

Department of Sociology Graduate Student Advising Policy

The sociology department's graduate program is designed to facilitate close collaboration among faculty and students with shared areas of interest. Consistent with this philosophy, graduate students have formal advising relationships, but they are also strongly encouraged to build a network of mentors.

Types of Formal Advisors

The **Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)** serves as the administrative advisor to all graduate students in the sociology department. They handle matters related to admission, enrollment, funding, and degree completion. They are the formal liaison between the department and the Graduate School. They also handle concerns related to other formal advising relationships.

The **Interim Advisor** is assigned to incoming Ph.D. students by the DGS. This faculty member often has similar research interests as the advisee, but it is not always possible to match interests at this point due to bureaucratic considerations (e.g., sabbaticals, advising loads of faculty, etc.). The primary role of the Interim Advisor is to assist the graduate student through the first two years of the program with respect to course selection, program milestones, professional development, networking, and identifying faculty as potential Advisory Committee members. The graduate student is allowed to change interim advisors and/or select a Faculty Advisor earlier than the end of their second year. Please consult with the DGS regarding any changes to the interim advisor.

The **Faculty Advisor** (a.k.a. Dissertation Chair, Advisory Committee Chair) is a tenure-track member of the Graduate Faculty who is primarily responsible for the student's research training, program milestones, and completion of the Ph.D. The student is expected to form an Advisory Committee (i.e., Dissertation Committee) by the end of the second year of the Ph.D. program before planning for their qualifying exam. The student requests a faculty member to serve as the primary Faculty Advisor and, if that person agrees, the student and advisor discuss the membership of the rest of the Advisory Committee.

Mentoring Network

Rather than only relying on one advisor to provide all of the skill development, research experiences, and emotional support for a graduate student, the sociology department encourages students to develop a [mentoring network](#) consisting of not only faculty, but also other professional contacts, other graduate students, and personal connections, in order to build a support system for graduate school and beyond. **Appendix A** provides an example of a mentoring map to guide students in building a robust mentoring network.

Setting Expectations

Graduate advising and mentoring is a collaborative process founded on clear communication of expectations. Both students and advisors should reflect upon their mentoring styles and needs when changing their Interim Advisor or selecting their Faculty Advisor. **Appendix B** provides an example of different mentoring styles. During their first meeting, students and advisors should develop a list of shared expectations. **Appendix C** provides an example of items to discuss during this first meeting.

The Department of Sociology endorses the following minimum expectations for faculty mentors and graduate student advisees.

Graduate advisors should:

- Serve as both intellectual advisors and professional mentors to their students
- Have a working knowledge of university and department policies related to graduate students
- Meet with their advisee at least once a semester (by phone, video call, or in person).
- Promptly respond to emails and requests for meetings from graduate student advisee (timeline to be defined by the mentor and mentee in advance)
- Assist students in preparing for future employment in academic, government, industry, or other professional positions
- Direct students to university resources to support them through various challenges
- Monitor the student's performance every semester and provide feedback on the student's progress toward degree at the annual graduate student review
- Guide students into the larger professional community (e.g., conferences, fellowships, professional organizations, social media, etc.) and mentor students about professional expectations and norms
- Provide timely feedback on all written work, if applicable (timeline to be defined by the mentor and mentee in advance)
- Interact with graduate students in a respectful and professional manner

Graduate advisees should:

- Initiate and maintain regular communication with their advisor
- Meet with their advisor at least once a semester (by phone, video call, or in person).
- Keep their advisor apprised of course enrollments and progress toward program milestones
- Stay informed about policies and requirements regarding their degree program, research activities, and financial support
- Comply with departmental and Graduate School policies and deadlines
- Seek clarification from their advisor or DGS regarding program requirements, policies, and expectations, as needed
- Explore opportunities for professional development
- Be considerate of their advisor's time and availability
- Interact with faculty advisors in a respectful and professional manner

Conflict Management and Resolution

Regular communication and clear expectations can prevent many problems in advising relationships. The following process should be followed if conflicts arise.

The advisor and advisee should attempt to resolve the issue together. If one or both individuals is not comfortable initiating such a discussion, then the DGS or another member of the Advisor Committee can be informally consulted for guidance.

If it is not possible for the parties involved to resolve the problem, the individual requesting assistance should arrange a meeting with the DGS to discuss the problem and the steps that have already been taken to address it. The DGS will assist with developing strategies for the advisor and advisee to resolve the issue.

If the DGS cannot resolve the issue, then the individual requesting assistance should request a meeting with the Department Chair and then, if still unresolved, with the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies of the College of Arts & Sciences to discuss how to best resolve the problem.

Changing Advisors

Graduate students are allowed to change Interim Advisors at any time, upon consultation with the DGS.

Changing a Faculty Advisor after the Advisory Committee has been formed and after any subsequent program milestones have been completed (e.g., qualifying exam, proposal defense) can be very disruptive to the student's progress toward degree.

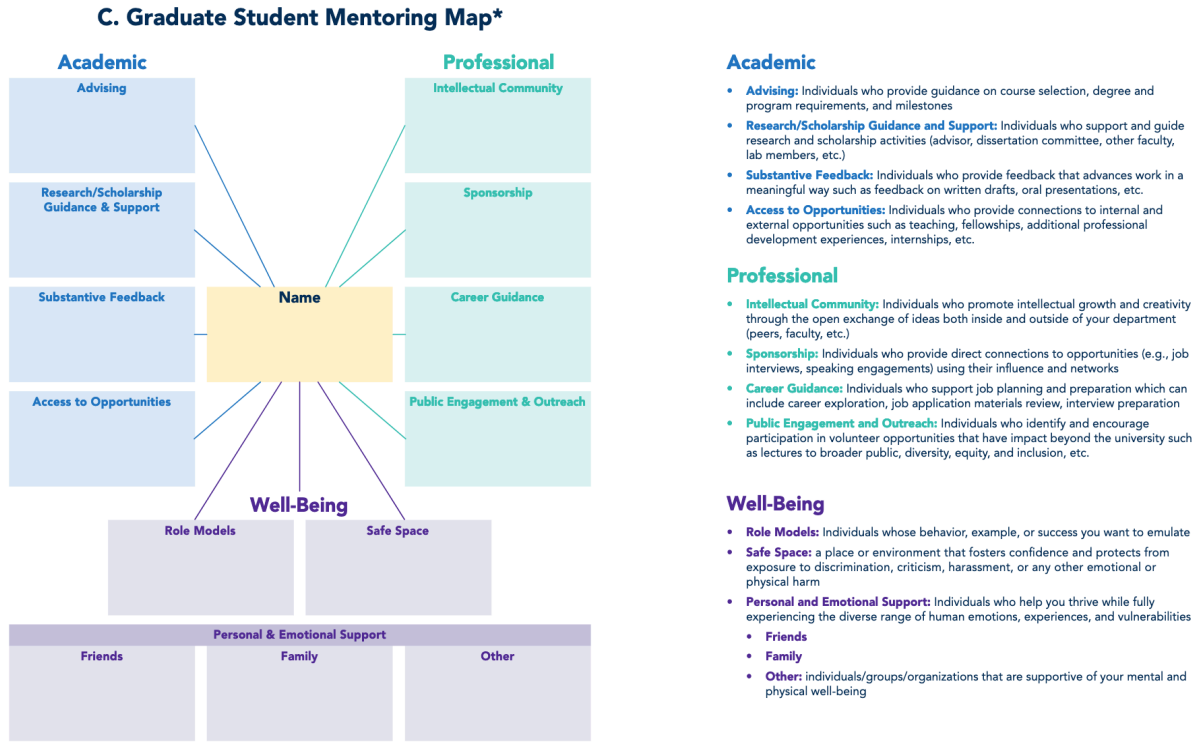
Nonetheless, we recognize that situations sometimes arise where changes to the Faculty Advisor are warranted, such as a poor fit of advising style and student needs, a change in the student's research interests, a faculty member moving to a different institution, or a Title IX complaint.

The following process should be followed if a student wishes to change a Faculty Advisor after the Advisory Committee has been officially formed with the Graduate School.

If possible, the student and advisor should frankly discuss the circumstances prompting a change in advisor. If that is not possible due to the nature of the dissolution of the relationship, the graduate student should consult with the DGS about how to proceed.

Once it has been determined that changing Faculty Advisors is warranted, the graduate student should formally communicate this request to the DGS via email. The DGS will work with the student and the Advisory Committee to find a new Faculty Advisor. The DGS will serve as a temporary advisor until a permanent replacement is found. Note that under most circumstances, changing advisors does not extend the Graduate School timeline for degree completion or eligibility for funding.

Appendix A: Mentoring Map Example



Source: <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/student-mentoring-handbook.pdf>

Appendix B: Mentoring Styles Example

The examples below are adapted from "Advising and Supervising." Gordon B. Davis. In *Researching Information Systems: A handbook for research supervisors and their students*. Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005. Preprint at http://misrc.umn.edu/workingpapers/fullpapers/2004/0412_052404.pdf

Style	Advisor Role and Behavior	Student Role and Behavior
Strong master/apprentice style	Advisor is research director. Advisor has a well specified domain of expertise and set of problems within it.	Student is an apprentice working for the advisor. Student works on advisor's problems.
Collegial master/apprentice style	Advisor is expert who limits advising to problems that are within scope of his or her research skill set but will work on student's problem.	Student develops a problem within advisor's domain and skills and works under the advisor to develop the research plan and procedures.
Collegial development style	Advisor is senior colleague who will respond to student research problem and extend his or her advising domain to include new problems and new skills.	Student takes initiative to introduce new problem that requires new skill set and works as a junior colleague with advisor in joint development of new domain.
Guidance and suggestion style	Advisor is a senior colleague who gives good general guidance over a wide range of problems and methods but does not have personal skill in all of them.	Student is an independent, junior colleague who takes initiative for presenting problems and research plans for discussion and guidance. Student develops required skills.
Passive hands-off style	Advisor has quality control role and responds only to requests or documents and performs only general quality control review.	Student is an independent researcher who takes initiative for developing problem, developing skills, and presenting research plans for general review and approval.

Appendix C: Developing Shared Expectations

1. Communication and Meetings
 - a. What is the best method of communication?
 - b. What is the best frequency for regular communications?
 - c. What is the expected time-frame for a response during the academic year? During breaks? During the summer?
 - d. How often will meetings occur and how long will they be?
 - e. What preparation is expected for meetings?
 - f. What follow-up is expected after meetings?
2. Professional Goals
 - a. What are the student's short-term goals?
 - b. What are the student's long-term goals?
 - c. What knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed to achieve those goals?
 - d. How can the advisor assist in achieving those goals?
3. Meeting Program Milestones
 - a. Map out target dates for milestones.
 - b. When and how should each party communicate delays in reaching milestones?
4. Participation
 - a. What are the expectations for contributing to the intellectual life of the department?
 - b. What are the expectations for participating in professional development activities? Department events? University events? Professional organizations?
5. Feedback
 - a. In what form and how often can a student expect to receive feedback regarding overall progress?
 - b. At what stages of writing can the student expect to receive feedback?
 - c. When can the student expect feedback on written work?
 - d. Does the Faculty Advisor want to approve written products before circulation to the rest of the Advisory Committee?
6. Authorship
 - a. Discuss disciplinary norms around authorship.
 - b. Set clear expectations and opportunities for authorship for all joint projects.
 - c. Establish a process for discussing any changes to the authorship agreement.
7. Funding
 - a. How will the student share plans to pursue external funding?
 - b. What skills does the student need to be competitive for external funding?
 - c. How much notice does the advisor need to supply a letter of recommendation?

Adapted from: <https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/student-mentoring-handbook.pdf>

Approved by Sociology Faculty on 3/25/21; dates updated annually