



BROWN Graduate School

Best Practices for Advising for Programs

- 1. Provide an orientation at the beginning of the graduate program**
 - The orientation should introduce students to departmental culture, expectations, and requirements, as well as to resources for support both within and beyond the department.
 - Make expectations as explicit as possible, rather than assuming that students are already familiar with the department's and discipline's norms and culture.
 - Advanced graduate students may play an important role in this process, but it should not be left entirely to other graduate students.

- 2. Ensure that faculty and students are well informed about program requirements and expectations as well as relevant University policies:**
 - Program requirements, milestones, and timelines
 - Expectations for teaching
 - [University policies on academic standing](#)
 - University resources for students exploring compatible careers
 - University resources for students facing other challenges [link to that page]
 - Advising and mentoring resources [link to that page]

- 3. Foster a culture of talking about advising**
 - Discuss climate survey data at department meetings.
 - Establish—through departmental discussion—shared expectations regarding
 - minimum expectations for how frequently faculty meet with advisees
 - how long students should expect to wait for feedback on work they submit
 - processes for evaluating student progress
 - Assess and articulate the program's goals and standards regarding graduate student advising; have in place a way to regularly assess advising.

- 4. Develop advising and supervision structures that ensure that more than one faculty member is monitoring each student's progress**
 - Problems easily arise when the supervision for a student is left entirely to one person.
 - Different faculty members' strengths in mentoring will likely complement each other. There will usually be some gaps, blind spots, or weaknesses in a faculty member's relation with any student. Having more than one faculty member involved in supervision can reduce the consequences of such gaps.
 - There are many models. Some possible strategies include
 - Having the entire faculty review all students at an annual meeting
 - Having each subfield hold review meetings for each student
 - Holding meetings of the dissertation committee to assess progress each semester

- Designating a faculty member not in the student's subfield to serve as a mentor and resource in addition to the principal academic advisor
- Support students in developing networks of mentors.

5. Establish regular processes for reviewing student progress.

- It is essential that more than one faculty member be involved in this review process
- Consider incorporating [Individual Development Plans \(IDP's\)](#) or [comparable documents](#) in the review process
- Evaluations should take place once a semester, or at least once a year
- At a minimum, letters to students regarding their standing, as well as updates to their official standing (good, satisfactory, or warning), should be entered in GSIM at least once a year. In most cases, this occurs at the end of the spring semester, though some programs have established practices based upon a different timeline.
- First-year doctoral students must have their standing updated in GSIM at the end of the first semester (as well as at the end of the academic year).
- Develop a standard process for communicating with students about their evaluations.

6. Expect that problems will sometimes arise. Have structures in place in advance.

Most of the time, things go fine. In these cases—most cases—following past practice, even when it is informal, appears sufficient; and establishing structures can easily seem an unnecessary distraction. However, when things go wrong, it may be too late to develop appropriate processes.

- What is the process for changing advisors? *If an advisor-advisee relationship breaks down, the DGS should, in most cases, lead a process of determining whether there is another suitable advisor. While the student must be involved in the process, it should not be left to the student.*
- Develop practices for addressing potential tensions between advisors and students before they rise to the level of crises

7. Establish practices that foster communication between the faculty and the graduate students

While the core of this interaction will likely center on scholarly activity such as colloquia, departmental lectures, and seminars, seek to develop forums such as town hall meetings that bring together faculty and graduate students to discuss the program and climate. Consider regularizing town hall meetings at least once a year, if not once a semester. Seek, welcome, and respond to feedback.