

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR ADVISING AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN FACULTY AND STUDENTS**

*Adopted by the Faculty on Feb. 19, 2019*

These expectations were developed by the CU-Boulder Sociology Graduate Committee during the 2018-2019 academic year and grounded in experience and student feedback. Faculty and graduate students should familiarize themselves with this document. It is meant to be a living document and will continue to be updated periodically based on feedback and learning about best practices.

The document includes information on roles, general advising expectations, and specific advice for faculty advisors and student advisees. Recommendations are offered based on the student's point in the program, and statements on communication and professional boundaries are also included. Additional resources and advice for faculty-student advising relationships are available online (details below) and in the appendices.

### **I. Roles**

The faculty advisor's role is threefold: 1) to provide graduate students with guidance as they progress through the program, 2) to offer advice regarding professional development, and 3) to offer constructive feedback on work.

The graduate program coordinator is the students' primary source of guidance around paperwork, deadlines, and other administrative issues.

### **II. Advisor-Student Communication Expectations**

See below for more general information about communication between faculty and students; this section applies to advising specifically. Whether or not the student and advisor decide to implement a formal communication agreement (see Appendix A for an example), they should discuss and mutually agree on the following:

- Frequency and length of in-person advising meetings, as well as expectations regarding who initiates advising meetings (these agreements will likely change as the student progresses through the program);
- How best to communicate outside of in-person advising meetings;
- Boundaries in the advising relationship (e.g., whether to have a strictly professional advising relationship versus socializing outside of advising meetings);
- Expectations for communication during sabbatical or over the summer, when the advisor is typically not on contract;
- The roles of other faculty mentors or committee members in advising the student (multiple faculty members being involved in advising a student is beneficial and encouraged).

### **III. Advising Background and Expectations**

As a resource, see Appendix B for a handbook on mentoring in the social sciences.

*Advising challenges:*

- If a student is having trouble identifying a potential advisor, the Graduate Chair may ask a faculty member to volunteer.
- Students have the right to change their advisor at any time without negative repercussions. Advising relationships change and evolve. If they are having difficulty with their advisor, students should be encouraged to talk with the Graduate Chair.
- Faculty should also remind students about the Ombuds Office as a resource for confidential advice (<https://www.colorado.edu/ombuds/>). This office does not have a mandatory reporting requirement.
- Students who feel uncomfortable with their advisor for any reason should also feel free to reach out to other faculty members.

- Faculty also have the right to choose not to work with a student.

*Advising meetings and feedback:*

- Once a student and faculty member have agreed on an advising relationship, clear communications guidelines should be established (see Section II above). Faculty are expected to meet with first-year advisees at least monthly and other students at least once a semester. See the first-year advising document for specific guidelines and advice for first-year students. Regular check-in emails are also encouraged.
- Graduate students should request guidance and feedback from their advisor and incorporate comments and advice to improve their work. This is an important part of the graduate learning experience. It is important for advisors to be clear about their style and expectations. For instance, will the advisor provide line by line or big picture feedback? Do they read multiple partial drafts or final drafts? What is their turnaround time for providing feedback? Are they open to co-authoring? In addition, expectations should be established around how negative or critical feedback is provided and received. Critical feedback is vital to the development of scholars, and it should be delivered in a manner that focuses on improving the work.
- To make the most of advising meetings, students should draft an agenda (ideally sent in advance) and bring questions or concerns. The advisor should not single-handedly run the meeting. Setting a clear set of objectives and identifying action items following the conversation makes for more efficient and productive meetings.
- The advisor should provide guidance to the student on meeting departmental milestones in a timely manner. This is particularly important at the annual review meeting. Faculty should be familiar with the cohort's Graduate Handbook (<https://www.colorado.edu/sociology/students/graduate-students/resources>), which provides information on the milestones. Faculty will also be provided with hard copies of the Graduate Handbook annually. In addition, the graduate program coordinator is an important resource for questions on the handbook.
- Advisors should also talk to students about coursework to ensure they are planning feasible and appropriate assignments and papers.
- Advisors should be clear about any potential research positions available through their own funding, while also ensuring students know of relevant departmental, college, university, and external funding sources. Students should be encouraged to pursue such opportunities.
- When advisors provide advice, it should be made clear if the advice is a professional or departmental requirement, as opposed to a personal opinion. If an opinion, it should be made clear that it is not a requirement and that the student has the choice of whether to act upon the advice.

*Professional socialization:*

- Students may not be knowledgeable about academic culture, particularly expectations for professional socialization. Faculty should talk with their advisees about interacting with other students and faculty, help them think about career planning, and help them understand the “hidden curriculum” in graduate studies. There are many resources (e.g., online discussions) for helping students to be aware of such issues.<sup>1</sup>
- Encourage students to attend and participate in department events such as colloquia, job talks, lunches with job candidates, recruitment open houses, and workshops—especially in the early years of the program. Help students to understand what kind of questions are appropriate for these events (especially discussions with visitors and job candidates).

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<sup>1</sup> Examples: <https://scatter.wordpress.com/2018/07/24/guest-post-grad-schools-hidden-curriculum/>, <https://twitter.com/JessicaCalarco>, <https://www.chronicle.com/>, <https://orgtheory.wordpress.com/>, <https://orgtheory.wordpress.com/grad-skool-rulz/>, <http://www.insidehighered.com/>

- Discuss conference and presentation expectations and deadlines. Talk with students, especially once they are working on their third-year paper, about which conferences they could attend, submission guidelines, and what they can expect when they attend a conference.
- Discuss different types of career trajectories and possibilities (research universities, teaching schools, soft money academic research, non-academic careers).
- Provide guidance for how students should think about different journal outlets and what they can do to get their papers into publishable form, as well as when they should be thinking about starting to publish.
- Recommend disciplinary associations that students should join, depending on their interests.
- From an early stage, encourage students to get to know and talk about their work with other faculty in the department or outside the department besides their advisor. It will be especially important for students to develop these relationships as they get closer to forming comprehensive exam and dissertation committees. They will need some assistance in knowing how to approach other faculty. Students should be urged to invest in these relationships with other faculty and to solicit their advice.

*Special topics to cover by year:*

*Year 1:* In September, the advisor should set up an initial advising meeting with their assigned advisee.

Establish expectations and norms for the advising relationship. See the first-year advising guidelines document (Appendix C) for more details.

*Year 2:* In the fall of the second year, discuss plans for the third-year paper. If student will be doing fieldwork for that paper, discuss timing and feasibility. Also start discussing the comps process including committee composition, areas, and primary versus secondary members. Be sure to let students know that their comp committee does not have to be their dissertation committee.

Encourage them to think about their comprehensive exams primarily as an opportunity to gain broad expertise in chosen subfields and secondarily as a way to begin developing a dissertation topic.

*Year 3:* Provide guidance for third-year paper writing and comment on drafts.

*Year 4 and beyond:* Support the student with the dissertation, publications, and professional development.

*Advising, co-advising, and committee responsibilities:*

- First-year advisors will be assigned to incoming students by the department. First-year advisors will not necessarily be the main faculty member that the student identified as a potential primary advisor, and instead will likely have been assigned to help the student broaden their advising network. Many students benefit from a secondary advising source that can extend beyond the first year. After the first year, some students will choose to switch advisors to those who are more aligned with their research interests or specific advising needs. Graduate students choose their advisor(s) beyond year 1 (details below).
- Students may want to consider a co-advising relationship with another faculty member if the student would benefit from their expertise.
- On comprehensive exam committees, each primary faculty member is expected to make suggestions for the student's bibliography and to read and provide comments on the appropriate section of the exam.
- On dissertation committees, each primary faculty member is expected to provide guidance and feedback on the dissertation proposal while it is in progress, individual dissertation chapters, as well as on the complete draft. The dissertation advisor should strongly encourage students to send chapter drafts to other faculty members on their committee and actively seek their feedback.

#### IV. Communication and Professional Boundaries

- Keep in mind that the department is a professional workplace. Faculty and students often socialize informally, and this can lead to productive scholarly relationships and provide practice for the kind of socializing academics and other professionals need to engage in as part of their jobs. We especially encourage faculty to meet with their advisees as a group in order to foster cross-cohort relationships. But these kinds of interactions should adhere to professional standards of conduct.
- Faculty should avoid discussing intimate or personal details about other students or faculty in advising meetings or other interactions. If students want to discuss a personal issue, this is fine, but the faculty member should ensure that such discussions remain confidential unless they involve issues that require mandatory reporting. Faculty should be aware of and refrain from microaggressions<sup>2</sup> and consider student sensitivities within advising interactions and when interacting with students in groups, either in classes or less formal situations.
- Sometimes faculty and students will develop closer friendships over time, but this should neither be an expectation nor a requirement. All faculty should keep in mind that they are in an evaluative role with students, and this may make students feel less comfortable having informal relationships and interactions, even if they do not show it.
- If faculty invite students to a non-advising meeting or event, they should provide different choices, including public spaces, non-alcoholic options, and different times of day. For example, faculty should ask students if they prefer to meet in their office, at a cafe on campus, or a restaurant off campus. They should be aware of who they are inviting and who they are excluding. Students should always feel free to decline such invitations.
- If classes are to be held off campus, such as at a faculty member's house, ask students well in advance if they are comfortable with this. Treat that space as if it were a campus classroom and use the time effectively (e.g., consider not serving alcohol).
- Students can often benefit from hearing about a faculty member's personal experiences. Faculty may think about their personal lives as a resource for students (i.e., here is an example of how I dealt with having an article rejected from a journal, what it was like to have a child in grad school, etc.) rather than as information imposed on them by the faculty member. Faculty should be judicious about sharing their personal lives with students or expecting their students to share personal details with them.
- Important advice and scheduling advising meetings should happen either in person or by email. Annual review meetings should always be in person. Text messages are not appropriate means of communication for major issues.
- Social media can be an important form of networking for scholars. Faculty and students should make sure to interact professionally on social media. Students are not required to "follow" or "friend" faculty on social media, and vice versa.
- Faculty may hire students for non-academic tasks, such as helping to move an office, babysitting, pet care, etc. but students should be paid for such work (payment commensurate to market rates should be agreed to in advance). Such tasks are not part of research or teaching jobs.

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<sup>2</sup> Sue et al. (2019) define racial microaggressions as "the everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people of color experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned White Americans who may be unaware that they have engaged in racially demeaning ways toward target groups" (see Appendix D).