

Department Policy on Graduate Student Mentoring
Adopted by Department Assembly 12 September 2011

Background:

In September 2010 Julie Greene convened a subcommittee of the Graduate Committee and charged it with evaluating and improving faculty mentoring of graduate students. The following is our report of the actions taken by the subcommittee and its recommendations, as approved by the Graduate Committee.

Our primary goal was to bring mentoring of graduate students to the fore as an important part of what we do in the history department, and create the structural supports to do it well. The rationale for this mentoring initiative may be described as follows:

1. Strong mentoring of Ph.D. students enhances success. Studies show that faculty mentoring of Ph.D. students correlates with enhanced success – both in intellectual work produced and in job placement.
2. A strong graduate program is an essential component of a Research One history department.
3. The Graduate School has initiated a new program in accountability and demonstrated improvement for graduate programs. Resources for graduate training, we expect, will become more closely to the strength of the program and demonstrated areas of improvement.

In response the grad committee agreed to take on improving our mentoring of graduate students as the task for this year, and appointed a subcommittee to develop a plan to improve mentoring for graduate students in our department.

In October the subcommittee conducted two written surveys to gather information about current mentoring expectations and practices from faculty and graduate students. These were followed by two lunchtime forums, one for graduate students and the other for faculty, to exchange ideas about mentoring and discuss ways to improve it. The subcommittee used the information gathered to develop the following recommendations.

1. Annual end-of-the-year faculty review of Ph.D. students. This would be done by holding a meeting which convenes all tenured and tenure-track faculty (this could be defined as graduate faculty, but is that the same?) to review the status and progress made by all Ph.D. students. We anticipate that most of the discussion will center on first year Ph.D. students and any more advanced students who may need additional support, have encountered difficulties, or who have demonstrated excellence. Each student would be discussed, and faculty who have worked with them in seminars or as Teaching Assistants would contribute their evaluation.
2. Adoption of History Department Best Practices in Mentoring Guidelines. See Below.
3. Development and distribution of “vital information” packet for faculty from DGS and ADGS about the graduate programs procedures, requirements, timelines for achievement of benchmarks, typical course of study for the different degrees, standards for examinations (exam format and process of exam composition) and thesis, departmental grants and fellowships, etc. This should be distributed to all faculty and to each new faculty hire upon arrival.
4. Annual early fall meeting of DGS with grad students to outline expected time to degree benchmarks; outline comprehensive exam preparation and exam process; present procedures on T.A. assignments; present mentoring best practices sheet; etc. We suggest 3 meetings: one for Ph.D students; one for M.A. students; and one for HILS students.
5. Each academic year, all Ph.D. students should initiate at least one meeting with the DGS to discuss the development of their plan of study and pertinent professional development issues. Each academic year, all M.A. should initiate at least one meeting with the Associate DGS to discuss the development of their plan of study and pertinent professional development issues. Each semester, all HILS students should initiate at least

one meeting with the ADGS – *preferably when registration for the next semester's courses opens* -- to discuss coordination of their library science and history requirements, as well as other pertinent issues about plan of study and professional development.

6. The department's efforts on professional development for graduate students should be continued and expanded.
7. Encourage the HGSA to continue its peer mentoring program.

Best Practices in Mentoring Graduate Students

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.

Mentoring Recommendations for Faculty

1. Regular Meetings with Advisees: 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 Ph.D. comps:	meet every 2-3 weeks
During prospectus development:	meet once a month
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 of M.A. and HILS students should help their advisees define their examination field or thesis topic. HILS students should also be encouraged to meet each semester with the Associate Director of Graduate Studies to discuss HILS 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:

Times 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 (such as Skype or iChat).

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, the Associate DGS, 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 advisees 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 Ph.D. students should initiate at least one meeting with the DGS to discuss the development of their plan of study and pertinent professional development issues. Each academic year, all M.A. should initiate at least one meeting with the Associate DGS to discuss the development of their plan of study and pertinent professional development issues. Each semester, all HILS students should initiate at least one meeting with the ADGS – *preferably when registration for the next semester's courses opens* -- to discuss coordination of their library science and history requirements, as well as other pertinent issues about plan of study and professional development.