

Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising

Preamble: Purdue University is committed to providing its graduate students with a world-class education and equipping them to become leaders in society and in the global workforce. Key to success is the relationship between the student and major professor. The advisory role of the major professor is arguably the most significant factor influencing quality of education, development of professional skills, and overall career success for Purdue graduate students. Consequently, it is imperative that graduate faculty members provide mentoring and advising concomitant with a preeminent university. The principles articulated in this document were endorsed by the Graduate Faculty via approval by the Graduate Council to help assure that every graduate student receives the best educational experience Purdue has to offer.

General Advising Guidelines

Serving as a major professor involves being supportive and engaged in promoting academic and career success for Purdue graduate students.

1. Although the Graduate School offers orientation programming for new students and departments and colleges typically also provide orientation sessions, most students are not fully aware of academic expectations, the best ways to navigate their graduate program, and the employment opportunities available to them when they graduate. Major professors should:
 - a) work with their students to develop an academic plan (to include periodic milestones along the way) that will help them progress through their degree program in a timely manner and properly prepare them for success after graduation;
 - b) encourage participation in professional development activities, relevant to their students' professional goals;
 - c) assist their students in assembling their advisory and examining committees; and
 - d) discuss with their students long-term career objectives and provide guidance in securing summer internships (when appropriate) and permanent job placement. This assistance may include introductions to colleagues in industry, government, or at other universities, and/or referrals to resources on campus, such as the Center for Career Opportunities.
2. On occasion, major professors may have to change the nature of their advisory relationship with their student. This can occur when professors retire or move to another university, or when students change major professors. In such cases, major professors should do all that is possible to ensure that their students have a pathway to completion and assist their students during the transition.
3. Research style and organization can vary widely among faculty. Students are often not aware of what is expected and how progress is measured. Major professors should make their expectations for research and their view of what constitutes satisfactory progress clear. Furthermore, at the onset of thesis/dissertation research, students should be given a clear picture of the accomplishments expected for degree completion.
4. An important part of developing as a scholar and successfully progressing through a degree program involves receiving feedback. Major professors should provide progress reviews to their students at least annually and should be accessible so that students can receive input when needed.

Guidelines for Supervising Graduate Staff

Graduate faculty oversee research, but in many cases they also supervise graduate teaching assistants, graduate research assistants, and other graduate staff. In these cases, faculty members have additional responsibilities.

1. Faculty supervisors should be familiar with department, college, Graduate School, and university policies regarding graduate staff employment and should refer students to the appropriate sources for employment information, such as the *Graduate Staff Employment Manual*, department resources (if available), and the Office of Human Resources.
2. Faculty should provide graduate staff working as research, administrative, and/or teaching assistants clear expectations of the roles, responsibilities, and professional benefits that come with that employment, and the associated time commitments should be consistent with university policy. For example, students on 50 CUL and 25 CUL appointments are expected to work approximately 20 and 10 hours per week respectively.
3. A common source of stress among graduate students is the uncertainty associated with funding. Loss of funding or gaps in funding can result in student attrition. Major professors should discuss the funding situation with their students, keep the students apprised of any anticipated changes as soon as this information becomes known, and discuss contingency options in the event funding becomes unavailable. Where possible, the academic unit should ensure continuity of funding, except in cases of poor academic or work performance.
4. Faculty members, departments, and colleges should regularly review graduate student salary levels to assure that they are appropriate.

Guiding Principles

A good student-advisor relationship is an important ingredient in helping students to be productive in their research and requires establishing reasonable expectations. While it is difficult to define “reasonable expectations” in a broad sense, the following principles and practices can be helpful in achieving a positive climate for discovery in which graduate students can thrive.

1. Major professors should take care in not overburdening their graduate students: there should be realistic expectations, recognizing that students have the right to a personal and social life outside of work and time off, periodically, to rest and relax. Major professors should avoid working conditions that preclude their students from having a manageable work-life balance, as this is not in the best interest of Purdue’s graduate students.
2. The best major professors are understanding, supportive, and empowering, providing enough guidance to allow students to explore and discover without over directing or micromanaging. Students should be encouraged by their major professors to interact with their advisory and examining committees, as these committee members can provide multiple perspectives that can be beneficial. They should also encourage other types of mentoring relationships where appropriate.
3. The best major professors put their students first amid competing priorities.
4. Students should be given opportunities to attend and participate in professional development activities as these are important to prepare them for the competitive job market.
5. Projects in which faculty members involve students should be appropriate and consistent with providing a valuable educational work or research experience.