Advising is a key component in the successful completion of a graduate degree. A good advising relationship correlates positively with student achievement, retention, and satisfaction. A successful advising process ultimately reflects well on the department and the institution and helps to build the program, attract high quality students, recognize faculty contributions in this critical area, and conserve scarce departmental resources.

The following easy-to-implement process can help ensure that high quality advising is a part of your graduate programs.

### Clarify Expectations

Colleges and programs often have different understandings of advising and mentoring and it’s becoming increasingly common to use advising teams. Clarifying expectations in your unit is an important first step in promoting best practices in advising relationships. Take steps to ensure that students in their programs receive high quality advising and mentoring; programs may wish to designate a person to coordinate this effort. The following checklist offers suggestions to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We have not discussed this in our program.</th>
<th>We have an informal understanding.</th>
<th>We have a written policy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often are advisers expected to meet with their advisees?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the key functions of an adviser?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the boundaries of the relationship between an adviser/advisee?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What challenges do faculty face in providing high quality advising?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do conflicts between students and advisers get resolved?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A useful resource, SUCCESS for Faculty Mentors & Graduate/Professional Students is available at [http://www.sos.umn.edu/stafffaculty/SUCCESSMentors.pdf](http://www.sos.umn.edu/stafffaculty/SUCCESSMentors.pdf)
Provide Orientation

Once you have determined standards for your department, you may want to develop written documents for faculty and an orientation program for new students. Providing an orientation for students – and new graduate faculty – will support students and their advisers as they work to establish a mutually beneficial collaborative relationship.

In developing an orientation program:

- Determine the information that students need within your department. Things to consider:
  - Academic requirements
  - Criteria for satisfactory progress
  - Culture
  - Successful adviser-advisee relationships
  - Survival strategies
- Customize by level:
  - Years 1-2: stronger focus on academic plan and GA/TA/RA expectations
  - Year 2-3: focus on research and career
  - Year 4 and on: focus on career
- Integrate existing resources including the Comprehensive Guide to Finishing a Doctoral Degree and the Graduate Student Virtual Commons.

Utilize experienced students in planning, evaluating and delivering orientation sessions. Remember that orientation need not be a one-time event; you may wish to offer shorter sessions on various topics throughout the year. Consider other methods of delivery, such as online.

Evaluate Process and Outcomes

Satisfaction with advising, both on the part of the student and of faculty, is also important to assess. The Council of Graduate Students (COGS) survey is a good place to start. Reports are available by unit for those with large enough populations.

You may also want to conduct your own assessment of advising. Collecting baseline data and establishing quality indicators can help provide a snapshot of your advising program and identify areas for continued development.
Indicators to consider are:

- Number of students who graduate each year, noting PhD track students who “master out”
- Number of, and circumstances regarding, students who withdraw each year
- Number of, and circumstances regarding, students who change advisers
- Feedback from faculty on their advising roles
- Feedback from students on the advising relationship

Provided below is a sample template of the type of evaluation form that can be used to gather feedback from students. Please feel free to modify this template to fit your individual program needs and take steps to ensure that the students in your program feel comfortable sharing information on their advising experience. Specifically, if your program departs significantly from the ‘one adviser’ model, or if students do not have an assigned adviser, be sure to edit the questions to accurately reflect the advising practice used by your program. If there are very small numbers of students in the program, consider reporting the results in a larger aggregate summary.

Consultants from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) can help you design an assessment plan that will be confidential, appropriate to your program, and simple-to-implement. They also work with programs to promote the best use of findings.

Finally, review annually with faculty any data that has been collected to get their feedback, review expectations, and consider ideas for improvement of current practice.

### Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>The Graduate School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Office Plaza, Suite 400</td>
<td>322 Johnston Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2221 University Ave. SE</td>
<td>101 Pleasant St SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 612-625-3041</td>
<td>Contact: Karen Starry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:teachlrn@umn.edu">teachlrn@umn.edu</a></td>
<td>Phone: 612-625-2815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduate Student Adviser Evaluation

Thank you for taking this survey, which seeks to gather information about your experience over the past year about your advising relationship. This important feedback will be used to help improve the quality of advising – a critical function of programs. Please answer as many questions as you wish, and return the form to (location) by (date). Your adviser will not see this form; the faculty in your program may be informed of the summary of responses.

1. **About how many times have you met with your academic adviser in the current academic year?**

   0  1  2  3  4  5  more than 5

2. **Have you talked with your adviser about any of the following topics? Please check all that apply.**

   - [ ] Progress to date
   - [ ] Academic course planning
   - [ ] Funding
   - [ ] Publishing
   - [ ] Attending conferences
   - [ ] Teaching
   - [ ] Research
   - [ ] Your career goals
   - [ ] The job search process

3. **My adviser is available when needed.**

   Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  Strongly Disagree

4. **My adviser has a thorough understanding of my overall progress.**

   Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  Strongly Disagree

5. **My adviser listens to my concerns and questions.**

   Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  Strongly Disagree

6. **My adviser provides constructive feedback.**

   Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  Strongly Disagree

**Please indicate your year of study:**

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  more than 7

**Please use the back of this sheet for any comments you wish to make.**