

Department of Sociology
Graduate Student Mentoring Policy
Approved April 10, 2024

I. Introduction & Principles

Vibrant and intellectually dynamic relationships between graduate students and faculty mentors lie at the heart of graduate education. Successful mentoring is based on the principles of honesty, integrity, collegiality, mutual respect, responsibility, and accountability; in other words, trust. Outstanding faculty mentors are critical to graduate education and to creating a successful graduate student experience. Graduate student mentoring is an essential and central element of the job of all graduate faculty members at a research university.¹ Consistent with this understanding, the Department of Sociology establishes this Graduate Student Mentoring Policy, which is based on the following principles:

- Intentional mentoring should take place in nearly every departmental activity involving faculty and graduate students, including but not limited to seminars, teaching and research assistantships, research collaborations, colloquia, committee meetings, and professional conferences.
- It is important to recognize the impact of conscious and unconscious assumptions, preconceptions, biases, and prejudices that can adversely affect the mentoring relationship. Vibrant intellectual environments require the active engagement of diverse perspectives.
- Mentors and mentees should learn about and utilize inclusive approaches to mentorship such as listening actively, working toward cultural responsiveness, moving beyond colorblindness, intentionally considering how culture-based dynamics such as imposter syndrome can negatively influence mentoring relationships, and reflecting on how their biases and prejudices may affect mentoring relationships, specifically for faculty and students from underrepresented populations.²
- Effective mentoring relationships are founded on open, reciprocal, and regular communication between mentors and mentees. Trust and candor are also essential, and the details of mentoring discussions must be kept confidential.
- A formal plan with clear expectations and a measure of accountability ensures more robust, consistent, and equitable mentoring.

¹ Preceding material drawn from UMD Graduate School resources:
<https://www.faculty.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2020-06/gradstudents.pdf>

² Drawn from: <https://www.nap.edu/resource/25568/interactive/>

- Effective mentoring helps students integrate into (and navigate) the intellectual community and culture of the department and ensures that students are aware of available resources at the departmental and campus levels.
- Mentoring needs differ depending on the student's intellectual development and progress through the program. Students new to the program will require different support than those writing their comprehensive exams, while students preparing their proposal have different needs than those conducting dissertation research and preparing for the job market. Effective mentoring is tailored to a student's career goals, including aspirations that may fall outside the academy.
- In addition to helping establish a trajectory for the mentoring relationship, mentors are primarily responsible for supplying the momentum. While mentees are encouraged to contact their mentors, the relationship should be mentor-driven. However, mentoring entails significant effort on the part of faculty members, and mentees should respect that investment by approaching their mentors in a professional manner by responding promptly to requests, doing their best to meet deadlines and communicating in advance if they will not, and considering and incorporating critical feedback of their work.
- Graduate student mentoring is a valuable service faculty provide to the department and will be recognized as such in merit, promotion, and post-tenure review processes.
- The purpose of mentoring, and graduate training more broadly, is not one of replication, but of synthesis. Mentors should not seek to replicate existing paradigms and ensure their mentees' paths closely resemble their own; faculty should rather share their experiences and expertise to help their students merge those insights with their own interests and passions to develop the next generation of sociologists.

While many of the above principles are broadly applicable to the range of interactions between faculty and graduate students, this policy is primarily intended to establish clear expectations for formally designated mentoring relationships.

II. Mentoring Model

A. Mentoring Definition

1. Mentors help advance the academic and professional lives of their students by sharing guidance, experience, and expertise. Mentors play a vital role in socializing students into the culture of the discipline, communicating and reinforcing—often by example—what is expected of a professional scholar or sociologist. While the primary emphasis is on intellectual development, truly effective mentoring attends to the whole student, and is sensitive to the difficult and even painful process of reconciling a student's personal

experiences and understanding of themselves with the demands of graduate training.

2. Although not all mentoring for graduate students happens in relationships with advisors, for purposes of this policy we generally mean advisors when making reference to mentors.

B. Mentoring Assignments

1. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will assign all newly admitted students a temporary mentor from the faculty as soon as possible after the student accepts admission to the program. Such assignments should be made in consultation with faculty and should be sensitive to the needs of the student (e.g. a student entering the program with an MA will have different needs than one who has just received their BA).
2. With the exception of initial mentors, mentoring relationships are generally intended to be ongoing. Should a mentoring relationship become unproductive or no longer in the best interests of either party, the DGS will work to either appoint a new mentor or otherwise facilitate the development of a new formal mentoring relationship for the student.
3. It is unlikely that any individual faculty member will be able to effectively mentor students in every aspect of their studies, assistantship duties, and professional development. Students are expected to build a mentoring network that extends outside the mentoring assignments covered in this policy, and formal mentors should actively assist with this process by introducing their mentees to other faculty (in the department or elsewhere), to more advanced students, and to others who can contribute to the professional development of the students.

C. Meetings

1. Initial mentors should contact their mentee promptly following the student's admission to the program, and before the start of their first semester.
2. Mentors are expected to meet with their mentees at least three times each semester, though the frequency and nature of the interactions should be mutually agreeable and revised as necessary over time.
3. At the end of the academic year, mentors must submit to the DGS an overview of mentoring activities that took place, including a brief list of general topics that were discussed.

D. Mentoring Contracts

1. Formal, written statements establishing expectations and responsibilities for all parties in mentoring relationships can reduce misunderstanding, provide accountability, and lead to more effective mentoring.
2. The DGS will provide a standard mentoring contract, which will include, at minimum, the following elements:
 - Standard turnaround times for providing feedback on papers, proposals, etc., or for providing letters of recommendation.
 - General areas that will, and will not, be covered by the mentoring relationship, to ensure a student can identify any areas where alternative support should be sought.
 - A structure for establishing deadlines and tracking progress towards goals related to research, writing, teaching, etc. The plan should account for any deadlines associated with funding, and for visa requirements for international students.
 - Expectations for the mentee's participation in the department's intellectual community (e.g. attending talks, participating in workshops, service work, etc.).
 - Publication and co-authorship expectations, when relevant to the mentoring relationship.
3. The initial contract—as well as any subsequent, substantive revisions of it—must be agreed to by both parties and filed with the DGS.

III. Roles and Responsibilities

A. Director of Graduate Studies

1. The DGS is broadly responsible for overseeing and coordinating the mentoring of all graduate students in the program under the terms of this policy.
2. The DGS will assign initial mentors, monitor the progress of students in moving toward their permanent mentors, and make alternate mentoring assignments as necessary. When making assignments, the DGS will provide additional resources and checklists to guide both mentors and mentees.
3. The DGS, with assistance from the Graduate Committee, will maintain and

update a standard mentoring contract template, and will share it with both mentors and mentees when making assignments. The DGS will be responsible for ensuring that current contracts are on file for all formal mentoring relationships established under this policy.

4. The DGS will receive annual mentoring overviews that indicate the general topics discussed. The DGS should use these, in conjunction with mentoring contracts, to identify unmet mentoring needs and work to resolve these by speaking with the mentor, providing alternate or supplemental resources, or making alternate mentoring assignments.

B. Mentors

1. Mentors will proactively engage their mentee, which includes:
 - i. Scheduling meetings or conversations
 - ii. Anticipating support that may be needed and tailoring the mentoring to the needs and interests of the particular mentee
 - iii. Assuming a degree of responsibility for their mentee's academic and professional development and success in the program.
2. Mentors will familiarize themselves with the various resources provided by the department, the college, and the Graduate School, and will refer their mentee to these resources, as appropriate.
3. Mentors will provide a summary of their engagement with their mentee and submit it to the DGS at the end of each academic year.
4. Mentors will work proactively to identify and address the needs of mentees from populations with distinct needs. Among these are students from historically underrepresented or marginalized populations, whose backgrounds and life experiences may differ from those of the mentor, and who may face additional challenges in orienting to the graduate school environment. This includes international students, who may come from cultures with different norms and bring scholarly expectations and practices informed by different educational systems. It also includes parents and others with caregiving responsibilities.
5. Mentors will provide candid feedback to their mentees. Should that feedback be routinely disregarded, or should the mentor feel that their suggestions are not being taken in good faith, they should communicate this to the mentee. Should the situation persist, the mentor should notify the DGS and ask that the

student be assigned a new mentor.

6. Those serving as initial mentors should assist their mentee with the process of identifying a permanent mentor.

C. Mentees

1. Mentees should approach the mentoring relationship as a professional one, and should respect their mentor's time. Mentees should, however, freely seek guidance on matters appropriate to the mentoring relationship as established in the mentoring contract.
2. Should a mentoring relationship prove inadequate, unhelpful, or even detrimental, the mentee should immediately share this with the DGS, who will assist with identifying a new mentor.
3. Mentees should use the resources they are provided, including checklists for planning mentoring meetings, to apprise their mentors of topics they would like to discuss.
4. Mentees should proactively engage with the department's faculty across research areas, and should carefully build their own mentoring networks that extend beyond formally assigned mentor.
5. Mentees should recognize that they are ultimately responsible for their progress and development. Mentors play an important role in facilitating that progress and development, but responsibility ultimately lies with the mentees to ensure they are identifying and seeking out the support they need.

D. Peer Mentors

1. The Graduate Student Forum should assign peer mentors from among more advanced students, who should in particular help their mentees navigate the department and the university.

IV. Mentoring Components

A. In general, mentoring should address, as appropriate, the following topics:

- The student's intellectual interests.
- Career development goals.

- Navigating personalities and politics in the department, college, and university.
- Skills that should be acquired.
- Maintaining work/life balance and taking time for self-care.
- Funding opportunities.
- Co-authorship opportunities.
- Both short- and long-term timelines for completing coursework, identifying and defending a proposal, researching and writing.
- Job searches, both in and outside of academia.