Resources on Doctoral Student Advising

Overall Rationales for Improving Advising

The graduate student population is changing in ways (e.g., age, diverse backgrounds, prior work experience, family responsibilities, financial circumstances) that affect students' educational needs. In addition, the careers they are preparing for are changing too. Many individual faculty & departments are re-thinking their approaches to advising.

Several of our peer institutions have demonstrated that effective advising benefits both students and faculty. They have published guidebooks and concrete advice for students and faculty (see next page). [http://www.rackham.umich.edu/faculty_staff/ensuring_success/promising_practices/mentoring_advising/](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/faculty_staff/ensuring_success/promising_practices/mentoring_advising/)

- The student is more productive in terms of research activity, conference presentations, pre-doctoral publications, and grant-writing. Effective advising has been correlated with higher completion rates and (what faculty consider to be more appropriate) time-to-degree.
- Faculty benefit in terms of both personal and professional satisfaction. As students are more productive, faculty in turn attract better students, cultivate collaborators for future projects, and amplify their own success.
- Departments with a reputation for strong advising relationships are better able to recruit new students and are more satisfying workplaces with abundant creative ideas and good will.

Aligning Faculty-Student Expectations

Setting explicit expectations is critical for both students and faculty. It is helpful to discuss expectations so that they are aligned with student needs at different stages of the program. Some programs establish it as a normal annual activity, while others encourage it at major milestones. Needless to say, the content and shape of advising relationships vary across disciplines. In all fields, in addition to explicit discussion of program requirements, several topics deserve discussion at regular intervals.

- **Student’s goals**: strengths & weaknesses; recent accomplishments & research progress; unanticipated challenges & emerging needs; long range aspirations & skills to achieve them
- **Student’s immediate plans** for research projects, publishing and presenting, professional & networking opportunities, acquiring teaching competencies
- **Plans for funding**: applications for fellowships, grants, other opportunities
- **Projected timeline** for completing projects, job search, and the degree program
- **What to anticipate regarding:**
  - Meetings (when, how often, about which topics)
  - Preferred mode of communication and feedback (how often, what type)
  - Publishing & presenting (what, when, & authorship)
- **The advisor’s circumstances and plans**, since students often view faculty as role models & talking about this will increase understanding of responsibilities & demands on the advisor.
For Further Reading

Published Resources


This book describes a framework and process by which students and faculty can resolve common conflicts. The authors also note: “The process of graduate education involves expectations and rules that are written (e.g., program curriculum or graduate handbooks) and unwritten (e.g., politics, myths, ethos). The ‘unwritten rules’ and expectations can confuse or trip up students, especially those who may be more isolated than others based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic, or other cultural or demographic characteristics.” (p. 11)


Focuses on the mentoring and advising roles of faculty members in science & engineering fields.


Research on leading geneticists and their doctoral “off spring” on how doing “good science” is taught.

Electronic Resources


Two-page handout with guidelines for faculty and students written by George Dekker, then Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Policy, Stanford University.

**Mentoring: How to Mentor Graduate Students - A Faculty Guide.** University of Washington. [http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradFacultyMentor.pdf](http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradFacultyMentor.pdf)

**Mentoring: How to Obtain the Mentoring You Need - A Graduate Student Guide.** University of Washington. [http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradStudentMentor.pdf](http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradStudentMentor.pdf)

Pair of booklets from the University of Washington for faculty and students that offer practical advice gleaned from research on doctoral student advising. Includes resources such as a sample professional development plan and a sample mentor-mentee agreement.


Depicts good mentoring distilled from applications for advising awards.