

Advising & Mentoring

Faculty advisors, particularly for doctoral students, play an important role in students' intellectual development.

Every graduate student is expected to work closely with a faculty advisor. Advisors assist students in planning a program of study to meet degree requirements. Students are also encouraged to seek out mentors in addition to their formal faculty advisor, which could include staff, researchers, industry partners and other students. Successful advising and mentoring relationships are characterized by clear expectations, open communication, and a willingness to resolve problems. The resources below can facilitate productive relationships between graduate students and their advisors and mentors.

The information below should be used as a general guideline to build a student/advisor relationship. These are not requirements, but rather best practices. Every advisor and lab situation is different, so expectations should be discussed and clearly laid out at the beginning of a student's career to better understand and meet the goals of the academic program, advisor, and student. If an issue arises with an advisor, each program has a designated Graduate and Undergraduate Director/Advisor who is available to help when needed.

Setting Expectations & Resolving Conflicts

Students should determine their area of interest and understand how they work best in an advising situation before approaching faculty to inquire/interview for a position within a lab or research center. What are your needs in graduate school and reassess those needs regularly as you develop your skills and understanding within academia. Be open and communicate goals and concerns with your advisor and develop a committee that will help you grow and become a strong researcher / industry professional. Each department/program has opportunities for students to learn new skills, but students may also look beyond their program to the school and university for more general skills building (communication, writing, management, networking, career planning).

At KU, the quality of our graduate education program depends on the professional and ethical conduct of our campus. Although KU is composed of many individual programs and departments, the faculty, staff and students create a community of intellectuals, each offering significant value to the university. As such, they have similar responsibilities and commitment to upholding academic standards and sustaining a creative and positive community, while serving state and local needs.

Focusing on the professional academic relationship between faculty and graduate students, the following guidelines are based on the collective experience and wisdom of many research universities. Their purpose is to serve as a starting point for clear and regular communication about expectations; and to encourage awareness of and commitment to practices that are considered a matter of common sense, courtesy, and basic honesty.

FACULTY ADVISORS

- Serve as a role model and professional mentor to graduate and undergraduate students, staff and junior faculty
- Help students develop academic, research, writing, oral, quantitative, or other relevant professional skills required by the discipline or field
- Design programs that take advantage of individual interests and strengths and that can be completed in a timely manner
- Encouraging, by example, with dedication to high quality teaching (using available resources, such as [Human Resources](#), [Office of Institutional Opportunity & Access](#) and [Center for Online & Distance Learning](#))
- Encourage faculty-graduate student collaborations which entail the sharing of authorship or rights to intellectual property developed in research or other creative activity
- Encouraging students to be open about problems in their working relationships (including the relationship with an advisor, committee member, student or staff), and being open to addressing such problems
- Provide students with an evaluation of their progress and performance in regular and informative ways (suggested frequency is two meetings per semester minimum) and address lack of progress with academic or financial consequences.
- Help students understand the rules of the institution, including Graduate Studies Policies & Procedures (available in the [Policy Library](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#)), or direct them to the staff member who is responsible for this information
- Help students understand the requirements of the degree program, utilizing the [Plan of Study System](#) to ensure timelines and milestones are met and students are meeting their research responsibilities
- Define research goals verbally and in writing, including research tools, access, security and evaluation, to ensure understanding across cultures and experience levels
- Discuss laboratory or research authorship policies with students in advance of entering into collaborative projects (utilize resources within the [Office of Innovation & Collaboration](#))
- Prepare students to be competitive for employment or future graduate programs by acknowledging student contributions, encouraging participation in academic and research-related conferences, professional publications, and patent applications
- Encourage students to participate in professional organizations and build on their personal skills and interests that might benefit the student, university or society
- Maintain professionalism: be respectful and honest in your communication, avoid conflicts of interest, interact with students, staff and faculty colleagues in a professional and civil manner

KU Policies & Resources

[KU Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[Office of the Vice Provost for Student Affairs](#)

[The Office of Graduate Studies](#)

[Student Conduct Review Team](#)

[Student Involvement & Leadership Center](#)

[Faculty Fellow Blog](#)

GRADUATE STUDENTS

- Understand faculty advisors' central role, as well as their constraints
- Interact with faculty, staff and other students in a mature, professional, and civil manner in accordance with University policies
- Recognize that faculty provide education and instruction for the student to conduct research, and, through access to teaching and research funds, may also be able to provide the student with financial support
- Recognize that the faculty advisor is responsible for monitoring the accuracy, validity, and integrity of a student's research, realizing the quality of that research reflects back on the student, faculty advisor and the University
- Be aware of time constraints (work hours/holidays/vacation time) and other demands imposed on faculty members and program staff
- Take the initiative to arrange meetings with the faculty advisor as often as needed or necessary to ensure progress in research and time to degree (minimum: twice a semester)
- Address problems as early as possible starting with your advisor and then dept/prog director and Assistant; Inform faculty of conflicts and working towards a clear resolution
- Take responsibility for informing yourself of the regulations, policies, and practices governing financial aid, degree and course requirements, research activities, and conflict resolution (see [Graduate Catalog](#) & Student Handbook) and seek clarification from Dean's Office staff if needed
- Exercise high professional standards in all aspects your research and studies (observe the University's policy on academic Misconduct)
- Maintaining absolute integrity in taking examinations and in collecting, analyzing, and presenting research data
- Take special care to preserve the data collected during experiments or noted during research (with precise identification of sources) in order to avoid future confusion or disputes about access or ownership
- Acknowledging the contributions of the faculty advisor and other members of the research team to your work in all publications; It is also appropriate to acknowledge the sources of financial support
- Maintain the confidentiality of the faculty advisor's professional activities and research prior to presentation or publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies of the discipline
- Understand the requirements of your degree program, utilizing the [Plan of Study System](#) to ensure timelines and milestones are met
- Realize that funding as a GRA or GTA comes with additional responsibilities (on top of your course and research enrollment requirements); Failure to fulfill these requirements can lead to reduced funding or a lower grade
- Seek additional resources through the university if needed

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Questions to ask during initial meetings between advisor/student:

Research

- What general area of research is a particular advisor working on and what specific projects are currently being conducted?
- Is this general area something you are interested in working on for the next few years?
- Projects are continually evolving. You may not be working on the same project that is currently being conducted. This is often correlated with the aims of grant funding.
- Who are the lab collaborators...industry, med center, etc???
- Where do graduates from the lab find jobs? What conferences do they go to?
- Have a plan if you are unable to work with your “first choice” advisor or project.
- Peer review and research validation is important. MS students should expect to submit at least one published manuscript and PhD students should submit at least three; though you should discuss individual expectations with your advisor.
- Know and adhere to all guidelines for intellectual property. When in doubt, ask your advisor.

Cohesiveness

- Find out how much supervision and direction the advisor will give you and in what manner they conduct it. Establish open, effective and straightforward communication with your advisor and other lab personnel.
- Spend a few weeks in the lab of any prospective advisor before making any decisions. Make sure that the research area and functional dynamics are a good fit.
- Request to attend group meetings within the lab.
- Other students in the lab can provide good insight into the project, advisor and expectations. A good relationship with other students is very valuable to your success.
- Try multiple labs before making a decision. You may be surprised how well you fit into a lab OR research area OR track that you didn't expect to like.

Time Commitments

- GRA/GTA agreements are typically set at 40-50%. This does NOT mean that you should expect to be in the “office” for 20 hours per week and you're done. You should consider your thesis to be above and beyond your GRA/GTA work requirements.
- An advisor will generally expect you to hold regular hours like a job. Generally between 8-5, you should be working in class, lab, office, etc.
- Academic breaks are a great opportunity to catch up on research
- An advisor will expect you to make regular forward progress on your research (even if it is negative results, it's still progress) The time it takes you to do this will vary.
- GRA research will develop your knowledge and experience. This should be kept in mind when “counting the hours you work.” The more work you put in, the more you get out.
- Outside jobs (on or off campus) are generally frowned upon.

Funding

- It's important...but not everything!
- It's in your best interest to find an advisor that has funding to support you.

- If funds are temporarily not available as a GRA, GTA's are sometimes available to bridge the gap between a PI's grants. These should NOT be counted on as a guarantee.
- Students with a GTA need to consider the time demands by that appointment and the impact that will have on your research ability. You will still be expected to be engaged and productive on your research project. Multiple GTA appointments throughout your career can impede research effectiveness and your graduation timeline.
- Actively participate in the grant seeking, writing and application process. It is vital to the success of your lab and is extremely beneficial experience for you to have.
- Funding is tied to a project that has specific aims and deadlines. If you accept funding, you agree to apply your time and efforts to that project.
- Renewal of financial aid is not automatic. It is contingent upon factors such as availability of funding, satisfactory performance, good academic standing and adequate research progress.
- Be proactive about your funding. Do some work and find out what options are available to you (ie..NIH, NSF, specific research foundations, etc). Do not expect for your advisor or BIOE administration to keep track of your funding for you. Know when your current funding will end and initiate new funding with enough notice to meet deadlines.

General Tips

- A GRA is “a real job.” Your responsibility is to your advisor and the ongoing research for which he/she is responsible. A GRA does NOT get paid to simply write their thesis or do homework.
 - Even if you are funded through an outside source (SELF, NIH, NSF, etc) you are still responsible for conducting research pertinent to the lab's goal.
- Work independently with guidance to solve open-ended problems. Don't get discouraged when things don't work the way you expected. If you knew what was going to happen, it wouldn't be research. Collaborate with your advisor and peers, get creative and try something else.
 - When you graduate and get a job, YOU will be the expert people will turn to for answers. Be able to overcome obstacles in research.
- It's good practice to analyze data and make sure it is reasonable as you collect it....NOT after you've conducted all of your experiments or when you are ready to write your thesis.
- There are some great research opportunities at the medical center and off campus. These come with some additional challenges. It is advisable you discuss these with the program assistant and other students.
- Your advisor's time is extremely valuable. Consider the value of their time and input and utilize it like you would if you were paying them a consulting fee.

Questions you should consider asking a prospective advisor...

1. Do they have specific hours they want to see you in the lab?
 - a. Is it applicable to do work outside of the lab?
2. Are you allowed to take time off? (vacation, holidays, spring break, summer, etc)
 - a. How long?
 - b. Will your project require intervention from others if you're gone (cultures, etc)?
3. How do they assess your progress?
 - a. Do you have to initiate contact? Do they have weekly meetings?
 - b. What should you do if you're struggling?
4. How is coursework prioritized?
 - a. What courses should you be taking and how does it apply to both your lab project and thesis?
 - b. Do they like you to take all courses upfront?
 - c. Will you be heavily involved in research immediately and taking a light course load every semester?
 - i. How will this affect your academic timeline? (ie...Qualifying Exam)
5. Can they fund you?
 - a. Duration and/or terms of agreement?
 - b. How much?
 - c. Is tuition included?
 - d. Other costs included? (fees, travel to conferences, etc.)
6. How can you help apply for more grants?
7. How many journal submissions are expected?
 - a. How can you be first author of a publication?
 - b. Where does that lab typically submit publications?
8. What conferences are you expected to attend?
 - a. Will you be submitting abstracts/posters, etc?
 - b. Is funding assistance available?
9. What are their expectations of you?
 - a. This is also a great time to share what you expect from them!
10. What is their policy if you deem it necessary to get another job?
 - a. Outside employment often conflicts with academic/research progress.
11. How will they help you find a job upon graduation?
 - a. To what areas will your skills make you marketable?

Additional Resources:

[Developing Communication and Conflict Management Skills to Save Time and Enhance Productivity](#)

This site includes an online assessment of your skills, planning tools and more.