

# Strategies for Improving Advising and Mentoring of Graduate and Professional Students

*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.*



## Resources

### Student Conflict Resolution Center

www.sos.umn.edu  
612.626.0689, 254 Appleby Hall  
Contact: Jan Morse

### Student Counseling Services

www.counseling.umn.edu  
612.626.0150, 340 Appleby Hall  
Contact: Matt Hanson

### Graduate School

www.grad.umn.edu  
612.625.2815, 321 Johnston Hall  
Contact: Karen Starry

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## Clarify Expectations

Colleges and programs often have different understandings of advising and mentoring and it is 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.

## Evaluate Process and Outcomes

Satisfaction with advising, both on the part of the student and of faculty, is also important to assess. The Student Conflict Resolution Center's [graduate advising 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

## 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 relationship
  - 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 such as the [Doctoral Degree Completion Steps](#) documents from the [Graduate Student Services and Progress office](#) (GSSP).

Utilize experienced students in planning, evaluating and delivering orientation sessions. Remember 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.



Provided below is a sample 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 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 Educational Innovation](#) (CEI) 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.

### Graduate Student Adviser Evaluation

Thank you for taking this survey, which seeks to gather information about your advising experience over the past year. 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. My adviser and I have met as much as we needed to this past academic year.  
Strongly Agree      1      2      3      4      5      Strongly Disagree

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

- Progress to date
- Academic course planning
- Financial support
- Publishing
- Attending conferences
- Teaching
- Research
- Your career goals
- The job search process

3. Overall, I am satisfied with my progress to date.  
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.