Handbook for Advising and Mentoring Graduate Students at BYU

Brigham Young University Graduate Council

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ADAM T. WOOLLEY Dean of Graduate Studies



Congratulations on being granted Graduate Faculty Status! You are now able to mentor graduate students and serve on committees as directed by your College, Department, and Graduate program policies. "Graduate programs of consequence" are essential to the Aims of a BYU Education and the Mission of BYU. Graduate students who are trained with the depth and breadth described in the Aims of a BYU Education support our exceptional faculty in teaching and facilitating high-quality scholarly work in every program on campus.

BYU Graduate Studies, located in the Former President's Home, is staffed by dedicated professionals who are eager to assist you in mentoring and supporting your graduate students. Please reach out to them if you have any questions or concerns.

The Graduate Council, composed of associate deans from each college, works with the Dean of Graduate Studies to develop policy while maintaining standards of quality in graduate education. They have developed an excellent document entitled, Principles and Characteristics of Graduate Education at BYU. This document serves as a guide to the fundamental principles and best practices that are common across many fields of graduate education. The Graduate Council has also developed a Handbook for Advising and Mentoring Graduate Students at BYU. I invite you to read and draw from both of these documents as you plan your graduate mentoring efforts.

Thank you for your desire to mentor graduate students at BYU. I look forward to your success as you serve your graduate students in the pursuit of their academic aspirations.

Sincerely,

Adam T. Woolley

Dean of Graduate Studies

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY · 105 FPH · PROVO, UT 84602 (801) 422-4091 · gradstudies@bvu.edu

Graduate Study at BYU

Advising and mentoring graduate students is one of the most rewarding and challenging responsibilities of faculty members. As an advisor you will play an essential role in the intellectual and professional development of countless graduate students. Although the primary focus of Brigham Young University is on undergraduate education, nurturing strong graduate programs remains an essential component of BYU's mission:

Scholarly research and creative endeavor among both faculty and students, including those in selected graduate programs of real consequence, are essential and will be encouraged.

The Mission of Brigham Young University
Approved by the BYU Board of Trustees on November 4, 1981

The Board of Trustees provided further guidance regarding the scope of graduate education at BYU:

BYU is a Church-related, very large, national, academically selective, teaching-oriented, under-graduate university offering both liberal arts and occupational degrees, with sufficiently strong graduate programs and research work to be a major university, but with insufficient sponsored research and academic doctoral programs to be a graduate research institution.

Board of Trustees minutes June 5, 1991, p.10

All graduate students, with the exception of those enrolled in the professional programs housed in the J. Reuben Clark Law School and the Marriott School of Management, must have an advisory committee chaired by the principal advisor. Although formal advisory duties are focused on supervising academic progress, many faculty members, even when not formally designated as a thesis chair or committee member, may wish to serve as mentors who are committed to advancing students' careers by providing additional guidance and experience. Thus, although this handbook is directed mainly to those individuals who serve as committee chairs and members, it is intended for all who serve in any capacity as an advisor or mentor of graduate students.

Perhaps the first reaction of many regarding the advising/mentoring of graduate candidates is to use their own student experience as a model. While many faculty members have had excellent role models, it is safe to say that such experiences have not been uniform.

While recognizing that each academic discipline has its own specific culture, in this document we focus on those aspects of advising/mentoring that are common to all fields. It is also recognized that each faculty member will have his/her own mentoring style, and it is not the intent of this document to constrain individual ways of doing things. Nevertheless, there are some basic issues that are shared across disciplines.

1.1 Graduate Faculty Status

All advisors who serve on formal graduate student academic advisory committees must hold graduate faculty status (GFS). Only faculty with GFS are entered into the AIM system according to one of the following possible designations: a) chair and serve on doctoral and master's committees; b) serve but not chair doctoral committees, c) chair and serve on master's committees only.

The basic university policy for GFS is defined in the online Graduate Studies Policy Handbook, https://gradstudies.byu.edu/page/graduate-studies-policy-handbook. Minimum requirements are: a) terminal degree for the discipline; b) commitment and availability to advise graduate students; and c) evidence of sustained, substantial, and consequential research/scholarly endeavor. In addition, each academic college provides its own specific criteria. Faculty are recommended by the dean of the college in which their department is housed and approved by the dean of Graduate Studies. GFS appointments must be renewed annually.

1.2 Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures

The Graduate Studies Policy Handbook, https://gradstudies.byu.edu/page/graduate-studies-policy-handbook, provides a comprehensive discussion regarding admission, financial assistance, matriculation, and graduation for all graduate programs (except for those housed in the J. Reuben Clark Law School and the Marriott School of Management). The key elements of this document are summarized as follows.

- All graduate student advisory committee members must hold GFS.
- All master's graduate candidates must submit a Program of Study to Graduate Studies
 by the third week of the second semester, and all doctoral candidates must submit a
 Program of Study by the third week of the second year of study.
- A progress report must be submitted for each graduate student twice per academic year. The categories are satisfactory, marginal, or unsatisfactory. Two successive non-satisfactory ratings result in automatic termination. A termination letter will be sent to the student unless Graduate Studies receives a Petition for Exception from the student's department. The Petition for Exception (OGS Form 2) must be sent to Graduate Studies making a convincing case that the student be given another semester to demonstrate satisfactory progress. A copy of a contract to completion listing student and faculty responsibilities and a timeline must be attached. This document will include the signatures of the student and the student's graduate committee.

All departments housing graduate programs should have orientation procedures to acquaint new graduate students with the expectations and requirements of their graduate programs. Additionally, all departments should maintain a practical and clear graduate handbook that is

revised regularly and is accessible to faculty and students (preferably on the department website). Typically, departments will assign an initial advisor to assist the new student before a permanent advisor is chosen, a process that typically should be completed by the end of the student's first semester. Master's degree committees typically consist of three faculty members, while doctoral committees typically consist of four or five committee members. The committee is formed before the Program of Study is created; the committee approves the student's program of study through the Grad Progress page. The chair must be from the student's major department.

Master's degree students should outline their Program of Study under the direction of their graduate committee during their first semester, completing it no later than the third week of the second semester. Doctoral students should receive approval and submit their Program of Study during the first year, with completion no later than the third week of the beginning of the second year of study.

Responsibilities and Expectations

2.1 Guide Graduate Student Progress

Although graduate students are primarily responsible for completing all degree requirements and for excelling in their academic endeavors, the relationship that they develop with faculty mentors is essential to their success. Indeed, many aspects of graduate life will be new and strange. An interested faculty mentor can help their students understand the maze of new requirements and concepts and learn to be proactive, to ask the right questions, and to solve their own problems.

2.2 Help Students Establish an Appropriate Plan of Study

Graduate students often begin a program with a limited understanding of the consequences of the decisions they make as they choose courses and prepare a Program of Study. Faculty mentors should not take for granted that their students already know information that seems obvious. Although each student should take responsibility for his or her own academic career, these young scholars can benefit greatly by having a knowledgeable advocate examine their proposed plans of study and ask questions that might reveal misunderstandings or potential missteps. To better assist students in developing a beneficial plan of study, faculty mentors should:

- Understand their department's program and curriculum. This seems like an obvious
 point, and yet it is not uncommon for faculty members to have a limited knowledge
 about some dimensions of their program for which they are not responsible (courses,
 ancillary requirements, etc.). Faculty should regularly review departmental documents
 (graduate handbook, curriculum and mentoring documents, etc.) that explain program
 requirements.
- Review curricular options with students and offer sound advice. Listen to and
 acknowledge your students' preferences. Their goals may warrant a unique approach to
 curricular design. Offer advice that is sound, supportive, and unbiased, and, when
 flexibility is reasonable, allow students to take responsibility for their nascent academic
 career.
- Take an interest in your students' academic progress and know how they are doing. Although much of your efforts as a mentor will be devoted to your students' original, culminating project, it is wise to keep track of how those mentees are performing in other aspects of their academic career, especially coursework. Ask students about their in-class experiences and encourage them to excel in all that they do. Additionally, explain the purpose of and help students prepare for the university's bi-annual evaluation.

2.3 Help Students Propose and Complete Their Culminating Research/Creative Project

The process of conducting a culminating research or creative project is challenging and filled with potential pitfalls. For those students writing master's or doctoral level theses, this is an opportunity to demonstrate the ability to produce high-quality and meaningful scholarship in an extended format. As an advisor, you have a dual responsibility as you work with graduate candidates. On the one hand, you are an advocate for the student and that individual should always feel that you have his or her interests in mind. At the same time, however, you are an advocate for your program and for the profession and you have a clear responsibility to ensure that your mentees reach the highest standards of academic, professional, and ethical performance. To help students successfully meet these standards and complete their degree, faculty mentors should:

- Be supportive, but also honest and clear when communicating with students. Often, a conflict between an advisor and his or her mentee stems from a misunderstanding about expectations. Be friendly and supportive, but also clear and insistent when explaining your standards. Don't let a student have to guess, for example, whether you expect the first draft of a thesis chapter to be fully polished or a rough draft.
- Meet regularly and set appropriate boundaries. Your time is valuable, and your student should know and respect that. Spell out any preferences you have for how you wish a student to communicate with you and meet regularly (weekly, monthly, etc.) to encourage and challenge your advisee. Consider appropriate boundaries. Although some faculty prefer a more formal relationship, mentors should be professional at all times and expect similar behavior from their students. Additionally, give students your full attention when they are with you. If you respect their time, they will be more likely to respect yours. Ensure that all consultations result in well-defined action items.
- Foster effective use of time. Although some candidates will work faster than others, all will benefit from a mentor who can offer advice on how to establish a timeline, set and accomplish appropriate benchmarks, and complete responsibilities in a timely manner.
- Encourage students to develop relationships with other mentors. Students will benefit from developing relationships with other individuals across campus and at other institutions. Avoid feelings of possessiveness and encourage your mentees as they network.
- Alert students to potential pitfalls in their scholarly agenda. Again, faculty
 encouragement of student scholarly agendas should be paired with an honest and
 objective assessment of those projects. Are there potential pitfalls that you see?
 Additionally, it is wise to be honest about limits in your own expertise in carrying out a
 particular project.

2.4 Help Students Define Their Scholarly Objectives

The nature of mentoring student scholarly projects can vary greatly by discipline. In some fields, for example, a graduate candidate is fully responsible for identifying and carrying out a research agenda. In others, a student might be expected to pair their investigative efforts to a larger

project being conducted by his or her faculty mentor. Nonetheless, a goal that is appropriate for all specializations is to encourage graduate candidates to develop the skills they will need to conduct their own scholarly agendas as they move from graduate candidate to young professional. To help students develop this independence, faculty mentors should:

- Be open to a student's scholarly hopes and expectations. Don't assume automatically that you know what type of scholarly work a candidate will be interested in or what is best for him or her. Ask sincere questions about where a student's interests lie and guide that individual with their interests in mind. Encourage innovation, new skill development, and the exploration of new techniques.
- Encourage students to recognize and develop their own strengths and interests. Offer examples of how others have addressed scholarly problems, but don't assume that those are the only paths to success. Additionally, avoid the temptation to see yourself in your students and to dictate a scholarly agenda to them. Allow them, as appropriate, to make their own decisions and to live with the consequences.
- Show your students that you have confidence in them. Give constructive criticism, tempered with appropriate praise. But always express your confidence in your student's ability to set and reach challenging goals.
- Provide a safe haven where the student does not feel vulnerable or threatened. This advice might be particularly important when dealing with minority or other students who may have reason to feel isolated in an academic setting.
- Respect student learning styles while maintaining academic standards. Students have
 different learning styles, and an effective advisor will look for ways to help their mentees
 draw upon their individual strengths. At the same time, graduate candidates should be
 encouraged to step outside their comfort zones, to adapt to new learning environments,
 and to develop new skills. In all cases, faculty mentors should pair high expectations with
 patience and understanding.
- *Maintain a commitment to advancing the discipline*. The faculty mentor is responsible to uphold the standards of the profession in any mentoring relationship.

Making the Undergraduate-to-Graduate Transition

For many individuals, the transition from undergraduate to graduate education can be one of the more difficult challenges they will face during their time in graduate school. It is essential for them to grasp the rigors of their new program and to raise their performance to meet these elevated standards. A student who fails to quickly make this transition can face delays, poor evaluations, and, in extreme cases, program termination. Students can feel "ambushed" when they are not aware of these differences.

3.1 Undergraduate vs. Graduate Education

The difference between undergraduate and graduate education can be profound. Undergraduate education is usually characterized by short-term goals, predictable closure, and tight coursework structure (often dictated by accreditation or licensure requirements). The goal is to learn the fundamentals of the discipline and to demonstrate that learning by passing exams and receiving high marks on term papers.

In contrast, graduate education is typically characterized by a more loosely structured curriculum that supports the relatively open-ended world of research and writing of an extended scholarly project or the development of a creative work. The student must actively seek to expand her or his knowledge and is expected to solve problems independently, to pursue opportunities to learn specific skills, and to become familiar with a body of knowledge.

Mentors need to be aware of the difficulty some students face in their transition to graduate education and to recognize that what is obvious to the advisor may not be so to the new graduate candidate. A common best practice is to "ease" the new student into the culture by making short-term assignments early in the relationship and backing off to more open-ended, long-term assignments as the student and your relationship with him or her develop.

In some disciplines, the communication abilities expected of a graduate student (e.g. conference presentations, journal papers, grant proposals) are completely foreign to the new graduate student. These skills are simply not part of many undergraduate programs.

An effective way to help a mentee develop communication skills is through modeling. Good mentors require their graduate students to read articles from top journals, to attend lectures given by scholars, and to listen to and give presentations in research groups.

3.2 Faculty Relationship

Close working relationships between faculty and undergraduate students are often rare. Large class sizes and competing demands for faculty time usually do not allow undergraduate students to develop the connection with faculty that is the hallmark of graduate education. Typically, undergraduates see their professors in the classroom and occasionally during office consultations. The best undergraduate students rarely need to visit their professors during office hours and develop a premature sense of independence that has little room for their

professors. The fact that these students are often those who are most likely to apply to graduate programs makes the issue more acute. (Involving undergraduate students in scholarly work is one way to address this issue.)

In contrast, the relationship between faculty and graduate students is collaborative. Here, independence means that the student takes responsibility to develop the skills required to answer the questions, and ultimately be the one asking the questions. Good mentors are able to leverage this independence. Establishing expectations and clear communication early in the mentor/mentee relationship allows each graduate student to grow into the culture properly and on his or her own terms. In many relationships, the graduate student is the one who initiates the meetings and discussions.

3.3 Student Evaluations

For undergraduates, evaluations are often limited to grades on short-term, closed-ended assignments. In graduate education, evaluations are more focused on progress regarding scholarly and creative endeavor. These differences can be confusing to a new graduate: student: "I am making great grades in my classes, why am I only rated Marginal?" For this reason, BYUs bi-annual student evaluation process needs to be clearly explained to new graduate students. New advisors will set goals to be accomplished by the next review.

3.4 Other Transitions

For many, graduate school is the start of a new phase in life. Change always brings a certain degree of stress but can also be the source of energy and enthusiasm. At BYU, many new graduate candidates completed undergraduate degrees here and are beginning a program on a campus and in a culture that they already know well. For others, the newness of the graduate experience includes the relocation to a new home and a new cultural and academic surrounding. For those who have worked at BYU and have lived in the Provo area for many years, it is easy to forget how foreign things can feel to those experiencing this environment for the first time.

Effective mentors will listen, hear, and support. Sometimes they will need to be sensitive to a mentee's needs that are not strictly professional, such as finding the right balance between work and family responsibilities, coping with cultural transitions after a move from a different part of the world, or developing confidence in a culture that may not be their own.

3.5 Dealing with Conflict

A close relationship between advisor and advisee can foster synergistic collaborations and successful research/scholarly endeavors. It can also result in conflict due to personality mismatches, misunderstandings, and, on occasion, fundamental disagreements between advisor and student. When such situations arise, a wise mentor will recognize the problem early and take steps to prevent it from escalating to a serious issue. If the problem cannot be worked out between the student and advisor, then it should be referred to the department chair and then to the dean if necessary. In all cases, it is essential that the faculty member, department, and college abide by the Graduate Academic Grievance Policy

https://www.byu.edu/gradstudiesinfo/graduate-studies-policy-handbook see page 53. It is important to understand that violations of policy may serve as the basis for legal proceedings against the university. In all cases, faculty members should maintain strict academic standards, avoid retaliation, and respect confidentiality.

Be aware that student behavior can be affected by non-academic issues such as health, financial, familial, and other social concerns. If you are concerned about a student regarding such issues, it may be best for you to encourage that individual to seek professional help (see the chapter on Resources).

Socializing Graduate Students into the Culture of Their Discipline

Every academic discipline has its own specific culture and expectations. Although new graduate candidates may have some awareness of the social structure of the field into which they are entering, it is unlikely that they will have a complete understanding, and what picture they do have may be distorted. Thus, beyond advising on academic matters, mentors can provide a great service to their mentees by helping them appreciate the professional standards and expectations of the discipline. Much of what students will learn about the profession will come naturally as they work and interact with faculty advisors. It is wise, however, to make a point of covering some issues early on in order to forestall problems, especially with international and/or non-LDS students who may have additional questions.

4.1 Take an Interest in Your Student's Life and Career

The commitment to serve as an advisor to a graduate student entails more than the basic academic advisory role. It is also a commitment to help advance the student's career prospects. One of the most valuable roles advisors/mentors can perform on behalf of their students is to introduce them to the academic/professional community. Components of such introductions might include

- Generating substantive and content rich letters of recommendation
- Introducing your students to colleagues when attending conferences
- Helping mentees identify and secure post-doctoral/employment positions
- Helping students understand where their scholarship fits into the broader agenda of the discipline
- Including advisees in your own academic network

4.2 Scholarly Environment

Different disciplines often have a unique concept of what constitutes scholarship and the scholarly environment. Some graduate programs involve collaborative work, where multiple graduate students work on related problems as coordinated by their common advisor. Conversely, some programs stress independent research. There is no "right" model. However, it is critical, especially in a collaborative environment, that graduate students have a substantial and clearly defined individual component of the overall project. Conversely, it is also important that graduate students who are working "solo" do not become so isolated that they do not receive helpful input from others in related areas.

4.3 Academic Ethics

Discovery, as a concept, does not distinguish between gaining an understanding of things already known by others and making an original discovery. In fact, most of the students' efforts will involve re-discovering their discipline. An essential part of an advisor's mission, therefore, is to help graduate students understand the strict rules of credit attribution. Students need to know that plagiarism is a serious academic offense. In this regard, it is important to appreciate that international students may come from cultures that do not emphasize the principle of academic attribution in the same way, and they may not grasp the seriousness of using the work of other without giving proper credit. A wise mentor will be sensitive to cultural differences, while also being open, clear, and insistent in teaching academic ethics.

Graduate students are under considerable pressure to achieve notable results in the course of their study, and advisors should be aware of such pressures and understand how they may impact students.

- Deadlines imposed by university calendars and funding sponsors may tempt students to "cut corners."
- If a student's scholarship does not yield the anticipated results, he or she may be tempted toward misrepresentation.
- Students working in collaborative environments may claim the work of others as their own. Advisors must be especially attentive to student progress and accomplishments to ensure that each student's individual contribution is recognized and appropriately documented.
- For projects involving the gathering, storage, and retention of data, care must be taken to ensure that the results are complete and verifiable.

Some disciplines involve intellectual property, such as data collections, software, devices, and other results of the student's work that involve patent agreements or other proprietary issues. Before beginning scholarship with such possible outcomes, make sure that you are clear as to who owns such property and who has access to it, and that such agreements are in accord with BYU's intellectual property policy.

(https://brightspotcdn.byu.edu/a5/b3/8d52234c4a81ac4003970c873297/intellectualpropertypolicy.pdf). Make sure that the student understands and agrees to any restrictions on the dissemination of results obtained from confidential sources.

4.4 Academic versus Professional Emphasis

For graduate students in professional graduate programs such as the J. Rueben Clark Law School and the Marriott School, as well as other professional programs that do not require a formal thesis or project defense, the role of faculty mentors is no less important than that of faculty who serve as graduate committee chairs. Although such mentors may not routinely supervise original scholarly work conducted by graduate students, they are responsible for preparing their mentees to serve as leaders in their profession.

4.5 Publishing and Presenting Scholarship

The dissemination of scholarly work is one of the most important consequences of a student's graduate education experience. Thus, it is vital that you make your expectations known in this regard at the outset of your relationship.

- Make your expectations clear regarding publishing and presenting the results of scholarly work.
- Explain the standards and norms for authorship. This is especially important if you expect to co-author papers based on the student's work. Bear in mind that students always own the copyright to their theses and dissertations.
- Define the extent to which you are willing to assist your students in the preparation of their work for submission to journals and conferences. Some disciplines have a practice of combining multiple published pieces into a dissertation. Such practices, however, can result in unintended consequences, especially with regard to ascribing proper attribution to works when the advisor has been heavily involved in the writing of the materials.

One of the most common sources of frustration for graduate student advisors is the underdeveloped writing skills of their advisees. However, the faculty advisor should not solve this problem, although tempting, by rewriting the student's work. Obviously, the advisor's own writing talents would produce a better product, but at the expense of developing the student's expertise.

Having the ability to write well, however, does not automatically endow one with the pedagogical skills to teach writing, and you may want to send your student to the BYU Writing Center located in the HBLL (http://writingcenter.byu.edu/). But there are several practical things that an advisor must do.

- Make your expectations clear, especially with regard to first drafts. Do you want to see rough first drafts, or do you expect to see a polished product?
- Encourage your students to share their work with others, such as a trusted peer or a writing group, before they submit it to their advisory committees.
- Help students understand that the act of writing is itself a way to generate ideas. One way to do this is for students to create a "running draft" as they conduct their scholarly work, and then undergo a constant refining as they gain increased understanding

Resources

5.1 Funding Sources

Graduate Studies provides modest funding for graduate students via four main vehicles.

- Direct funding to Departments. Graduate Studies computes a baseline funding allocation
 for each academic graduate program (excluding the law and management professional
 programs) to help each program achieve its potential by awarding funds to their
 graduate students directly. This baseline funding allocation calculus is subject to change
 depending on available funding and the number of eligible graduate programs from year
 to year.
- HIGRA Awards. Each year, Graduate Studies sponsors seven High Impact Graduate
 Research Awards (HIGRA) to both doctoral and masters seeking students that are
 designed to enable graduate programs to recruit highly motivated and talented
 graduate students. Preference is given to those students who have not previously
 attended BYU. Details of these funding sources can be found in the online Policies and
 Procedures document.
- Professional Presentation Awards (PPA's). PPA comprise \$500 awards for presenting high quality scholarly work at a conference during the school year. Any graduate student presenting original work may apply for an award.

5.2 Graduate Studies Staff

Graduate Studies is housed in the Former President's Home (FPH). In addition to the Dean, the Graduate Studies staff is responsible for admission, advising, and special projects. This highly professional staff takes great pride in their work and are of invaluable help for both faculty and graduate students.

5.3 Graduate Student Society

The Graduate Student Society provides service to graduate students by hosting a number of lunches, workshops, and other gatherings. In particular, they take the lead in organizing the Three-Minute Thesis, a popular and very competitive program that allows students to explain their scholarship to a lay audience using one viewgraph in three minutes.

5.4 Graduate Student Fair

Graduate Studies hosts an annual fair that explains the various services available to graduate students as well as introductory information regarding the various programs.

5.5 Center for Teaching and Learning

Teaching & Learning Consultants – partner with your consultant to enhance your course.

https://ctl.byu.edu/node

5.6 Faculty Center

The Faculty Center supports the professional development of faculty throughout all stages of their academic career with a variety of programs, services and resources on scholarship, rank advancement, interdisciplinary learning, mentoring, grant writing, professional leaves, academic administration, citizenship, retirement, and life management skills.

https://facultycenter.byu.edu/

5.7 Counseling and Career Center

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides individual, couples, and group counseling to help students struggling with personal issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, family problems, among others.

https://caps.byu.edu/