

Departmental Guidelines for Effective Advising

The advisor-advisee partnership is central to the Ph.D. experience. Both the Primary Advisor (PA) and advisee should expect a partnership based on mutual respect and acceptance of the responsibilities outlined in the Responsibilities section of the [Ph.D. advising page](#).

Characteristics of effective advisers and advisees

Advising and mentoring is a core responsibility of faculty members. Principles of good advising and mentoring include the following.

- PA helps student figure out the student's goals for their Ph.D. experience, and supports the student in accomplishing those goals.
- PA helps the student think about next steps after the Ph.D. program and helps the student advance their career aspirations.
- PA solicits and listens to feedback from students on their progress, their concerns, their goals, and on the advisor-advisee relationship, adjusting as needed.
- PA provides constructive and honest feedback on student's research and other aspects of being a Ph.D. student.
- PA meets all responsibilities outlined in the Responsibilities section of the [Ph.D. advising page](#).

To be a good advisee/mentee, students should act as follows.

- Take initiative. For example, come prepared for meetings with your PA; ask your PA about opportunities that might enhance your studies and career.
- Be willing to be mentored and open to feedback. Listen to the advice of your PA.
- Be honest. For example, if you are struggling with your research, let the PA know so the PA can help you get through it. Or, if you want to take your research in another direction, let the PA know that too.
- Meet all responsibilities outlined in the Responsibilities section of the [Ph.D. advising page](#).

Additionally, the department recommends that PAs and advisees reach the following understandings

- The PA should make clear how the student will be funded, such as via an RA or TA. If funded via an RA, the PA should explain the RA duties.
- The PA and student should determine early in the advising relationship how they will meet, including frequency, format, and general expectations for meetings.
- The PA and student should discuss timelines for when the student will be ready to defend the PhD dissertation. Students are empowered to initiate these discussions at any time during their PhD research, as are PAs. Both the student and PA should recognize that timelines are subject to the progress of the student's research.

Students who want to change their primary advisor

Sometimes it is beneficial to end an advisor-advisee partnership. This can be for many reasons. As examples,

- the student may become interested in another research topic that is better advised by a different PA;
- the student may lose interest in the research that they were working on with that PA;
- either the student or PA may not be meeting the departmental expectations;
- the student and PA may have personal conflict that cannot be resolved;
- the student may feel uncomfortable with the way they are treated by the PA.

No student is required to remain in an advising partnership for any reason. In cases where the student wants to consider changing advisors, they should talk to the DGS who will work with the student to determine a best course of action. Alternatively, the student may talk with the Associate Chair or Department Chair.

What to do when an advisor or advisee is not meeting responsibilities or the advising relationship is not functioning effectively

It does happen that advisor and advisee relationships do not function as expected. This could be for many reasons. In such cases, the department policy is as follows.

1. Both advisors and students should know that it is acceptable for students to raise concerns with the PA, and for the PA to raise concerns with the student. Such discussions should be focused on how to address the concerns going forward, so that the advisor-advisee relationship is productive. It is not acceptable for the advisor or the student to penalize, mistreat, or be less engaged in the partnership because such concerns were raised.
2. If after such discussions the student or advisor believes the concerns have not been addressed, or if the relationship is not functioning well, either may approach the DGS with their concerns. The DGS will work with the student and advisor to identify solutions. Alternatively, they may approach the Associate Chair or Department Chair.
3. It is also acceptable for students to bypass discussions with the PA and talk directly with the DGS. This may be necessary, for example, in cases of mistreatment, harassment, or gross negligence.
4. If problems cannot be resolved after meaningful efforts on all sides, it may be beneficial for the student to change the PA.

Policies and procedures in cases of harassment or related misconduct

The Department of Statistical Science cultivates an inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment where all faculty, staff, and students can thrive. We condemn all forms of discrimination and harassment, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, and veteran status. We condemn all misconduct related to harassment. The Department expects all members of Statistical Science to call out harassment and related misconduct, and to intervene to prevent acts of harassment and related misconduct from occurring.

The Departmental follows all policies and procedures of Duke University on discrimination, harassment and misconduct. These procedures are [available](#) and on the [University's Office of Institutional Equity \(OIE\)](#) web page. The OIE offers [guidance](#) for complaints and concerns about harassment and misconduct, as well as [resources](#) for students and postdocs, faculty, and staff. Resources and information specific for graduate students are available at <https://projects.gradschool.duke.edu/reporting/>

No one in the department—student, postdoc, faculty, staff—should be subject to harassment. If you have concerns or complaints about harassment or related misconduct, please bring them to Department Chair, Associate Chair, DGS, DUS, MS Director, or any senior faculty member as you feel comfortable. This is the case for incidents at Duke or outside of Duke. Retaliation for reporting concerns or complaints in good faith is strictly prohibited. The Department will help you reach a resolution, so that you can continue to accomplish your goals and have the Duke experience you deserve.