

Mentoring Doctoral Students in GSAS (Fall 2020)

This document is intended to provide a set of general guidelines for the mentorship of doctoral students in NYU's Graduate School of Arts and Science. It was developed through discussions with faculty who attended any of four listening sessions held during the fall 2018 term, and with GSAS doctoral students who attended either of two listening sessions held during that same semester.

Definitions

These guidelines presume a distinction between a *mentor* and an *advisor*:

An *advisor* focuses on program requirements and a student's progress in fulfilling them. Advising is managed differently in different departments and may or may not be seen as the responsibility of the faculty mentor. Advising may be provided by departmental administrators, Directors of Graduate Studies, advisory committees, faculty supervisors, or—as is often the case—a combination of these.

A *faculty mentor* focuses mainly on providing professional guidance and field-specific training. While the dissertation supervisor typically functions as the faculty mentor, this role can also be fulfilled by other faculty members within or outside of NYU.

The Mentor–Mentee Relationship

The primary purpose of the mentor-mentee relationship is to provide the student with a rich and supportive academic environment and intellectual experience, so that the student can achieve his or her full potential and excel in dissertation research. This objective entails responsibilities for both parties, as well as for academic departments.

The faculty member will, at minimum, provide:

- Assistance in identifying a viable dissertation project that meets the interests and goals of the student and (when the mentor is the dissertation supervisor) is compatible with the expertise of the faculty member;
- Direction in finding and accessing the resources needed to conduct the dissertation research;
- Guidance in assembling a dissertation committee;
- Timely feedback regarding the student's ideas, proposals, data, and writing, as well as timely submission of letters of reference. Timely may mean different things in different fields, but one month is not an unreasonable upper bound regardless of field. (Note that

this assumes that sufficient notice—i.e., one month, minimum—is given to the faculty mentor with respect to deadlines for submission of proposals and letters);

- Counsel on and support for next steps as the student approaches graduation—e.g., help in assembling a dissertation defense committee, assessing various career pathways, and identifying post-doctoral training and/or job opportunities;

Ideally, the faculty mentor will offer the student opportunities to build a network in the field. This may include, for example, inviting the student to meetings with visiting faculty, supporting the student in attending discipline-relevant professional meetings, or introducing the student to colleagues in professional situations.

Once a faculty member agrees to take on a student as a mentee, the student and faculty member should meet to discuss and agree on mutual expectations for their interactions. Specifically, they should arrive at a verbal or written plan regarding how often they will meet, how they will communicate, what the turn-around time will be for the submission of work and the provision of feedback, how progress will be gauged, whether the student is expected to perform work other than that related to the dissertation, and how authorship will be attributed for work produced. The goals of the student should be recognized from the outset and respected throughout the student's time in the program.

The mentor–mentee relationship should be one of mutual respect and fairness. This is expected to be a professional relationship based on collegial interactions. It is recognized that, over time, doctoral students and faculty mentors develop close working relationships that can include collegial social interaction; such interaction is generally productive and valuable to both mentor and mentee. However, faculty should be mindful of the inherent power imbalance between faculty members and graduate students, and take care to not exploit that dynamic. The boundaries of professional interaction must be respected, and all University policies regarding appropriate relationships and the prohibition of harassment must be adhered to. University guidelines for reporting inappropriate behavior must be followed in the event of an incident.

If the faculty member becomes unable to serve as a mentor, that individual should facilitate the student's finding another appropriate faculty member to take over the role. For example, a faculty member's personal situation or work load may change, or a sabbatical may arise making it difficult to provide appropriate support and guidance to the student. In such cases, if the mentor is unable to sustain the supervisory role, another appropriate mentor should be found in a timely manner.

In the event that a conflict arises between the mentor and mentee regarding the mentee's performance or progress, the issue should be brought to the attention of the DGS or other responsible departmental official. If necessary, the matter can be referred to GSAS—to the Assistant Dean for Students—for consideration.

The student will take responsibility for his or her own progress, which entails:

- Articulating goals and needs, providing sufficient notice to the faculty mentor with respect to deadlines for submission of proposals and letters of recommendation. (As indicated above, one month constitutes reasonable notice that input, feedback, or a letter is needed);
- Asking for help when necessary;
- Knowing the program requirements;
- Seeking guidance with respect to the completion of program requirements, making progress through the program, and obtaining mentoring for professional development;
- Accurately recording research progress and results. Complete records of experimental data and archival research and writing are important for completion of the dissertation and for career development.

The department will provide clear information on policies and procedures with respect to advising and assistance. This includes:

- Identifying who in the department is available to assist with course selection, registration, and the fulfillment of program requirements, and making sure that students are aware of the departmental advising structure.
- Identifying an individual (or individuals, such as a committee) to whom students can bring concerns about any stressful, negative, or neglectful situations they experience. It is important that a safe, responsive environment be provided such that concerns can be brought forward without threat of repercussions. Each department should provide a plan for how such situations will be addressed and ensure that students and faculty know what the structure is. To that end, the departmental plan must be approved by GSAS and included in the department's graduate student handbook.
- Establishing clear standards for what constitutes timely feedback for student work in the context of both class assignments and independent research and writing.
- Providing—independently or in collaboration with other like departments—guidance for students on career planning and successful navigation of the professional field.

The guidelines outlined above address GSAS's general expectations for mentorship. For those seeking further, more in-depth information about successful mentoring, note that many other universities have also adopted guidelines that may be useful. Such guidelines largely dovetail

with the concerns and proposed procedures discussed in the listening sessions on which the GSAS guidelines are based. Provided below, for informational purposes, are links to several other universities' guidelines. Most are similar to one another and are based, at least in part, on a publication on the topic from the University of Michigan's Rackham Graduate School entitled "How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide For Faculty" (linked first, below).

Existing Policies and Resources:

<https://rackham.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fmentoring.pdf>

<http://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/core-programs/mentoring/mentoring-guides-for-faculty/>

<https://gradschool.duke.edu/professional-development/mentoring/faculty>

<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/resources-for/faculty/excellence-in-mentoring/best-practices-for-mentors-of-doctoral-students.html>

