Department of Psychology Graduate Student Mentorship Policy[1]

I. Values Statement

The purpose of this document is to articulate our collective commitments to graduate student mentorship/advising that centers core values of the department and creates an accountability structure to ensure that students are given mentorship and resources throughout their graduate program, promoting their ability to thrive. Effective mentoring and successful graduate outcomes require establishing and implementing best practices from the beginning of a graduate student's career within the department. To support this, we commit to the following broad values:

Respect.

Advisors shall exhibit and model respect for the advisee, including respecting the advisee's time, research, and professional goals.
The mentor is an important source of advice and guidance but should respect the advisee's independence and autonomy. This covers both the advisee's time and scholarship.

Communication

Advisors shall provide transparent communication about expectations.
The advisor should have regular discussions with the advisee about both parties' expectations, so that it is clear when basic standards are not being met. Clear communication can help reduce misunderstandings.

Professionalism

Advisors shall be professional in their interactions with advisees.
Mentorship can extend into various domains of life, especially with regard to concerns about work-life balance, but both parties should have clear boundaries around what are appropriate spheres for discussions.

Well-being

Advisors shall acknowledge the importance of maintaining well-being and work-life balance.
Advisors should recognize that continual maintenance of oneself is necessary for health and happiness and to avoid "burnout". Advisors should recognize the challenges involved in maintaining an appropriate work/life balance and be committed to an open dialogue about the advisee's needs.

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[1] This document focuses on expectations for advisors/mentors, not expectations for advisees. Of course, many of the values and expectations described should be reciprocal.

Portions of this document were drawn from UMD's Department of Anthropology mentoring guide and the University of Michigan's Graduate Student Mentorship Guide for Faculty created by the Rackham Graduate school. Thanks to the 2021-22 and 2022-23 PSYC graduate committee and the UMD graduate school mentorship committee for input and suggestions.

Responsiveness

Advisors shall be responsive to advisee's communications and requests.
Advisors should be responsive to communications. Advisors and advisees should develop a shared understanding of reasonable timelines for this responsiveness.

Normalized change

Advisors should support mentees working with additional advisors and/or initiating a change of mentorship if such is deemed beneficial by the advisee.
The advisor-advisee relationship is typically assigned before the advisee arrives on campus. Sometimes this partnership is simply not a good fit for a variety of reasons. Advisors should support changes to mentorship with assurances and support that this is not a problematic or disruptive decision.

II. The Faculty Advisor-Graduate Student Advisee Relationship

Students are assigned a primary advisor in their area of concentration/subfield of study at the time of admission. The smooth functioning of the faculty advisor-graduate student advisee relationship is essential to student success and should be predicated on the values articulated above. Once the advisor-advisee relationship has been formalized, the faculty advisor and graduate student advisee will meet on a regular basis (at a mutually determined interval) until the student graduates from the program. Meeting on a regular basis is defined here as meeting *at least* once a month (in person or virtually) throughout the academic year. Typically, more frequent meetings are expected, especially during periods of intense data analysis, writing activity, and/or other periods where additional support is deemed necessary. In addition to these regular meetings, advisors are expected to attend all meetings directly related to the status and future of their advisee (e.g., proposals, defenses, qualifying exams) unless their advisee requests otherwise. Should the faculty member be away (for example, on leave or attending to other responsibilities), they should still check-in at least once a month via email or zoom call.[2]

A critical component of the advisor-advisee relationship is the establishment of clear lines of communication surrounding coursework, research, teaching, and the student's overall wellbeing. This clear line of communication should be established as the graduate student begins the program and maintained throughout their graduate career. Both parties should expect their counterpart to be responsive to communications and work products. Ideally, they should reach consensus about what are reasonable timelines for this responsiveness *in advance*. (The best practice here is to establish *specific* expectations, for example agreed-upon timeframes for responding to emails and for giving feedback on written work.[3]) Communication should focus on monitoring student progress, establishing mechanisms for providing ongoing

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[2] For cases where regular contact is infeasible (e.g., some instances of family or medial leave), advisors should ensure the advisee has access to other sources of mentorship.

[3] A helpful framework to establish these (and other) expectations is the *Statement of Mutual Expectations* from the graduate school. This is required for graduate assistants (GAs) and their supervisors and is highly encouraged for advisors/advisees as well. This form should be completed or reviewed each year.

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feedback to the student, imparting concrete guidance on research/internship development, assisting students in effectively managing their time, and encouraging participation in departmental/campus life. Advisors should encourage reciprocal feedback and evaluation of their own mentoring performance as well. Through these ongoing discussions, advisors should seek to model and cultivate ethical relationships and behavior surrounding research conduct and authorship, including clearly articulating and mutually agreed upon conventions for co-authorship as relevant.[4]

As students begin their program of study, advisors and advisees should strive to align expectations about their graduate training and career aspirations and revisit options on a regular basis. If the student's aspirations are to work outside of academia or traditional applied settings, the advisor should be supportive and foster connections to other mentors who can provide guidance on career development and navigating the job market. Advisors should model professional responsibility and have open conversations with their students about professional development and professionalization.

Advisors should engage with their advisees holistically, focusing not only on their academic journeys but also supporting an appropriate balance between their academic/graduate work and their personal lives. This includes encouraging advisees to take necessary time to engage with challenges they may be facing in their personal lives that impact degree progress. This also includes more broad encouragement of the work/life balance appropriate to the educational and personal needs of each of their advisees. This balance will vary across individuals and over time, and advisors are reminded that what works for one student may not work for another. Advisors should aim to provide concrete forms of support (e.g., referrals to campus support services) during challenging times and also help students find creative solutions to address these challenges. Students are also encouraged to engage in these personal conversations as is helpful with faculty who are not their advisors. Faculty will respect students' personal boundaries and decisions about confidentiality and disclosure of personal circumstances as much as possible. (Note, however, that UMD faculty are mandated reporters for disclosed sexual misconduct and so cannot promise confidentiality or nondisclosure in these cases.)

Of course, faculty advisors *also* need support so that they may provide good advising on diverse issues of interest to their graduate student advisees. Faculty advisors should reach out to the Director and Assistant Director of Graduate Studies as needed to receive information on upcoming milestones, activities, and associated forms they will need to complete with their graduate student advisees. Faculty advisors are strongly encouraged to engage in regular training opportunities for mentoring to ensure that they are up to date on best practices and emerging issues.

Multiple Advisors

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[4] The APA's tips for determining authorship credit and the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) may be useful starting points for these discussions.

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Upon beginning graduate school, graduate students are assigned a primary mentor. The primary mentor is responsible for helping the student navigate campus policies, ensure that the student is making good progress toward their degree, and providing research mentorship. However, the department recognizes the value of providing students with multiple avenues for career development. Thus, graduate students should work with their primary faculty mentor and/or area head to identify an appropriate secondary academic/career advisor. The secondary faculty mentor is responsible for meeting with the student at least annually and should remain open to additional meetings if requested. The secondary mentor's role is to provide a supportive environment in which the student can discuss their progress and career ambitions. The secondary mentor is not expected to work directly with the student on research projects; however, such collaborative opportunities should not be discouraged when they appear to be in the student's best interests.

In addition, other faculty-student relationships can and often should be viewed as mentorship opportunities. For example, graduate students regularly serve as teaching assistants and instructors for diverse classes at the University of Maryland. Identifying and working with an experienced teaching mentor assists graduate students in building instructional skills, strategizing difficult classroom situations, finding useful learning resources, and developing a personal pedagogy. Providing opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring is also important as more experienced students can offer insights into available resources, departmental norms, and non-academic support. Having a broad mentorship network provides graduate students the opportunity to receive the holistic support they need to be successful. Both the primary and secondary mentor should help students cultivate such a mentoring network that includes faculty and peer mentors (within and/or outside the department). Advisors should also encourage their advanced graduate students to offer mentorship to more junior students.

Changing Primary Advisors

Per the [UMD Graduate School](#), the faculty advisor-graduate student advisee relationship is one of mutual agreement. Either party may request termination of the relationship at any point in the student's graduate career. A change of advisor may occur for a variety of reasons, such as students and advisors having different research interests or work styles, or if faculty retire or leave the university. Regardless of the specific situation, if both parties agree to terminate the relationship and the student has secured a satisfactory arrangement with a new advisor, no further discussion is necessary (although all parties – the student, the former advisor, the new advisor, and the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) – will need to complete and sign off on the Transition Plan (see below), which will be maintained for administrative purposes).

When a change of advisor cannot be resolved amicably, the party seeking the change should initiate a confidential conversation with the DGS and/or the Department Chair. Separate meetings will be held between the graduate student, current advisor, proposed new advisor, DGS, and/or Chair, and faculty members of the Graduate Committee if desired. Meetings will not be convened with all of the stakeholders simultaneously and no formal written statement

from either party will be required. If the other party does not already know about the requested change, then they will be notified after meeting/s between the above stakeholders.

If agreement is not achieved between the former advisor and student in terminating the relationship, there is no clear replacement advisor presented by the graduate student, or if this proposed new advisor has not agreed to replace the former advisor, then the DGS and Chair will discuss the best possible candidates who might serve as a new advisor. The Graduate Committee and members of the relevant area of concentration will be brought in to discuss possible candidates if needed and at the discretion of the DGS and/or Chair. The consideration of advisor candidates will take into account the best possible match in terms of interests as well as the equitable distribution of faculty advising responsibilities. Candidates for advisor will be approached after these deliberations if they were not already part of them. Note that the department cannot guarantee that a student will secure a new advisor and, according to the graduate policy, a student has up to 4 months to make a transition to a new advisor.

The DGS will work with the student, old advisor, and new advisor to develop a clear Transition Plan for the graduate student moving to a new advisor. This Transition Plan should address, among other topics, implications for program requirements (coursework, exams, advancement to candidacy), how students' funding will be maintained, and intellectual property concerns (e.g., continued research obligations, authorship on completed or ongoing research). The student, the former advisor, the new advisor, and DGS will sign the Transition Plan, which will be maintained for administrative purposes.

Graduate student self-care resources
- UMD Counseling Center
  https://www.counseling.umd.edu/

- Mental health and other resources compiled by the Dean's Graduate Student Advisory Council (DGSAC): https://bsos.umd.edu/graduate/about-dgsac

- James, B. T. (2019). Staying in and staying healthy: Insights for positive mental health in graduate school. *The Behavioral Neuroscientist and Comparative Psychologist*.
  https://ter.ps/stayingin

Mentoring Resources
- University of Maryland, the Office of Faculty Affairs:
  https://faculty.umd.edu/faculty/mentoring.html

- University of Maryland - Postdoc mentoring resources:
  https://gradschool.umd.edu/postdocs/resources

- University of Michigan Mentoring Guide for Faculty
  https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/how-to-mentor-graduate-students.pdf

- University of Michigan Mentoring Guide for Graduate Students
  https://rackham.umich.edu/downloads/student-mentoring-handbook.pdf

- APA Guidelines on Equitable and Respectful Treatment of Students in Graduate Psychology Programs
  https://www.apa.org/about/policy/guidelines-equitable-treatment-students

Other resources

- Maestre, F. T. (2019). Ten simple rules towards healthier research labs. *PLoS Computational Biology, 15*(4), e1006914.

- Gee, K. L., & Popper, A. N. (2017). Improving academic mentoring relationships and environments. *Acoustics Today, 13*(3), 27-35.

- Colón-Ramos, D. A. (2018). Statements of Mentorship. Eneuro, 5(6).

- Chapter 5: Mentoring and Being Mentored. In *Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty*, Second Edition.
  https://www.hhmi.org/science-education/programs/making-right-moves