

Graduate Student Advising Guide

Academic Concerns

Keep in mind that there are many causes of academic difficulty including:

- Difficulty in course material, including socialization into a new field, difficulty balancing new roles of student and teacher/researcher, and limited experience writing for new scholarly audiences.
- Diagnosed or undiagnosed disability issues (Attention Deficit Disorder, Learning Disability).
- Mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, etc.).
- Cultural, family, or personal concerns.

Many students appreciate an instructor taking the initiative to express concern about their academic performance. Faculty may be able to help a student with content-related difficulty, or may wish to refer to the resources below for these and other concerns.

Resources

Student Conflict Resolution Center

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

Boynton Mental Health

www.boynton.umn.edu
612.624.1444, 410 Church St SE
Contact: Matt Hanson

Graduate School

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

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Concerns Related to the Advising Relationship

- The relationship is dynamic and is defined by the expectations, needs and interests of both student and advisor.
- Conflict is sometimes a part of the advising relationship. Engaging constructively in conflict can provide for diverse perspectives and positive outcomes.
- Clarifying expectations early in the relationship can minimize misunderstanding.



Personal Concerns

Be clear about what you can and cannot do. Respect the student's value system and culture.

- Recognize the limits of your role and refer to other professionals when needed.
- Refrain from making promises you cannot or may not be able to keep.
- If the student or others are in danger, you will need to act; so be cautious about promises of confidentiality.
- Doing something in response to a student's concerns is almost always better than doing nothing.
- Students may be in a new and potentially disorienting day-to-day cultural context while some students also feel disconnected from their normal support groups.

Employment Concerns

- Graduate assistant employment is often integrally related to a graduate student's success in the graduate academic program and to financial resources, such as tuition benefits. When things go wrong at work, there can be ripple effects that can negatively impact an academic career.
- Refer to [Tips for TAs and Supervising Instructors](#) for helpful advice on working better together.

General Guidelines for Taking Action

- Ensure privacy when you talk and choose a time when you are not preoccupied or rushed.
- Listen to the student in a sensitive, non-threatening way.
- Demonstrate your understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has said. Try to include both the content: "So you are new to this campus..." and the feelings: "...and you are feeling overwhelmed" as appropriate.
- Ask questions to better understand the scope and nature of the problem.
- Express concern in specific, non-judgmental, behavioral terms: "I noticed you haven't been to class in three weeks" not: "Where have you been lately?"
- Communicate hope by reminding the student that there are always options, and things tend to look different with time.
- Recommend resources appropriate to the situation. Consult the resource ahead of time if you are unsure or would like more information on how they might be helpful in a particular situation. Remind the student that using resources is a sign of strength and courage, not weakness or failure.
- Follow up in a reasonable length of time.
- Consult with other professionals by contacting any of the offices listed, especially if you are concerned about your safety or the safety of others.