

Best Practices in Mentoring Graduate Students

History Department

In recognition of the critical role faculty mentorship plays in the scholarly development, progress, achievement, and job placement of graduate students, the History Department faculty has adopted the following “best practices” guidelines for faculty mentors.

The Director of Graduate Studies will distribute this list to all history faculty members each fall, and meet with new faculty members to orient them to best practices in graduate student advising.

Core Values

Integrity: Academic and research integrity consistent with departmental, university, and professional policies and standards in the pursuit of excellence

Professionalism: Professional relationships that foster excellence, encouragement, listening, respect, and kindness

Curiosity and Guidance: An environment that champions and guides intellectual curiosity

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: An environment that equitably provides professional development and opportunities, and attends to the needs of fostering greater inclusion.

Goals

Academic progress toward degree
Mastery of field of study and associated skills
Professional development
Foster independence and accountability
Open, honest, and consistent communication

Mentoring Recommendations for Faculty

1. Regular Meetings with Advisees and TAs: Advisors should schedule regular meetings with their advisees. The frequency of those meetings will depend on the needs of the student and the phase of the program they are in.

Best Practices with Ph.D. students:

When TAing for your class:	meet once a week
During coursework:	meet twice a semester
During reading for comps:	meet every 2-3 weeks
When researching dissertation:	meet or check in once a month
When writing dissertation:	meet or check in once a month*
When on the job market:	meet every 2 to 3 weeks if possible

*It is particularly important to have regularly scheduled “check ins” with students who are writing dissertations away from campus.

Best Practices with M.A. and HiLS students:

When TAing for your class:	meet once a week
During coursework:	meet twice a semester
When writing a thesis:	meet once a month
When preparing for MA exam:	meet once a month during semester prior

Note: M.A. exams are expected to grow out of regular course work and should not require extensive additional reading.

Beginning of the year meetings with all advisees are ideal for setting goals and expectations for the year.

2. Outline a plan of study

Advisors should engage each new graduate student in a discussion of their proposed plan of study, and identify how and when they will satisfy the major requirements for the degree. This should include a discussion of how to plan for comprehensive exams and develop a dissertation topic. Each semester the advisor and advisee should review and/or revise this plan and evaluate the advisee’s progress toward exam preparation and choosing a dissertation topic. Advisors should guide advisees on how to best use their summers (i.e., language exam preparation, seek summer funding for research, prepare for comprehensive exam) to achieve work/life balance.

Advisors of M.A. and HiLS students should help their advisees define their examination field or thesis topic. M.A. and HiLS students should also be encouraged to touch base regularly with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss their program requirements.

3. Engaged and prompt feedback on written work.

Giving advisees prompt feedback on written work and grant proposals is essential. To facilitate this, advisees should alert advisors in advance that they will be submitting draft chapters, grant proposals, or other materials.

Best Practices for “turn-around time” for written work:

Time sensitive material such as drafts of grant and fellowship proposals: one week

Scholarly work, such as prospectus, thesis, or dissertation chapters: 2-3 weeks

Advisors should ask advisees and other graduate students to submit requests for letters of recommendation at least one month ahead of grant or job deadlines.

4. Advisors and advisees should agree upon a plan for continued communication when the faculty advisor is on leave or otherwise away from campus

Advisors should give advisees as much advance notice as possible that they will be away from campus for an extended period, and the advisor and advisee should agree on a plan for continued communication that might include:

Monthly progress reports sent via email from an advisee writing a thesis or dissertation to the advisor; with response/feedback via email by the advisor.

Regular scheduled meetings via video-conferencing software.

Designating an in-residence “back up” faculty advisor for emergency or spot advising if the lead advisor cannot be reached.

5. Professional Development

Advisors should strongly encourage advisees to apply for fellowships and grants as a means to speed their research and build their resumes. (Advisors in specialty fields should take pains to alert advisees to field specific grants and resources.) Advisors should also offer to read and review advisees’ grant applications.

Advisors should encourage students to participate in professional events, such as conferences; and should also take active responsibility for preparing graduate students to give conference papers, interview for jobs, and publish their research. Faculty are also encouraged to attend graduate student-organized colloquia where students often present their work for the first time.

Advisors should strongly encourage students to attend the professional development forums that the Graduate Office sponsors each semester.

Advisees should be encouraged to prepare research seminar papers with an eye towards publication.

Advisors should foster a collegial relationship with their advisees, treating them as junior scholars, engaging with their work, and offering active and specific intellectual guidance and encouragement.

Advisors can also serve as models of professorial scholarly achievement by publishing regularly, being active in the profession, and engaging advisees in their ongoing research and writing.

6. Advocacy

Advisors are often their advisees' most effective advocates at the departmental level. Advisors should inform the Director of Graduate Studies and Associate Chair of their advisees' needs with regard to course offerings, teaching assignments, teaching workload, etc.

7. Mentoring Effective Teachers

Advisors should also help their advisees assemble an excellent teaching portfolio that will help them in their job search. Although mentoring good teaching is a department-wide responsibility, advisors should make sure their advisees have had opportunities to TA key courses in their field (and to teach History 208 or other offerings independently). Advisors can also suggest teaching strategies, monitor advisees teaching evaluations, occasionally attend an advisee's class, and critique practice job talks. Advisees should know that for many jobs at schools that emphasize undergraduate education, a polished teaching portfolio (and the success or failure of an on-campus lecture) can be as critical to their prospects as the quality of their dissertation.

8. Advisee Responsibilities

Advisors should remind advisees that the advisor/advisee relationship is based on mutual responsibilities, and that the advisee should:

- a) make sure regular meetings are scheduled and that the advisor is kept up to date on the advisee's scholarly progress,
- b) actively seek guidance when needed,
- c) provide the advisor with lead time when seeking letters of recommendation or feedback on grant/fellowship materials or job applications,
- d) bring concerns to the advisor's attention,
- e) actively participate in departmental academic events—especially those related to the advisee's field,
- f) recognize that advisors are also active scholars with their own extensive scholarly commitments.
- g) each academic year, all graduate students should initiate at least one meeting with the DGS to discuss the development of their plan of study and pertinent professional development issues.
- h) seek additional mentors (faculty and peer) inside and outside of the department. Faculty mentors outside of your advisors will not have the same expectations as outlined above, but can

be invaluable resources as you navigate your program and career goals. Moreover, peer mentors, such as more advanced students in your program, can provide less formal mutual support and advice based on recent experience and similar trajectories.