Graduate Advising Expectations – PhD Program

This document outlines the minimum advising expectations with regard to PhD students in the Neurosciences IDP. Additional requirements, recommendations, and information are provided in the Neurosciences Student Handbook.

The Neurosciences IDP is committed to providing advising in support of the scholarly and professional development of its students. When most effective, the advising relationship entails collaborative and sustained engagement by both the advisor and the advisee. Advising expectations should be periodically discussed and reviewed to ensure mutual understanding. Both the advisor and the advisee are expected to maintain professionalism and integrity.

Faculty advisors serve as intellectual and professional mentors to their graduate students, provide support regarding the academic and non-academic policies that pertain to graduate students, help to prepare students to be competitive for employment in their desired careers, maintain a high level of professionalism in the relationship, and, establish and collaboratively maintain expectations of the advisor/advisee relationship according to program standards.

Graduate students are active contributors to the advising relationship, proactively seeking academic and professional guidance and taking responsibility for informing themselves of, and meeting, policies and degree requirements for their graduate program.

Advising in the First Year

The Program Director and Student Services staff members are the primary resources for information on degree requirements, deadlines, and administrative policies and procedures throughout the student’s enrollment in the program. They can also be consulted for guidance and referral about just about anything. Additionally, a First Year Advisor is assigned to every PhD and MSTP G1 student. This person is meant to serve as a resource and mentor particularly during the first year, but the relationship can continue as long as it is valuable. Students must meet with their First Year Advisor at least once per quarter. If for any reason the relationship isn’t working out students may request a different First Year Advisor and should speak with the Program Director or Student Services Staff to initiate the change.

Thesis Advisors

Students select a thesis advisor after completing at least three laboratory rotations. Once the student officially joins a lab, the thesis advisor serves as the primary advisor and will oversee the student’s academic progress and dissertation research to completion of the PhD. Within 30 days of joining a lab, the student must meet with his/her advisor(s) to review degree requirements and mentoring guidelines and complete the Biosciences Individual Development Plan (IDP). Students must meet with their advisors at least once each academic year and complete the IDP. The frequency of IDP meetings does not change as the student progresses. Students are encouraged to have additional meetings as needed throughout the year to revisit goals, discuss progress and challenges, and get advice about career plans. Students can change advisors at any time; if a change is desired students should meet with the Program Director. Many students are moving toward having a secondary or co-advisor who helps provide mentoring across the breadth of topics being investigated. For example, having a computational advisor as a co-advisor.

Thesis Committee

After passing the Qualifying Exam, the student consults with his/her thesis advisor and selects 3 faculty members to serve on their Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee, also known as the thesis committee. The role of the
thesis committee is to facilitate an open exchange of scientific ideas and results, ensure timely progress to the completion of the degree, and provide guidance on career direction. Thesis committee members can also serve as general advisors to the student. The thesis committee must meet at least once per academic year in Years 3 and 4, and at least twice per academic year starting in Year 5 until the student completes the PhD. Students will regularly update the committee on their progress and engage in discussions that help focus the research. Students and faculty should refer to the Neurosciences Student Handbook for requirements and details regarding thesis committee meetings.

**Degree Progress**

Student services staff will review degree progress annually and send status reports to both students and their advisors. The thesis advisor and thesis committee monitor research progress, provide feedback, and help the student set goals to stay on track for timely completion of the required first author publication, oral defense, and written dissertation. In the case of deficient performance, the thesis advisor must inform the student, Program Director, and Student Services staff in writing. The Biosciences Office of Graduate Education monitors compliance with IDP and thesis committee meetings.

**Informal Advisors**

The Program Director and Student Services Staff are always available to provide help or guidance. Students are also encouraged to seek out additional advising and mentoring, and faculty who are familiar with the program and have been identified as excellent mentors willing to meet with neuroscience program students are listed on the Neurosciences Student Intranet. These selected mentors are meant to provide advice outside of the committee as independent sources for science and administrative advice.

**Green Light for Graduation**

As the student nears readiness to graduate, s/he will schedule a meeting with the thesis committee to discuss what remains to be completed before the student can defend and set an approximate date for the defense and graduation. This is called a “Green Light Meeting” and should take place at least 6 months prior to the thesis defense. The Green Light Meeting Form must be signed by the student, thesis advisors, and committee members, and submitted to student services staff. This form documents that program requirements are met and also specifically outlines specific expectations in terms of data collection and analysis as well as publications.

**Additional Guidance and Advising Resources**

- Neurosciences website: [http://med.stanford.edu/neurogradprogram.html](http://med.stanford.edu/neurogradprogram.html)
- Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education Advising and Mentoring: [https://vpge.stanford.edu/academic-guidance/mentoring](https://vpge.stanford.edu/academic-guidance/mentoring)
- Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education Academic Guidance: [https://vpge.stanford.edu/academic-guidance/overview](https://vpge.stanford.edu/academic-guidance/overview)
- Stanford Biosciences Advising and Mentoring: [https://biosciences.stanford.edu/current-students/advising-and-mentoring/](https://biosciences.stanford.edu/current-students/advising-and-mentoring/)