

**Academic Senate  
Santa Barbara Division**

June 7, 2022

To: Susannah Scott, Chair  
Academic Senate

From: Adam Sabra, Chair  
Graduate Council



**Re: Graduate Council Best Practices for Faculty Mentoring of Graduate Students**

In 2019, Graduate Council (GC) convened a small subcommittee of members to begin drafting guidelines for graduate mentoring. Their draft borrowed heavily from a UC Berkeley document that was approved by their Graduate Council in 2006. Over the next three years, GC continued to revise this draft and solicited feedback from the Academic Senate Executive Council, Graduate Dean, Graduate Student Association, graduate advisors from all schools, colleges and divisions, Associate Dean Faculty Equity Advisors, and the Committee on Academic Personnel.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to faculty, and serve as a starting point for discussions within departments about expectations for mentoring appropriate to their disciplines. There is a growing need for departments to have resources to reference as they contend with graduate student mentoring concerns. We hope that faculty and graduate students will find this document a good basis for discussion about what graduate mentoring should look like in their discipline.

At its meeting of March 14, 2022, the Council unanimously voted to approve this best practices document.

Graduate Division plans to post this document, and distribute it to academic department graduate advisors.

CC: Shasta Delp, Executive Director, Academic Senate

## BEST PRACTICES FOR FACULTY MENTORING OF GRADUATE STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

The Graduate Council offers this set of priorities and best practices for mentoring of graduate students for the consideration of all faculty, staff, and graduate students. These guidelines are aspirational. They are intended to serve as starting points for discussion as individual departments and programs articulate shared expectations for mentoring appropriate to their disciplines. Importantly, different campus departments and programs will have different conventions regarding who has the responsibility for conveying different types of information (for example, general degree requirements). Through discussion, these responsibilities should be clarified in individual department or program handbooks.

Mentors, adapted from the Council of Graduate Schools, are people who fulfill multiple roles:

*Advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance... sponsors, sources of information about, and aid in obtaining opportunities; models of identity, of the kind of person one might be as an academic or professional.*<sup>2</sup>

In addition to teaching the content of a discipline or profession, then, a mentor commits to attending to the wellbeing and professional development of a mentee. That said, mentoring is a professional relationship that *both* the mentor and mentee actively create, a relationship that evolves over time. Moreover, because no single mentor can provide all of the information and support that a graduate student may need, "[e]ffective mentoring is a community effort."<sup>3</sup> Graduate students are encouraged to seek out advice from multiple staff members, faculty members, fellow graduate students, and other campus resources. When needed, these resources include the campus's Title IX officer and Ombuds Office, as the university's rules and regulations govern many issues relating to the relationship between mentors and mentees. Beyond those rules, a broad literature has emerged regarding the effective mentoring of graduate students, recommendations that are summarized here.

Mentoring is a fundamental part of graduate students' education. Underlying all mentoring relationships are some common-sense guidelines which bear repeating. The literature suggests that they are frequently forgotten, although they are necessary for fostering productive professional relationships:

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<sup>1</sup> This document is a modified version of what was approved at UC Berkeley by their Graduate Council in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> As cited in the UC Berkeley document, Zelditch, M. (1990). *Mentor Roles*, Proceedings of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Western Association of Graduate Schools. Cited in Powell, R.C. & Pivo, G. (2001), *Mentoring: The Faculty-Graduate Student Relationship*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona.

<sup>3</sup> Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan (2019), *How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty*, p. 8. Available from <https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/facilitating-academic-success/mentoring-advising/>

- Participating in a mentoring relationship is voluntary on the part of graduate students. Graduate students retain the ability to choose advisors and committee members while making progress to degree. Graduate students should meet, or communicate regularly, with their mentors.
- Either party has the right to withdraw from a mentoring arrangement, if, despite genuine attempts to make it work, the relationship is not satisfactory. If either party feels unclear about the current status of the mentoring, that party should seek to clarify the views and wishes of the other party.
- Mentors should recognize their limitations and avoid working with a student in ways that exceed those limitations.
- Should either party sense there is a conflict of interest between the mentoring and any other role, this should be made known to the other as soon as it is practicable, with decisions made according to campus regulations.
- While a mentor often will have more experience in certain life or work practices, the participants in a graduate mentoring relationship are partners in which the graduate student is ultimately responsible for their education.
- Meetings should be held in an environment (or environments, for example, telephone meetings or Skype/Zoom) where both parties feel comfortable, and feel that they can speak freely without being overheard. Information shared in mentoring meetings is subject to standard rules of professional confidence.
- Meetings should be long enough and paced so as to allow the two people to communicate effectively. Commitments should be honored. If meetings are canceled or delayed, adequate warning of non-availability or delay should be given. A postponed meeting should be re-booked promptly.

### **Best Practices:**

Good mentoring requires a commitment to helping students achieve their academic and professional goals. It involves treating students respectfully and fairly, providing effective and reliable guidance, and serving as a role model for upholding the highest ethical standards.

More particularly, mentoring of graduate students should be provided in **three broad areas**, with the responsibilities for these areas articulated in department or program guidelines:

#### **I. Guiding students through degree requirements.**

- Ensuring that graduate students receive timely information about requirements and policies of the graduate program, understand those policies and requirements, and have opportunities to request clarifications and guidance.
- Advising graduate students on developing a program plan, including appropriate course work, research or creative activity, and a timeline for completion of milestones that will lead to the degree.
- Providing information about relevant and appropriate opportunities for interdisciplinary study, summer institutes, or other curricular offerings external to the department, and supporting student applications for them.
- Providing regular feedback on the progress of the graduate students toward degree requirements. This should include advising them on their preparedness to take the qualifying exam, as well as any departmental “comprehensive” (“prelims”, “PhD entrance”, etc.) exam(s).
- Providing regular and timely feedback and advice about the student’s performance in coursework, where appropriate, as well as their progress in mastering the analytical, technical, and technological skills needed for rigorous academic research in their disciplinary area(s).
- Providing for supervision and advising of graduate students when a committee advisor is on leave or extended absence, or maintaining contact through, for example, Skype or Zoom.

## **II. Guiding students through thesis or dissertation research.**

- Advising graduate students on the selection of a thesis or dissertation topic that offers realistic prospects for successful completion within an appropriate time frame, and on the formation of an effective thesis or dissertation committee.
- Providing training and oversight in the design of research projects, in staying abreast of scholarly literature and recent developments in the field, in rigorous research methodologies, in theoretical and technical aspects of the thesis or dissertation research, and in professional integrity.
- Providing regular feedback on the progress of graduate students toward degree completion, including timely feedback on research, creative activities, and teaching, and constructive criticism if the student’s progress does not meet expectations. This feedback includes (but is not limited to) evaluating clearly and explicitly communicating the strengths and weaknesses of the student’s research, writing, and

presentation skills, and providing clear and constructive commentary that advances the student as a scholar.

- Providing an inclusive and equitable learning environment and a climate that encourages an open exchange of ideas by all participants, and fosters students' creativity and intellectual growth.
- Providing and discussing clear criteria for authorship of collaborative research.
- Assisting in identifying grants, fellowships, or other financial resources to support the research enterprise; teaching the student how to construct compelling proposals for funding; providing feedback on application materials; and writing letters of support.

### **III. Guiding students through professional development and career attainment**

- Creating opportunities for open discussions about students' career goals and working to ensure that students obtain the professional skills, knowledge, and experience that will position them well for their chosen profession. These opportunities include (but are not limited to) facilitating interactions with other scholars and appropriate career professionals, on campus and in the wider community.
- Providing students with the time and resources to explore career options and to develop transferable professional skills (such as communication, management, collaboration, and entrepreneurship.)
- Encouraging participation in professional meetings of regional groups, learned societies, (inter-) disciplinary research groups, campus colloquia, or other opportunities for professional engagement and networking. When appropriate, students also should be encouraged to practice communicating the importance of their research to the public at large.
- Helping graduate students develop professional skills in writing reports, papers, and grant proposals, making professional presentations, establishing professional networks, interviewing, and evaluating manuscripts and papers.
- Facilitating career development, including advising graduate students on appropriate job and career options, including diverse career options, and on the preparation of application materials for appropriate fellowships, scholarships, and other relevant opportunities.

In addition, good mentors demonstrate a willingness to accept each student as a unique individual, both in the discourse of communication and empathetic understanding. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Special attention should be directed to the well-being of the student and to overcoming barriers to learning. In particular:

- Mentors understand that students come from varied backgrounds and have wide-ranging experiences and views that will impact their perspectives; good mentors will seek to understand these diverse views and perspectives, in order to build trust and create a comfortable working environment for all. As part of this environment, a sense of mutual respect should be established between the mentor and the student.
- Mentors encourage students to maintain a healthy balance between their university work and their lives external to the university; this includes respecting students' need for time to pursue activities that support their physical and mental health, and their social and family responsibilities.
- Mentors are aware of campus resources that support students -- from Student Health to the Graduate Student Resource Center – and encourage students to take advantage of these resources as needed.
- Mentors and mentees are encouraged to communicate directly with one another if there is a conflict. Sometimes, however, this might not be possible because of power differences (e.g., the conflict is about the mentor and the mentee worries about possible consequences for their career if it is addressed directly). In these situations, the mentee should communicate their concerns to the department graduate director and/or department chair. The mentee and/or the mentor also have the right to seek outside counsel (e.g., Graduate Division, Title IX, Office of the Ombuds) to help settle the dispute. Both the department and those outside the department should understand the sensitivity of the situation and maintain confidentiality of everyone involved.

Mentors and mentees also have a responsibility to inform each other as soon as possible if there is a potential change in their employment. For instance, if a mentor is no longer able to support a student on a grant, they should let the graduate student know. The mentor should also clearly articulate the type of work that is expected on a project. Likewise, the graduate student should inform the mentor immediately if they are unable to complete a project or grant, as well as provide documentation of the work that was conducted thus far.

As partners in the mentoring relationship, graduate students have responsibilities. In particular:

- Students should monitor and be aware of their own mentoring needs and how these change through their graduate student tenure. Graduate students should discuss

these changing needs with their mentors. If concerns arise about physical or mental health, dealing with stress, or disability, these may be brought to the attention of a mentor.

- Students recognize that one faculty member will not be able to satisfy all of a student's mentoring needs, and they should seek assistance from multiple individuals/organizations.
- Students maintain and seek regular communication with their mentors, acknowledging that their mentoring needs must respect a mentor's other responsibilities and time commitments.
- Students should be aware of – and work with mentors to meet – the deadlines associated with the degree program.
- Students should make sure that, in cooperation with the faculty member in charge of the graduate program, all parties are informed if a change of advisor or committee membership is contemplated. If specific research plans have been agreed with one advisor, see these through, if possible, before changing to another advisor.

## References

The guidelines are based on the following:

**Mentoring Guidelines**, *Graduate Council, University of California, Davis*,  
<http://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu/gradcouncil/mentoring.pdf>

In addition, the following sources were consulted:

**Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend**, *National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine*,  
<http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/mentor/>

**Guidelines for Faculty Mentors**, *University of California, San Francisco*,  
<https://facultyacademicaffairs.ucsf.edu/faculty-life/mentoring-resources>  
**Faculty Mentoring Handbook**, *The Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan*,  
<https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/facilitating-academic-success/mentoring-advising/>

**National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018.** *Graduate STEM Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.17226/25038>.

## **Resources**

[Basic Needs Resources](#)

[Counseling & Psychological Services](#)

[Disabled Students Program \(DSP\)](#)

[Distressed Students Response Protocol](#)

[Financial Crisis Response Team](#)

[Graduate Division Academic Counselor](#)

[Graduate Student Resource Center](#)

[Ombuds Office](#)

[Student Health](#)

[Title IX & Sexual Harassment Policy Compliance Office](#)