well as **valuable models of assessment forms and reports** which chronicle the success of the ASC's assessment initiatives.

Suggested Texts on Assessment

Angelo, T.A. & Cross, K.P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers (2nd ed.).* San Francisco: Wiley.

Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for learning: Building a sustainable commitment across the institution.* Sterling, VA: American Association for Higher Education.

Walvoord, B. E. (2004). *Assessment Clear and Simple: A practical guide for instittutions, departments, and general education.* San Francisco: Wiley.

Research Extensive Institution Public Assessment Web Sites:

Colorado University-Boulder

Michigan State University

[North Carolina State University](#)

[University of Arizona](#)

[University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign](#)

[University of Georgia](#)

[University of Washington](#)

[University of Wisconsin-Madison](#)

[Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University](#)