



## Best Practices for Advising and Mentoring

- 1. Understand and respect that each graduate advisee brings different perspectives, experiences and interests.** Different backgrounds warrant thoughtful, individualized advising approaches as well as sincere effort to understand the individual's experiences and interests and how these affect the student's graduate education.
- 2. Communicate clearly and frequently with an advisee about expectations and responsibilities, ensuring with each communication that there is mutual understanding.** Give honest, constructive and timely feedback on progress, even when an advisee's progress is less than expected. It is important to discuss a student's weaknesses as well as strategies for addressing them. Students also need substantive engagement with the intellectual dimensions of their work. For advisees who are in the dissertation writing stage, in particular, clear and timely *written* feedback from advisors is especially important. As important as it is, however, written feedback should never replace face-to-face meetings.
- 3. Help the advisee develop a timeline for completing academic requirements and meeting professional goals.** Good advisors help advisees plan ahead for academic and professional milestones and work toward clear goals. Doing so includes helping students understand and navigate the basic degree requirements. The goals should also include appropriate progress in research, grant writing, conference presentations and publications. It is best to help students devise a plan that forecasts training, research activities and professional development opportunities at least one year ahead of the current year. Though a plan (individual development plan) may change annually or mid-semester, depending on circumstance, plans ensure that an advisee sees a path and goals to move forward with for the month, semester or year.
- 4. Meet regularly with an advisee to review progress, goals, challenges and future plans.** Effective advisors schedule regular meetings with advisees throughout the year. Note that faculty's advising obligations continue through the summer and sabbaticals. When in-person meetings on progress are not possible—such as with a student conducting fieldwork—advisors should attempt to connect through email, video chat or phone to correspond with the student on progress, to give feedback and to work through any challenges with the advisee. It is incumbent on *both* the student and the faculty advisor to maintain active communication. Although the frequency of meetings will vary by field and by the student's stage in the program, *advisors should generally meet individually with their advisees at least once a month.*
- 5. Encourage openness about any challenges or difficulties that impact graduate student experience and work with the advisee to resolve any challenges and/or identify resources for support.** Good advisors welcome communication about these challenges and help students to address concerns and challenges when they arise. Doing so can lessen, if not eliminate, the negative impact on the advisee's intellectual, professional and personal development. Good advisors are approachable and do not dismiss any concern before hearing about it. Good advisors create environments that foster help-seeking and more importantly, minimize barriers to communication and honesty.

6. **Listen to and support an advisee's scholarly and professional goals.** The role of a faculty advisor is to provide thoughtful guidance, clarity and support to advisees, providing them with opportunities to develop skills, training and experiences to achieve their goals. The advisor must realize that an advisee's goals will not always align with an advisor's own goals for the student. Good advisors do not place their own personal and professional goals over advisees' goals.
7. **Be knowledgeable about departmental and Graduate School policies.** Work with the program's Director of Graduate Studies to explain these policies to students; check in with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School for any clarifications. Graduate students, especially those who have never had previous exposure to graduate school, normally will not understand specific jargon, policy and terms used in graduate school, let alone within Brown University. Good advisors will help advisees decode or demystify these aspects of graduate education.
8. **Be aware of institutional resources that can provide support to advisees in times of academic, professional and personal challenges and whom you, as advisor, may consult for further guidance.** Advisors guide and help advisees in their scholarly and professional pursuits. Along with this, they provide support through challenges and obstacles in the pursuit of their goals. Hence, advisors should be familiar with resources and individuals within the department and the institution who may be helpful to a student depending on the particular concern. A good starting point for both advisors and advisees would be the Graduate Resources page: [brown.edu/go/gradresources](http://brown.edu/go/gradresources). A poster version of this resources page should be posted in common spaces in the department. Faculty and graduate students in BioMed should begin by consulting their Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
9. **Prepare an advisee to be competitive for future careers inside and beyond the academy.** Preparing an advisee for the "next step" involves:
  - a. Fostering community and collaboration among graduate students, undergraduates and postdocs, as well as with others beyond the department. Doing so includes supporting students' social and professional networking in order to create an environment in which students can thrive.
  - b. Recognizing an advisee's contributions to research in publications or presentations; when relevant, acknowledging their service outside of their research—e.g. service as mentors to undergraduates and graduate student peers and as members of University or departmental committees.
  - c. Promoting advisees' participation in conferences or meetings to present their work.
  - d. Connecting an advisee to one's own professional networks, former students and collaborators.
  - e. Supporting opportunities for a student to cultivate professional and technical skills that may open up a broader range of career outcomes.
  - f. Being realistic, open and honest about career prospects and options available to a student.
  - g. Having honest conversations with advisees about devising realistic back-up plans for any unexpected changes and challenges in their trajectory and in their lives.
  - h. Collaborating with an advisee to find resources and networks that support career development in careers outside of academia.
  - i. Directing an advisee to additional resources that bear on careers with which the advisor is not familiar. [CareerLAB](#) offers extensive resources on a wide range of careers that build on advanced graduate education. Other helpful resources are also highlighted on the Graduate School's advising webpage.