

“Responsible Conduct of Graduate and Professional Advising” March 14, 2008

Report with supplementary materials for: Gail Dubrow, Dean and Thomas Sullivan, Provost

From: The Academy of Distinguished Teachers -
Responsible Conduct of Graduate and Professional Advising Working Group

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Origin of this committee

The Academy of Distinguished Teachers held a session on graduate and professional advising at their retreat in October 2006. Discussions at the retreat led to formation of a committee to consider the need for and possible nature of training, to identify existing initiatives and resources regarding advising. There was a follow-up discussion at the October 2007 retreat where this draft document was shared and positively received.

Statement of purpose

To improve the quality and consistency of graduate and professional student advising at the University of Minnesota, including supervision of research and teaching assistants.

Rationale

Graduate advisors have the potential for a large impact on students' lives, and yet, they are not required to receive any training. Without training, and in the absence of stated "best practices" by the University, faculty advisors often draw from their own experiences as graduate students – both good and bad. The quality of advising ranges from excellent to unsatisfactory or harmful. In a survey of graduate students that was part of the Graduate School's PhD Completion Project, in which 76 percent of the first-year graduate students who were administered the survey responded, it was clear that for a number of students, advising was a negative aspect of their experience. The executive summary of the survey reported that eleven students (out of 142) listed finding an advisor or their relationship with their advisor as the most negative aspect of their first year experience.

New faculty advisors, as well as experienced faculty advisors, are not always effective or efficient at their job, and a small minority of advisors harms the students they need to help. As a result, ineffective advisors use an undue amount of University resources, including additional work on the part of faculty, staff and administrators. Not only do they damage the reputation of the University with employers of our graduates, potential students, the public at large, and alumni; but they also harm current students in terms of their progress and successful completion of their degrees. They also dampen the morale of the faculty, staff and students who observe or experience the consequences of such advising.

The quality of graduate advising is not uniformly or universally addressed in faculty evaluations, in post tenure review, or in retention of membership on a graduate faculty. The time is opportune to discuss this matter now, when we aspire to become one of the top public universities. We need to consider how to improve advising, considering, among other things, what kind of training is necessary and appropriate; how effective and ineffective advising should be taken into account in promotion and tenure decisions and merit review; and what consequences should follow from advising that adversely affects students.

We can address these issues through the following specific aims:

Specific Aims

- Set university-wide standards for best practices for advising students.
- Provide faculty with training that includes the following information:
 - Expectations for faculty advisors and student advisees;
 - Services and resources available to assist students and their faculty advisors;
 - Appropriate boundaries between students and faculty;
 - Laws and policies at the University regarding students and their scholarship.
- Initiate discussion among faculty and administrators regarding the consequences for advisors when their advising affects their students adversely.

Benefits of training in the best practices of advising

- Enable new faculty advisors to be effective advisors
 - Training can enable new faculty to advise efficiently by providing information on expectations of an advisor, resources for advisors and their students and examples of typical issues faced by advisors.
- Improve student satisfaction with their University experience
- Improve the reputation of the University
- Improve productivity by saving time for faculty students, and staff and the resources of University.
 - Directors of Graduate Studies, other faculty members, the Student Conflict Resolution Center and others often spend substantial amounts of time because of repeated “bad practices” by a small number of faculty.
- Avoid lawsuits and grievances:
 - Bad advising can cause delay in academic progress or inadequate guidance for students; it can result in student grievances or lawsuits.

Recommendations/ requests

We ask that the Dean and Provost:

- Name a committee to
 - Create a training program
 - Establish best practices for graduate and professional advising at the U of MN
 - Propose consequences for advising that affects students adversely
 - Develop a communication plan
- Provide financial support to achieve the training goals
 - Administrative support
 - Web design
 - Center for Teaching and Learning staff to help build curriculum
- Assist in implementation of a training program
- Consider measures for evaluating success of such of training: e.g., long term reduction in the number and or severity of complaints that come the student dispute resolution center and improvement in satisfaction ratings on graduate surveys.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The following are recommendations from the ADT working group for components of a program to train faculty advisors and a list of current initiatives, resources and services (not exhaustive) related to students or student advising.

Overview

- A training program should provide information to faculty in a centralized and easily accessible manner.
- Training should include material relevant to most faculty and modules that can be designed specifically for departments/majors as appropriate.
- Training of new faculty would ideally proceed any graduate or professional level advising, which may occur several years after appointment. This would be preferable to coupling such training with new faculty orientation where there are numerous other topics covered.
- Training should be enjoyable – maybe have in-person sessions over lunch.
- Perhaps faculty mentors could be assigned for advising or advising could be included in the topics that a faculty mentor addresses with a mentee.
- Training might be carried out by The Center for Teaching and Learning and could be delivered with:
 - Online training
 - Online resource information
 - In-person session - a faculty group with a facilitator

Online training content

Structure and function of graduate program administration

- What is the role of a Director of Graduate Studies?
- What is the role of a Major Chair?

Resources and services

- “Questions frequently asked by faculty advisors – and the answers” (see supplementary material)
- Campus resources to address students’ problems such as mental health, writing skills, or issues specific to international students. Examples include:
 - University Counseling and Consulting Service
 - Student Conflict Resolution Center
 - Disability Services
 - Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity
 - Office for Equity and Diversity

- Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
- Student Academic Success Services

Forms/checklists that can be downloaded for use by faculty

- Tracking student progress
- Notes page to document student/advisor conversations
- Modules that can be designed specifically for departments/majors as appropriate

Policies and laws regarding students and their scholarship

- FERPA

Video files

- Conversations between a faculty advisor and an advisee that might address
 - Courses or course load
 - Developing a resume
 - Type of job student seeks
 - Where they are willing to live
 - Referral to student service office that helps with interviewing skills

In-person Training Content (not exhaustive)

Role of an advisor

- What should advisor do?
- What are advisors *not* obliged to do?
- What should advisors not do?

Appropriate boundaries for advisors and their students

- Student counseling and consulting service has a presentation on this topic

Maintaining best practices among colleagues

- What can faculty members do when a colleague's advising adversely affects students?
- What can faculty members do when colleagues and their students do not maintain appropriate boundaries?
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Current Initiatives, Resources and Services (Not exhaustive)

Initiatives

- Graduate School's PhD Timely Degree Completion Project
- Task force on faculty culture: section on mentoring
- Provost's Committee on Mental Health, U of MN
- Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate.
<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/index.asp?key=29>

Resources

- “Faculty Advising Handbook”, Division of Epidemiology & CH (<http://www.epi.umn.edu/academic/facresources.shtm>)
- “Thriving through the experience” Women Graduate student advising handbook, (1997)

Services (not exhaustive)

- University Counseling and Consulting Service
- Student Conflict Resolution Center
- Disability Services
- Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity
- GLBT Programs Office
- Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
- Center for Teaching and Learning
- Student Academic Success Services

Questions frequently asked by faculty advisors – and the answers (not exhaustive)

This is an example of content for online training of faculty advisors to familiarize advisors with resources and services. (It is currently used in the Faculty Advising Handbook, Division of Epidemiology & Community Health, School of Public Health.)

Where do I refer a student who needs help with writing skills?

Student Writing Center

What services are offered there?

Where do I refer a student who needs legal representation?

Student legal service

What services are offered there?

Where do I refer a student looking for an RA/TA position (needs to be specific for a department)?

E.g., School of Public Health - Career Services website

Who do I contact if I need to consult with someone about how to advise a student who is having mental health problems?

Boynton Health Service

Mental health services (see also Provost committee on Mental health)

Where do I refer students looking for jobs after graduation (needs to be specific for a department)?

E.g., School of Public Health - Career Services website and Career Resource Center

Where do I refer students having problems with a faculty member?

Student Dispute Resolution Center

University Counseling and Consulting Service