

UMD College of Information Studies

Doctoral Student Mentorship Statement of Expectations

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The purpose of this document is to articulate our collective commitments to doctoral student mentorship that centers the core values of the College, and creates an accountability structure to ensure that students are given mentorship and resources that will enable them to thrive. The values and expectations outlined here extend, rather than replace, the core UMD ethical values of honesty, integrity, collegiality, mutual respect, responsibility, and accountability.

In this document, we use the term *advisor* to refer to the formal advisor that is assigned to each student and/or retained eventually as their dissertation chair. We use the term *mentor* for the broader expectations of mentorship by faculty in the department who may engage in mentorship of students through relationships such as joint work on a research project, and/or involvement as dissertation committee members. Supervisory relationships, in which an advisor or mentor is additionally supervising a student's employment, (e.g., through a graduate assistantship), should be understood as a distinct kind of relationship governed by a separate set of expectations. In some contexts these roles are practically indistinguishable, and advisors must be cognizant of the distinct requirements of mentoring and supervising students simultaneously. However, aspects of the advising relationship that pertain to the student's role as a *graduate assistant* are governed by a separate statement of expectations: the Statement of Mutual Expectations for Graduate Assistants¹. Both advisors and students should refer to that document for aspects of advising that pertain to a student's assistantship work. Advisors of students employed in a non-assistantship capacity should consider establishing a documented set of mutual expectations for their collaborative work, using the same or an adapted document.

The values and expectations in this document apply to all iSchool students and their advisors, including advisors with affiliate appointments in the iSchool. Students in other units, including those advised by iSchool faculty, are subject not to this document's expectations but to those of the student's units.

Core Values and Goals

We commit to the following core values and goals when mentoring our doctoral students.

Care and Excellence

We aim for care and excellence in our core activities of research and collaboration, teaching, learning and mentorship, and service and outreach. Our standard for success is not merely passing peer review or gaining citations, but real, robust knowledge gains, and real impact on problems and communities we care about. We co-construct an environment where students can acquire and hone the skills, practices, and ways of being that enable this care and excellence.

¹ <https://www.gradschool.umd.edu/forms>

Joy and Flourishing

We strive to co-construct a safe, empowering, and welcoming environment, where students can *thrive* — not just survive — as they grow into information studies scholars. We want students to be empowered to savor the joys of the process and fruits of research, not just its struggles. We want students to learn to do excellent research in a way that *enhances* — rather than drains — their ability to flourish as whole persons. We reject the false dichotomy between excellence and well-being: doing a PhD should not result in burnout, or require the abdication of your health; instead, a solid foundation of health and well-being nurtures the curiosity, care, and courage that is necessary for scholarly care and excellence.

Equity and Justice

We recognize that our students come to us with multiple identities, which can include but are not limited to: race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, international student status, disability status, familial and professional responsibilities. No student should be hindered from their research and professional goals because of any of these identities; instead, all students should be able to succeed out of the fullness of these identities. We are therefore mindful of structural barriers and harmful power dynamics, and work to dismantle these within our domains of influence. We also seek to empower students to access and apply the full range of assets from their intersecting identities to their research and professional goals.

Diversity, Collaboration and Community

We strive to train scholars who are skilled at drawing from and contributing to the full breadth of their research and professional communities. This high-level skill comes from skills and practices like help-seeking and help-giving, mutual respect across disciplinary and epistemological boundaries, and ongoing active awareness of the interests and experiences of others in their community. It also relies on our ability to cultivate a space which centers on collaboration, respect, wellness and well-being, empathy, and openness.

Shared Ownership, Mutual Accountability, and Lifelong Learning

Finally, we view our students as the ultimate stewards of their education, and ourselves as facilitators of their PhD journey. We therefore invite them to hold us accountable to these values. We commit to growing and learning in response to feedback over time to maintain and improve our adherence to these values. Faculty and students should revisit these values annually to check that their collaboration here at the iSchool continues to chime with the core values and expectations laid out in this document, and to feel empowered to propose changes as needed.

Expectations for Doctoral Mentorship

In line with these core values and goals, we expect doctoral mentoring to be characterized by the following practices and policies.

Proactive, Responsive Mentoring and Communication

Regular, responsive, and clear communication is a core component of the faculty-student advising relationship. Clear lines of communication related to coursework, research, teaching—including, but not limited to, prompt, honest feedback on progress (or lack thereof), and overall well being—should be established at the outset of the advising relationship and maintained throughout the student's time in the doctoral program. Both the faculty and the student should expect each other to be responsive to communications. Expectations around responsiveness should be established early on in the advising relationship.

One crucial way that this communication manifests is regular meetings between advisors and students. The specifics of timing and cadence may vary by career stage and the working styles and disciplinary norms of the student and advisor: for instance, some faculty may, for a period, work side by side with their advisees on many days each week; other faculty may maintain a weekly or bi-weekly cadence of 1-on-1 meetings; and in some cases, such as when the advisee has progressed far towards independent research and is primarily in the writing stage, regular meetings may take place at a cadence of bi-weekly to monthly, punctuated with asynchronous communication over drafts. Expectations about the specific cadence that best fits the working relationship should be established mutually, rather than left unspoken. To the extent that interruptions in the advisor's continued presence may be anticipated, whether temporarily (e.g., sabbatical, leave of absence) or potentially permanently (e.g., leaving the university), the student and the advisor must establish in advance the ways in which the student will receive continued guidance. They may identify another faculty member who will serve as a primary source of guidance on campus while the advisor is away.

An important area of focus for proactive, responsive communication is monitoring student progress, particularly through program milestones in accordance with the Doctoral Student Handbook. Faculty advisors and students are expected to review the handbook so that both parties are familiar with college-level, Graduate School-level, and university-wide policies, expectations, and resources. If any points of clarification are needed or areas of uncertainty arise, the Doctoral Program staff should be consulted. The advisor plays a key role in helping the student select classes, plan research and teaching activities, refine areas of interest, and prepare for the Integrative Paper and candidacy. In many cases, the advisor involves the student directly in their research projects or helps the student to find ways to become engaged with the research life of the College. These expectations and plans around the student's progress through the program comprise a plan of study, which should be in place from the beginning of the doctoral program. The plan should be revisited and examined during the First Year Review, and reassessed on a regular basis and revised if necessary. One regular opportunity to review and revise the plan of study is at the beginning of each academic year or semester. Where appropriate, advisors and advisees may also revise the plan of study in

response to anticipated major life changes on the part of the student that may lead to substantial changes in availability or slowing/disruption of progress (e.g., taking on additional jobs outside of the university, starting a new faculty position before the dissertation defense).

Because of our shared values around equity, justice, and diversity, we cannot expect students to follow a single “best” professional development path: instead, advisors support each student’s ongoing efforts to construct their own unique path to success, whether it is within academia, industry, or something else entirely. This means that regular, explicit conversations about career and development goals are a necessary component of each advising relationship. We also expect advisors to work with students to seek opportunities for professional development that are appropriate to their unique paths, and reflect on when additional mentorship is required to complement their perspectives relative to the student’s career goals. For example, to help students understand the broad range of duties an academic career may entail, advisors can, when appropriate, share information about faculty duties beyond research and teaching, such as professional service, directing a lab or research assistants, applying for and managing grants, and participating in professional conferences. Faculty may also, where appropriate and possible, help students gain insight into varied workloads in other sectors that may be part of their career goals.

Relatedly, because of the interdisciplinary nature of the College, there can be substantial variation in expectations around specific standards for excellence in program milestones that are consistent with variation disciplinary norms; for instance, in some disciplines, students may include pilot data or even a completed study to appropriately contextualize and set up additional planned work, which may result in a dissertation that articulates an overall substantial contribution from a coherent sequence of publications; in other disciplines, dissertation proposals are expected to only include planned work, such as a single substantial ethnographic study. As part of proactive mentoring, mentors will work with students and committee members to proactively define and negotiate expectations around milestone expectations.

To facilitate shared ownership and mutual accountability, the expectations and plans that are mutually established here — such as the plan of study — should be documented in writing whenever possible. This explicit documentation also helps to reduce potential equity and justice harms, since new students, first generation students, students who are underrepresented in the discipline and/or have experienced other forms of marginalization may not necessarily know what questions to ask, and may be unfamiliar with certain terminologies or various graduate school processes and protocols. The specific forms of documentation may vary across mentoring relationships, but the general principle is that important shared expectations and plans should be made explicit in shared externalized representations that can be revisited and revised. The College will provide examples and templates of documentation that faculty can adapt for their specific mentoring relationships.

Finally, we view mentorship as an ongoing process as doctoral students advance through the program. Faculty and students should acknowledge an ongoing commitment to the constant work, reflection, and accountability that mentorship requires. Indeed, all shared expectations

and plans should continually be revisited and revised as necessary, since mentorship needs and expectations can change as a student progresses through the program.

An Intersectional Approach to Mentoring

Advisors should recognize that there are power dynamics between faculty and graduate students. Thus, constant reflection and work are needed to foster open communication, and minimize harm and toxicity. At times, unaware of certain processes and protocols inherent to academia, the advisee may not necessarily feel comfortable providing feedback or addressing issues such as deadlines, work-life boundaries, and other personal or professional commitments. Thus, advisors will work to create an environment that fosters openness, reciprocity, and that is welcoming of feedback without fear of punitive repercussions.

Advisors should acknowledge that their advisees may face additional challenges in graduate school/academia due to their unique goals and intersecting identity categories, and that the advisee's goals and experiences may be different from their own. Thus, advisors cannot and should not provide comprehensive support for all of the needs or challenges that students will encounter in the course of their doctoral careers. Advisors should instead support regular, open conversations about the full breadth of mentors and community support that students may require. Where appropriate, these additional mentors may join the advising team in a formal co-advising role. Advisors should cultivate awareness of the variety of resources available through the College and University, and be prepared to connect students to other relevant resources in support of their research, academic progress, and general wellbeing. Relevant resources include support for the security of students' basic needs and mental and physical wellbeing, organizing with fellow students, and research services available, for example, through the UMD libraries. While the onus for seeking out support and resources ultimately falls upon individual students, advisors commit to helping students identify relevant resources at the College and University levels upon request, or connecting them to people at the College who can help. A list of resources can be found in the Doctoral Student Handbook, and both faculty advisors and graduate student advisees are welcome to consult the Doctoral Program staff or any member of the Doctoral Committee for support.

We recognize that faculty may be at varying levels of preparedness for this work. Therefore, the College will provide — and update, as appropriate — such resources and training around equity and justice in mentoring on a regular basis. In the spirit of lifelong learning, we expect faculty to avail themselves of these resources and training.

Intentional Support for Sustainability and Well-Being

While we value joy and flourishing in the PhD process, we also recognize the many structural and task-specific challenges to sustaining health and well-being, including the inherent uncertainty of doing excellent research at the boundaries of human knowledge, the challenges of maintaining healthy boundaries with work, and the competitive pressures of the larger academy.

For this reason, we expect advisors to actively work with students to develop working practices that respect the need for sustaining health and well-being. These practices can include, but are not limited to, regular planned breaks, mental health days, planned celebration of process (vs. only outcome) milestones such as manuscript submissions, developing considered strategies for saying yes/no to opportunities and requests, and sharing experiences, triumphs, struggles, and overcoming barriers and challenges. We reiterate that we understand these practices as synergistic — rather than in competition — with our values of care and excellence. As noted above in relation to proactive communication, we expect faculty to outline clear written expectations for how students can engage in these practices in relation to their shared responsibilities and context. We also expect advisors to ensure students are aware of and able to access appropriate resources from the community, College, and University. Again, additional resources can be found in the Doctoral Student Handbook, and members of the Doctoral Program staff or the Doctoral Committee can be consulted for support.

Support for Navigating Interdisciplinarity

The College of Information Studies offers a highly interdisciplinary collaborative research environment, which may be bewildering to new students and others coming from different disciplinary traditions. To enable students to fully leverage and thrive from this interdisciplinarity, advisors commit to helping students forge connections with faculty across research domains within and beyond the College, as they seek to understand and find their place among the many epistemological, methodological, and theoretical cultures that intersect among the College's faculty. Whether by guiding students toward unfamiliar course offerings, helping them select interdisciplinary committee members, introducing them to peers and colleagues across the school and other relevant institutions, or engaging them in interdisciplinary research projects, advisors should help students find pathways into the collaborative life of the school.

Mutual Expectations of Students as Advisees

As described in our core values, we understand students to be the stewards of their own education, primarily responsible for their own academic and research progress. By implication, students share accountability with their advisors and mentors for the effectiveness and success of their advising and mentoring relationships.

The expectations of professionalism and mutual respect outlined in the expectations for doctoral mentorship, above, must be understood as reciprocal—incumbent upon both advisors and advisees. Students should be proactive, responsive, and communicative in their role as advisees. They should honor their stated commitments to the best of their ability, as expected in any professional context. This includes meeting program requirements in addition to mutually determined obligations, meeting and communication patterns, and interim deadlines for academic and research progress established in discussion with their advisors. Students, like advisors, should approach the advising relationship with openness, being receptive to constructive criticism, guidance, and alternative perspectives offered to support their growth and progress. While advisors should be proactive in their approach, students are ultimately responsible for reaching out to advisors and mentors as needed, tracking their own progress through the program, meeting appropriate milestones, and developing and following their own

academic pathways and research plans—with support, guidance, and facilitation from advisors and mentors.

Students should also refer to their program handbook, the University of Maryland Code of Student Conduct, Code of Academic Integrity, and Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and other Sexual Misconduct for further elaboration of expectations and related policies that affect them as students within and outside of their advising relationships.

Changing Advisors

Over the course of a student's studies, circumstances of many types might warrant a change in advisor. There are some natural times to consider changing advisors, such as after the First Year Review and the Integrative Paper. Advisor changes can be made at any time, and there is no limit on the number of times a student might change advisors, although changes should be carefully considered and some continuity should be sought. Before changing advisors, the student should receive confirmation that the new advisor is willing to enter this relationship, and the previous advisor should be notified of the change. The student is also responsible for notifying the Doctoral Program staff in writing of any advisor change. Students may not spend more than one full semester in the program without an advisor. If they do, their case will be referred to the Doctoral Committee for possible dismissal from the program. If students do not have an advisor and they need to complete an Annual Review for the year, members of the Doctoral Committee will complete the review for them in place of an advisor. If a student's advisor leaves the College and the student does not follow them, the advisor is expected to help the student secure a new advisor in their place. Additional information can be found in the Doctoral Student Handbook in the section titled "Changing Advisors and Feedback on Advising."

Resolving Tensions in Advising

In cases where tensions are present between advisors and students, committee members and students, or advisors and committee members, the first step should typically be to try to resolve the tension between the concerned parties directly. Advisors should have an open-door policy of willingly and professionally listening to their advisees' concerns, ensuring that advisees understand that it is safe and appropriate to approach them directly with any concerns that they might have.

In the unusual circumstance where there is compelling evidence that it is not feasible to fully achieve the resolution of tensions between directly concerned parties, any concerned party may contact the Doctoral Program staff or any member of the Doctoral Committee with its concerns. The Doctoral Program staff and the Doctoral Committee should have an open-door policy of willingly and professionally listening to any concerns, and where necessary and when approved by the concerned party, they may take the concern to the Doctoral Committee as a whole. The ultimate authority within the college on such matters is the Dean. On the rare occasion that such tensions might have legal implications, concerned parties should bring their concerns to the relevant campus or other authorities.