

Graduate School Advising Agreement Guidelines

Organized and effective advising is beneficial to both the advisor and advisee. This document is intended to be a supplemental tool created to support a graduate student's short and long-term goals while also giving advisors tools to clarify expectations. This document is meant to facilitate this conversation between the graduate student and their advisor and should be reviewed once a semester and/or once significant educational milestones have been met. This document should be modified and developed collaboratively throughout the advisee/advisor working relationship. The Graduate School recommends advisees and advisors adhere to the following 10 guidelines:

1. **Regular one-on-one meetings:** Both advisee and advisor should agree on the frequency and length of meetings. Feedback is critical to student success and clear expectations will help insure that both parties are successful and supported during the advisee/advisor relationship. Depending on where the student is in the graduate degree process, meetings may need to be more or less frequent.

Advisors and advisees should agree on how agendas for these meetings will be formulated. One approach, especially for more advanced students, would be for the advisee to send out an agenda to their advisor prior to their meetings with a list of all items that need to be discussed and any issues the advisee would like to bring to the attention of their advisor; if the advisor wishes to add anything to the list, they should make edits to the emailed list and send it back to their advisee.

2. **Intentional Communication:** Both advisee and advisor should properly prepare for meetings and adhere to the agenda.
3. **Documentation and record keeping:** Both advisee and advisor should take notes during meetings. The advisee should email a description of discussion topics and any agreed upon next steps to their advisor. The advisor will let the student know if any corrections or modifications need to be made. These notes will help clarify expectations and provide records for both parties.
4. **Lab Work/Teaching Expectations and Requirements (GRA and TA appointments):** If applicable, the advisor should provide an overview of lab and/or department expectations, practices, and requirements so that the student has the information necessary to succeed in their research and/or teaching role. ***(Please see the included lab sample document for an example of how to address department specific expectations in supplemental materials.)***

Students should be informed in advance about what kind of work they are expected to do and how they will be included in projects/research currently underway.

Students who have teaching appointments should be informed about the responsibilities for the courses they are assigned to teach along with key contacts for the appointment. Will the students serve as teaching assistants or co-teachers? How many course sections will the advisee be required to teach? How many preps should they expect to prepare each semester? How

many students will they have in each course? Will the syllabus be provided, or should they expect to create their own? Will their teaching loads be regular or should they expect changes from semester to semester?

Lab, teaching and department documents are supplemental to this form. Advisors, please be sure to include pertinent information about lab, teaching and department expectations to your advisee. Advisees please ask clarifying questions so that you have a holistic understanding of the workload, principles, and expectations surrounding your work for your department/advisor.

5. Graduation and milestone completion timeline:

The chart below is a SAMPLE timeline.

Advisee and advisor should discuss progression and timelines related to graduation at an early point in the student's graduate career. Advisee and advisor should have knowledge of [Graduate School](#) and program requirements, guidelines and expectations for graduation. Advisees should discuss the timeline of important milestones with their advisors and make sure they understand what is expected at each step. The timeline should be evaluated each semester and updated if necessary.

Milestones marked with * are required by the Graduate School. Other milestones are program specific and can be removed from the timeline as appropriate. (For example, preliminary exam or dissertation prospectus may be removed if not required by the program.) Other milestones can be added as necessary. Specificity can be added to this document by noting whether the milestone should be completed during a fall or spring semester, if necessary.

In order to have the degree awarded in any given semester, advisees and advisors should be aware of relevant [deadlines](#) set by the Graduate School for the dissertation defense and submission of approved dissertation. Completion dates for these milestones should be set with those deadlines in mind.

Students should also be informed on how and when to form their committees. As this is specific to departments, please add any applicable information to this document.

Academic Milestone	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Notes
Preliminary/Qualifying exam							
Completion of coursework*							
Comprehensive exam*							
Dissertation prospectus/proposal							
Dissertation defense*							
Submission of approved dissertation*							
Other program milestones:							

6. **Professional obligations and dates:** Advisees should be aware of department and lab meetings that they are required to attend. Any service expectations or professional opportunities should be discussed with the advisee.

The advisor should discuss conference attendance recommendations and requirements. Advisors should also explain how advisees should obtain funding for travel.

7. **Publication expectations: (If applicable in the student's field of study.)** The advisee and advisor should discuss topics and timeline for student papers/publications. Will the dissertation follow, say, a three-paper model? What must be complete/published prior to the dissertation defense? The advisee and advisor should discuss how the work will be edited and submitted. Advisees should have a clear understanding of primary authorship and co-authorship expectations on papers they publish prior to graduation.

8. **Feedback:** Prior to submitting any work to the advisor, the advisor and advisee should discuss the feedback process. Guiding questions include: Should the advisee ask for specific feedback from the advisor? What is the nature of the feedback that will be provided by the advisor? Does the advisor do line-by-line edits or should the advisee plan on using campus writing support services for documents edits? What are the expectations for turnaround time between when a draft is submitted and when the advisee can expect feedback?

Advisors should let advisees know how long it will take for them to provide feedback. Advisors should commit to providing feedback in a timely fashion based on upcoming milestone goals.

Advisors should provide regular academic performance updates, including clarifying expectations surrounding level and quality of work. Advisors should let advisees know if they are making adequate progress, and what they need to do to meet graduate school level expectations to secure graduation.

9. **Boundaries:** Both advisee and advisor should be clear on one another’s personal and professional boundaries. The power differential in this dynamic could convolute the working relationship, and both advisor and advisee should discuss and agree to the work that needs to be done and how it will come to completion. The advisee and advisor should also decide when phoning or texting a personal number is appropriate.

How will the advisee and advisor communicate? Email, text, phone calls? What kind of response time should both parties anticipate?

10. **Conflict Resolution:** If conflict should arise, the student advisee and faculty advisor should attempt to resolve the issue informally. The Director of Graduate Studies, program director, or Department Chair may also be contacted for context and guidance. The [Ombuds](#) office can act as a confidential resource for conflict resolution, along with assisting with mediation in some cases. If resolution cannot be reached informally, students may consider additional avenues for their complaint. The Graduate School grievance process and procedures document includes information about jurisdiction for a variety of issues, and explains the process for grievances which fall under the purview of the Graduate School. [Resources](#) related to conflict resolution and information on the [grievance process](#) can be found on the Graduate School website. Conflicts related to discrimination and harassment or sexual misconduct should be reported to the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#). If the student is employed by CU and has an employment grievance, they should consult [Faculty Affairs](#) for guidance.

In conclusion, this document can assist in establishing productive professional relationships. This document serves both the advisee and the advisor by providing guidelines and a plan for clarifying expectations, lessening conflict and providing structure. By initialing below, both parties are acknowledging that they have received, read, and understand the information above.

The information contained in this document is intended to provide recommended best practices and guidelines for graduate student mentoring. It is not intended to, nor does it, create an express or implied contract between the advisor and advisee or between or among the university and any faculty member or graduate student.

Please feel free to add any other points of concern below prior to initialing.

Student Initials:

Advisor Initials:

Please contact The Director of Graduate Community and Program Development, Dr. Leslie-Ellen Blood <leslie.blood@colorado.edu>, with any questions you have on how to use this document.

Workbook Exercise

EXAMPLE: The PI Lab

Note: the text below is meant to serve as an *example*. It is strongly suggested that advisors evaluate the text below and customize to the specific needs of their individual lab. Once created, this information should be reviewed with students annually in case something needs to be changed.

Quick Facts:

Discuss these onboarding items with students. This information can help reduce conflict by aligning lab-specific and advisor-specific expectations early. Examples are provided below of potential answers. Your answers will likely be different, **so please tailor them to meet your needs and research methods:**

Lab Hours are:

Example: Generally, 7 AM to 4 PM for me, and ideally our paths would cross during that time. If you're not a 'morning person' I'd expect you to work later in the day. I expect you to come to lab meetings which are on X days at X time. You're an adult, so I expect you to manage that time yourself, and I expect the work will get done. How you want to schedule that time is up to you.

If you want to reach me:

Example: Email is always good, in person is great but I'm not always in the immediate vicinity. Feel free to drop in when we're not having our one on one. When my door is closed please do not disturb. My cell is X and my office is room Y.

When I go out of town:

Example: I will let you know. If it's a personal vacation, I'll be offline. If it's professional (conference, talk, etc) I'll still be reachable but my emails will be delayed. I keep a calendar at X so you'll know where I am and when I'll be back. If there's an issue that needs immediate assistance, please speak to <Lab Manager> until I am back.

If I email you:

Example: I expect a response within 2 business days, if I would like a faster response (during tight deadline times) we will have a conversation about that. Generally, if I email on weekends I don't expect an answer until Monday during lab hours, unless we're up against a deadline and we've had a discussion about emailing outside of the workweek. I do not expect late night responses or very early morning responses if I email during those times. I do, however, expect a response.

If you email me:

Example: I will respond to all emails from you within 2-3 business days. If I am on travel, this can be delayed. I'll be sure you're aware of when I will be offline. If I don't respond during 'normal times', please email again – I get a great deal of email so sometimes I need to be reminded.

If you want to go on a vacation:

Example: Just give me 3 weeks' notice. Certain times of year are bad for travel. Such as during the school year when you are TA'ing. We'll coordinate a calendar to make sure the needs of the lab are

covered. For family emergencies, obviously no notice is needed (but please let me know you are out so I don't worry). Students in my lab get 2 weeks vacation a year, plus major university holidays.

If you are sick:

Example: Please do not come to the lab. Rest and get well, see a doctor if you need to. If you need to communicate anything serious, please let me know (I don't need details, but I do want to know how you are doing).

If you make a mistake:

Example: Please come to me or to a postdoc in the lab. Mistakes happen during grad school, and during the scientific process. THIS IS NORMAL. This is how we learn.

If you and I are in conflict:

Example: We should try to resolve the problem informally first, but if you don't feel like I'm hearing your concern or you feel uncomfortable raising it with me, you should first go to the graduate advisor (if you don't need confidentiality) or the Ombuds office (if you need confidentiality). They should help you with mediation, and will direct you to formal complaint avenues should it prove necessary.

If you feel your research interests have changed OR our working relationship is not the best fit:

Example: It is okay to let me know if your research interests have changed, OR if you feel the working culture in this lab is not the best fit for you. Please feel free to come and discuss with me on this. We can sort out issues together and work on your next plan of action or next steps to succeed in the PhD program.

Core values of my lab (List 5):

Example: Respect. Accountability. Perseverance. Compassion. Support.

Lab Culture:

Example: I work hard to maintain a respectful lab culture. If at any time there is an issue between lab mates I hope it can be resolved through discussion and mutual respect. If it becomes a problem, please bring it to me. Everyone should feel safe, supported, and empowered.

Graduate School is:

Example: Not easy! It's a marathon, and there will be ups and downs throughout the process. You may feel like a failure, or an imposter. THIS IS NORMAL. Please know you were brought into my lab for a good reason, and I am here to support you – work hard and don't give up. You can do this!

EXPECTATIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Department Expectations:

<List department expectations here>

Expectations Specific to My Lab:

<Make use of a table to provide lab-specific milestones; Customize as needed>

Lab milestones	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Notes
Master equipment							
Read X papers							
Publish a paper							
Go to a conference							
Give annual talk							
Present at lab meeting							
Broad goals:							

<List other lab-related expectations here>

What I expect from YOU:

When you graduate from my lab I hope you:

I expect you to manage your pace to and goals of the PhD by:

I expect you to communicate to others in my lab:

I hope you obtain research skills and abilities in:

I expect your communication with me (and others):

My expectations for deadlines are:

What You Should Expect From Me:

As a mentor I promise to:

In regard to your career goals I promise to:

Feedback from me will be:

You will be evaluated on your progress (on project and towards degree - how often?):

This document serves both the advisee and the advisor by providing agreed-upon guidelines which will clarify expectations, lessen conflict and provide structure.

College of Engineering and Applied Science Guidance on Providing Time Off for Graduate Students

Graduate students on appointment at the University of Colorado Boulder have unique characteristics associated with their position. Graduate students depend on their faculty members to provide them with flexibility with respect to work hours and taking time off when the need arises. While each faculty member has final say on what leave they will provide, this document provides suggestions on a recommended baseline.¹

Leave for Life Events

There will be times in anyone's life when a major event occurs requiring time off. These events are typically rare and faculty should therefore be inclined to provide time off when they occur. As a common baseline, faculty should consider providing **one to two days of leave** for these events and then provide **more time off if possible**.

Bereavement Leave: This is leave for the death of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, or grandparent.

Sick Leave: This is leave to allow a student who is sick to stay home and recover. Generally, if a student is sick, they should be encouraged to stay home to avoid spreading their illness to others if contagious. This type of leave includes time for diagnostic and preventative examinations, treatment, and recovery. Faculty should consider flexibility for the health needs of the student and a student's child if applicable.

Accommodations for long-term illness or serious medical conditions should be discussed on a case by case basis. The faculty member and student should apply for funds to help in such situations at the unit, college and campus levels (see "Funds for Medical and Financial Emergencies" below).

Holiday Leave: Currently there are 10 observed holidays on the University calendar; faculty should set expectations with students ahead of time about whether they expect students to work on these days. The baseline recommendation is not to require students to work on these holidays with the exception of a major deadline associated with a paper or grant submission.

Restorative Leave: Taking a break to hit the 'reset button' is crucial to mental and physical health and wellness. Some natural breaks are easy to predict based on the University calendar, whereas personal vacation leave needs to be discussed ahead of time. Faculty and students should have a candid conversation early about expectations 1) for the amount of time off a student can expect each year, 2) how much notice a faculty member needs ahead of time for vacation requests from students, and 3) if the faculty member expects students to work on days that are otherwise considered a general break in the semester (e.g. Spring Break and Fall Break).

¹ *Advisors are not required to adhere to any of the recommended baselines. However, they should be aware that these recommendations are consistent with employment practices at CU Boulder for other types of employees. Decisions about paid leave are at the discretion of the advisor. The baseline recommendations were developed after reviewing CU Boulder HR guidelines and other graduate program expectations at peer institutions.*

Vacation Leave: The baseline recommendation for vacation leave is two weeks of vacation each calendar year, with the understanding that some times of year are not ideal for individual labs based on research-related events (e.g. a major conference or paper submission deadline). Faculty should set clear expectations around vacation requests for their students as part of the onboarding process (e.g. “I expect a minimum of two weeks’ notice before going on vacation.”).

Vacation Leave for International Students: Please note that requests from International Students may be different from that of domestic students. If an international student has not been home in several years, the advisor should consider providing more flexibility to the student: e.g. providing a month of vacation leave to allow a student to spend time with their family rather than two weeks. International students taking this type of leave should check in with ISSS before they make any travel plans to account for visa issues.

Pregnancy or Parental-Related Leave: It is the policy of the University of Colorado Boulder to support to the greatest extent possible, and in a manner consistent with the effective and efficient operation of the university, graduate students with a need for Academic Adjustment and/or Paid Parental Leave for Students on Appointment due to childbirth or adoption. The new Graduate Student Pregnancy and Parenting-related [Policy](#) will be in effect as of 7/1/2020.

Leave of Absence:

Graduate students must [apply for a leave of absence](#) if they withdraw from or do not enroll in classes for a fall or spring semester. Graduate students who do not apply for a leave of absence will be discontinued and must reapply to the university to return to CU Boulder.

The leave of absence form must be filled out and then signed by your faculty advisor. After obtaining that signature, please submit the form to the Graduate School’s Student Services office to obtain the signature of the Dean of the Graduate School. The form can be dropped off or mailed, accompanied by the leave of absence fee.

Doctoral candidates who have passed their comprehensive examinations are not typically eligible, [with the exception of parental leave](#). Students who are conducting required research out of the area, and students with other extenuating situations or additional questions may contact the Graduate School for further guidance, at gradinfo@colorado.edu.

Funds for Medical or Financial Emergencies

There are emergency funds available at the university for students that encounter an unexpected medical emergency.

Within the College of Engineering & Applied Science, we request that departments and advisors reach out to the Director of Graduate Programs, Meredith Canode (meredith.canode@colorado.edu) or the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs, Massimo Ruzzene (massimo.ruzzene@colorado.edu) to inform them of any emergencies, so that the College can assess and advise as how best to proceed.

The existing resources available to students are listed below:

1. Graduate School Emergency Fund

The University of Colorado Boulder Graduate School Emergency Fund is intended to help meet the financial needs of Boulder graduate students who encounter an emergency situation resulting in unforeseen expenses during their degree program.

For more details, [download the document about this fund located on the Graduate School's website.](#)

2. Student Relief Fund Emergency Grant

The CU Boulder Student Relief Fund Emergency Grant is designed to assist enrolled students with a financial emergency in the current term that is impacting their ability to stay on track towards graduation. Students must be either in danger of withdrawing due to an unexpected, temporary financial hardship resulting from an emergency or crisis situation; or struggling with debilitating financial circumstances which may impede their academic progress and ability to complete classes. The emergency grant is only available to students who face a legal barrier to accessing federal or state financial aid. The costs must have been incurred while enrolled at CU Boulder; costs for a future academic year will not be considered.

Emergency funding is provided in the form of one-time per year awards. It is not intended to provide ongoing relief for recurring expenses. These awards are grants and do not need to be repaid.

<https://www.colorado.edu/financialaid/types-aid/student-relief-fund-emergency-grant>

3. International Student and Scholars Office Emergency Fund

Every fall and spring semester, ISSS administers grants for F-1 and J-1 students with financial difficulty or emergencies. Grants vary according to available funds and need. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, not all applicants will receive a grant. If you are in need of emergency financial assistance, you are encouraged to review the [application instructions](#) (<https://www.colorado.edu/iss/node/268/attachment>) and apply before the deadline. For more information, please [contact ISSS](#).

4. Medical Expense Assistance Fund

The Student Health Board's Medical Expense Assistance Fund (MEAF) is designed to financially assist students who are unable to pay incurred medical bills or prescription costs. To Apply: Read and complete the MEAF application (<https://www.colorado.edu/healthcenter/content/meaf-application>) and bring to the Billing & Coding office at the Wardenburg Health Center on the 3rd floor in Room 336. If you'd like to appeal a Medical Expense Assistance decision please complete the [Application to Appeal for Medical Expense Assistance](#).

Assisting Students in Difficulty

The Student Affairs Health and Wellness Services division provides a variety of resources for assisting students as part of the [Red Folder initiative](#). For those with dedicated desktop support from OIT, the red folder icon can be seen on your computer desktop for easy access.

The site includes information on how to recognize the common signs of distress:

Recognizing signs of distress

These are the most common signs of distress. Students may present with signs that are not listed.

Academic

Sudden decline in quality of work and grades

Frequently missed classes and assignments

Disturbing content in writing or presentations

Classroom disruptions

Consistently seeking personal rather than professional advice

Multiple requests for extensions or special considerations (a change from prior functioning)

Doesn't respond to repeated requests for contact or meetings

Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, helplessness, isolation, rage, despair, violence or self-harm

Physical

Marked changes in physical appearance like poor grooming or hygiene or sudden changes in weight

Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality

Visibly intoxicated or smelling of alcohol or marijuana

Rapid speech or manic behavior

Depressed or lethargic mood or functioning

Observable signs of injury like facial bruising or cuts

Psychological

Self-disclosure of personal distress like family problems, financial difficulties, assault, discrimination or legal difficulties

Unusual or disproportionate emotional response to events

Excessive tearfulness, panic reactions

Verbal abuse like taunting, badgering or intimidation

Expression of concern about the student by peers

Safety Risk

Verbal, written or implied references to suicide, homicide, assault or self-harm behavior

Unprovoked anger or hostility

Physical violence like shoving, grabbing, assaulting or use of a weapon

Stalking or harassing

Communicating threats or disturbing comments in person or via email, text or phone call

How to respond to a student in distress:

Responding to a student in distress

Stay safe: If there is an imminent danger to you, the student or someone else, call 911.

Take your time: If this is not an imminently dangerous situation, take time to listen to the student's concerns and how you might be able to help.

Stay calm: Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself. Use a calm voice when talking and asking questions.

Use active listening: Make eye contact, give your full attention. Restate what the student says to make sure you understand what is causing the distress and/or what they are asking for help with.

Ask direct questions: Don't be afraid to directly ask the student if they are having thoughts of harming themselves or others. By asking you are not instilling the thought.

Refer: Connect the student with the appropriate campus resource(s) for additional support.

And how to refer a student in distress to campus resources:

Referring a student in distress

Does the student need immediate assistance?

Yes

The student's conduct is clearly reckless, disorderly, dangerous or threatening and suggestive of immediate harm to self or others in the community.

What to do:

- If there is an imminent danger to you, the student or someone else, call 911.
- Report the concern to [Student Support and Case Management](#).

I'm Not Sure

Signs of distress are visible but the severity is unclear. The interaction has left you feeling uneasy or concerned about the student and you're not sure how to proceed.

What to do:

- Consult with [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#) (303-492-2277) or [Student Support and Case Management](#) (303-492-7348) on how best to support the student.

No

I'm not concerned for the student's immediate safety but they are having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use support.

What to do:

- See our list of campus resources below to connect the student with support on campus.

Mandatory Reporting

In addition to referring a student to resources, any sexual misconduct, intimate partner abuse (including dating and domestic violence), stalking, protected-class discrimination or harassment, or related retaliation must be reported to the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance \(OIEC\)](#).

For questions regarding these issues or the obligation to report, please contact OIEC at 303-492-2127.

The links above, and additional resources, can be accessed on the [Red Folder resources](#) page. Extensive resources are also available on the Student Affairs Health and Wellness [Services site](#).

The Graduate School website provides a variety of additional resources related to conflict resolution and assisting students in distress. See Section 10 of the Advising agreement above or the graduate school [website](#) for details.