UW Sociology
Graduate Advising Guidelines

This document lays out some foundational principles and common dynamics that we believe will be useful for graduate students and faculty as they work to develop productive advising relationships. Graduate advising is one of the core pillars of advanced academic training. As a department we are committed to being a community that facilitates the professional training and development of all students through constructive advising and department interactions that are respectful of individual differences and prioritize the dignity of all. While variation in the character of specific advising relationships is natural and expected, effective advising relationships share important features. This document is not intended as a comprehensive guide to advising, nor is it a binding contract. Rather, the document is intended to help foster conversation and build collective expectations around advising and faculty-student interactions more broadly. These principles help cultivate an inclusive, supportive, and productive department culture and offer critical training for graduate students who may become academic advisors. These guidelines should not create additional work for faculty, but rather should inform their existing practices.

What is Advising?
Although advising relationships vary depending on the needs of the student, the stage of graduate training, and faculty expertise, advisors are typically expected to provide their advisees with constructive feedback on scientific work, encouragement, and advocacy. Advisors and advisees should have regular explicit conversations about the evolving advising needs of the student and ways to improve the advising experience.

Noy and Ray (2012) describe several advisor types, including: affective (therapist), instrumental (practical), intellectual (feedback), available (helpful), and respectful (interpersonal). The effectiveness of these types varies across students and across stages of graduate training. Some advising relationships, like those with a first-year advisor, may be temporary and focused on a very few topics. Other advisers may become long-term mentors who provide guidance long after graduation. According to Brunsma et al. (2017), being a mentor does not require a special skill set. Rather, mentors possess qualities typical of any good role model, such as being a good listener, being a guide rather than an enforcer, being accessible, being supportive and caring, and even being practical if the circumstances call for it. In essence, according to Schnaiberg (2005), good mentorship simply involves long-term concern over a mentee's personal and professional development. In addition, mentorship can be extended via multiple modalities.

Regardless of the type of advising provided, graduate advisors should strive to provide expert guidance and feedback in a constructive way. This includes critical evaluations of areas that need further development in students' skills and work, as well as feedback that identifies and encourages students' talents and strengths, thereby helping to illuminate pathways to future success. This includes, for instance, offering literature suggestions, suggesting university resources to strengthen data or writing skills, helping to troubleshoot problems in the classroom, and providing feedback on drafts at a frequency that is reasonable for both the advisor and

student. At each phase of the graduate program, faculty can invite priorities, questions, and concerns from advisees, and support them in navigating the program generally.

General Expectations for Graduate Student Advisees

Our department does not use a strong *lab model* of graduate training, wherein students are effectively hired to work under the tutelage of a single primary faculty member to whom they are answerable, in a structure akin to an employer-employee relationship. Instead, we use an *independent scholar* model, wherein graduate students have a good deal of leeway to choose their areas of specialization, set the pacing and focus of their research, and invite partnerships with advisors best suited to support students' needs and goals. Under this model, students should expect to:

- **Be their own project managers**. Advisees are expected to develop skills and strategies for setting goals and deadlines, managing workloads, writing and revising papers, getting feedback on work outside of the advising relationship, building collaborations, and pursuing opportunities to present research results. While students are expected to do this, they are not expected to arrive knowing how to do so, or to figure out these strategies on their own. Instead, faculty are expected to provide advice and guidance on these matters.
- **Build their advising teams.** Deciding whom to ask to be an advisor or join a committee are some of the most important decisions graduate students make**.** All students will be paired with a first-year advisor. During the first year in the program, the student should talk with that advisor about how to build advisory relationships with other faculty members. Students are also encouraged to speak with the Director of Graduate Studies, as needed, to identify potential advisors and navigate the process of building these relationships.
- **Maintain regular contact with advisors.** With the primary advisor, this means that the student should send emails to set up meetings to discuss the student's progress on at least a quarterly basis (or as otherwise agreed). With other committee members, this means that the student should provide updates, share drafts, and seek out advice as needed.
- **Update and organize shared information**. Students should take notes during meetings and follow up with the advisor about any advice or agreed-on commitments, and any changes to deadlines and goals.
- **Identify and pursue professional opportunities**, such as fellowships, grants, RA positions, and conference presentations. Faculty are responsible for sending out notices that may be appropriate for the student, helping the student weigh the pros and cons of various opportunities, and developing strategies for pursuing those opportunities.
- **Submit paperwork and materials for review with adequate time for faculty response.** Exams, feedback on papers and grant/job applications, and submissions of letters of recommendation are a regular part of academic life. When requesting assistance for the completion of milestones, graduate students are responsible for

consulting the Sociology Manual and with the Graduate Program Advisor to understand all relevant deadlines and paperwork requirements. For exams, applications, and letters of recommendation, students are responsible for asking all committee members what kind of materials, and by what time, the faculty needs to prepare, and for accommodating those requests. For more on this see the section on "Tailoring the working relationship."

- **Be explicit about professional goals.** It is especially important for the primary advisor and student to discuss questions and goals related to the student's research and career trajectory, so that the advisors can help support the student's plans and vision for the future.
- **Reach out for help when they need it.** It is normal for students to feel stuck, lost, confused or overwhelmed in the face of new or unexpected challenges in graduate school. At these times it's crucial that the student let someone on their team, or some other faculty member, know that there is a problem. Please see the section below on "Additional resources and support" for more on this.

These skills are critical facets of project management that underlie long-term success in any research-related job, in or outside of academia. Developing these capacities is a key part of our training for graduate students to become independent scholars and project leaders.

Equity and Inclusion in Graduate Advising

As sociologists we understand well that academia has a long history of excluding and devaluing BIPOC students, and that academia frequently assumes and rewards a familiarity with the expectations of the institution that is generally denied to first generation college students. In their review of the literature, Brunsma et al. (2017) identified the following themes as being characteristic of BIPOC graduate students' experiences in their programs of study:

(1) racism, discrimination, and racial microaggressions
(2) isolation and lack of integration and belonging
(3) mental health, stress, identity, and coping
(4) lack of mentoring

We are also acutely aware of the struggles facing LGBTQ+ students on campus and more broadly in today's political climate. Despite what appears to be steps forward and commitments to inclusion, LGBTQ+ students, especially Trans and BIPOC individuals, who continue to face feelings of isolation, stigma, and discrimination (Sokolowski 2020).

We are committed to acknowledging that these disparate experiences can occur and aim to promote an inclusive approach to graduate student advising that strives for clarity in expectations and a web of resources that meet students' needs. Faculty can affirm and encourage connection of a student's social identity to the discipline in a variety of ways depending on the interests of the student. This may include guidance on how to develop topics

of interest into research agendas, direction towards funding and research opportunities, and/or fostering connections to broader communities in the university and discipline. At the department-level, the diversity committee is responsible for disseminating new research about best practices for support of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and first-generation students to faculty. Faculty should be mindful of the diverse personal and professional backgrounds of students, the general power imbalances between faculty and graduate students, and ways they can use their power to encourage and support students on their academic trajectories.

Who Advises?
Most students work with several advisors at different points in their graduate school career. For example, different members of the faculty may serve as a student's first year advisor, M.A. chair, or PhD chair. This exposure to a variety of faculty perspectives can broaden opportunities and help students forge an independent scholarly identity. It is not uncommon, nor is it frowned upon, for students to change primary advisors as their needs change. Further, students often work with and seek/receive support, help, and advice from multiple faculty members at any given time.

Because advising roles and expectations can vary over time and across relationships in accordance with the needs of the graduate student and capacity or expertise of the advisor, students should not assume that any one member of the faculty will satisfy all needs across the entire graduate school career. It is important that students communicate their needs and expectations with their faculty advisors. If the advisor is unable to meet all the needs of the student at any point in time, the student should contact the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss ways to supplement the advising relationship and/or establish new relationships that better meet the needs of the student and capacity of faculty.

While faculty may have limited bandwidth for formally advising numerous students, they should make every effort to meet with students who request to do so, and to guide them to relevant resources or literatures.

First-year advisors
Each incoming student is assigned a first-year advisor. The role of the first-year advisor is to welcome and orient the student to the department, serve as a point person for answering general questions about the department, and to work with the student to develop individualized plans for coursework and professional development. In most cases the first-year advisor will not remain the student's primary advisor. Rather, we expect that the first-year advisor will help the student identify and connect with faculty members in and outside the department who have complementary research interests, strategize about who might serve as an advisor for the MA research or, if the student comes in with an MA, for the qualifying exam. The first-year advisor can also help their advisees identify other graduate students with shared interests and connect the student to networks and resources outside of the department that may be helpful. The first-year advisor and advisee should meet in the first two weeks of the quarter and should plan to

stay in regular touch thereafter. Best practices call for weekly or bimonthly meetings, especially during the first quarter in the program.

Advice for Teaching

Students' first experiences as teachers frequently come in their role as a Teaching Assistant. This can include discussion of section planning, student participation, efficient grading, equity and inclusion in the classroom, and conflicts with students. When questions arise about how to manage any aspect of teaching, students should immediately contact the instructor of record for directions on how to proceed. In addition to the instructor of record, students can receive support and advice from other faculty members, the Graduate Program Director, the Department Chair, and from UW's Center for Teaching and Learning. The Sociology Teaching Toolkit (on Canvas) and Brown Bag series also offer guidance on teaching.

Advising for the MA and Beyond

As graduate students begin work on their M.A. thesis and prepare to take exams, they should work to build relationships with multiple faculty members, some of whom will become their new advisors, committee chairs, and committee members. Formally appointed advisors, committee chairs, and committee members are expected to attend exams, provide feedback on student work, write letters of recommendation, and respond to questions through emails and meetings. Other faculty members may serve as informal advisors who provide feedback or serve as a sounding board on various aspects of the student's research or experiences in graduate school.

> **Primary Advisors and Committee Chairs.** The primary advisor's role is to guide the student toward successful completion of the MA and PhD, providing constructive feedback and instruction throughout the year, with official annual reports on progress submitted during the Spring quarter.
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> The primary advisor will, as appropriate: provide feedback on work-related goals and priorities; advise on the timeline and preparation for achieving milestones in the program, including the MA, Comprehensive Exam, prospectus defense, and dissertation; assist in fostering competence in learning the knowledge and skills of the discipline; recommend relevant academic skill-building and professional development activities; help troubleshoot technical and research-related challenges; answer questions about progress through the program, professional development, and disciplinary norms; help to strategize about building relationships and networking with colleagues and potential collaborators; help to identify, and in some cases may provide, opportunities for research, employment and publication. As the student progresses through the program, the advisor answers questions about various career paths and helps them prepare for job talks and interviews.
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> **Other committee members:** There is much variation in the levels of involvement and contributions of faculty members not officially designated as the committee chair. Some committee members may specialize in providing guidance on a specific method or area

of topical expertise, while others may provide additional guidance about professionalization, work/life balance, and wellbeing. Depending on the composition of the committee, expertise of the faculty, and interests of the student, other committee members may meet with, or provide feedback to, the advisee more or less regularly. We encourage committee members and advisees to discuss their expectations when they begin working together and to periodically revisit these expectations and needs as the graduate student moves through the program. At a minimum, committee members should review drafts of student work, provide substantive and specific feedback, and offer strategies for success at each academic milestone.

General engagement. Every interaction between faculty and graduate students has the potential to shape graduate students' trajectories and the department culture overall. Faculty should take care to use these interactions – whether during one-one meetings, courses, or over email – to demonstrate collegial and supportive academic relationships. Constructive criticism for students' research should include actionable suggestions for them to refine and improve their work. If a student has a question about an assignment or grade, faculty should be willing to engage with the student around suggestions to improve their work, although this does not require a regrade. Graduate students also appreciate when faculty share opportunities or initiatives widely with the student body. Sharing opportunities with all graduate students (via email at socgrads@uw.edu) can reduce stratification that tends to occur within graduate programs, and contribute to the strength of the department overall. Participating in department activities, seminars, and working groups also enable faculty and graduate students to get to know each other and their research interests beyond formal advising relationships or coursework.

The frequency and expectations for meetings and other forms of communication will vary depending on the nature of the advising relationship and the student's progress through the program. Students and faculty should discuss expectations about the frequency of meetings and feedback on student work. Faculty advisors and other committee members should always strive to respond to student work promptly and communicate to the student when periods of limited availability or heavy workload will prevent a prompt response.

Department Milestones.
Advisors and faculty generally should support students in navigating program milestones. These include completing coursework, submitting the Master's thesis, passing the Comprehensive Exam, defending the prospectus, dissertating, and preparing for the job market. Throughout each of these phases, graduate students are also expected to conduct research or teaching assistantships, submit articles to peer-reviewed publications, apply for grants and fellowships, and present at academic conferences. Each of these milestones cumulatively prepares students for a successful academic career, but can also seem daunting prior to and during each phase of graduate school. Faculty mentors can support students by being explicit about what each milestone entails and how to best prepare for it. Such support might include helping students

build a multi-year academic plan, quarterly goals, study guidelines, and draft templates, and amplifying resources and opportunities available to students.

Tailoring the Working Relationship

Effective work relationships are based on the development of shared goals and expectations, and mutual understanding of similarities and differences in personal work styles. Below are some questions and topics that should be discussed early and often in the advising relationship with the intention of better understanding the evolving needs of the student and the capacity of the faculty member to meet these needs. Even the most successful advising relationships may involve some mismatch on one or more of these topics, but as in all aspects of relationships, clarity and respect even in the face of ambiguity and differences of preference and approach can improve matters tremendously.

- **Work style.** Work style affects the level of direction or structure that works best for each party to the relationship, preferred frequency and focus of meetings (e.g., big picture issues or details, troubleshooting or accountability), extent to which the student's work must directly align with the faculty member's research interests, opportunities for collaboration, etc. Does the advisor have a specific philosophy or style of advising? Does the graduate student have specific questions, challenges, or requests in accordance with their own work and learning styles? What does each party expect to get out of the advising relationship?
- **Meetings.** How often should you meet? What is the best format for both parties to discuss student work? Does the advisor require attendance at advising groups? Will the student benefit from quarterly review meetings or reports? Are there expectations about what it means to be prepared for reviews or meetings - i.e. should drafts/documents be exchanged beforehand, should both parties read material in advance, should the advisee come prepared with a set of questions or agenda of topics, etc.? How should advisees go about scheduling meetings? Is it best to schedule regularly occurring meetings in advance or schedule when meetings are needed? Are certain times of the day unavailable due to pre-existing commitments, like childcare?
- **Feedback**. Does the faculty member have a preferred way of giving feedback on student work, or does the student have specific requests for receiving feedback? Is the faculty member willing to read outlines, memos and/or multiple revisions of the same document? What kind of turn-around time is reasonable to expect from each person?
- **Expectations for exams and letter writing**. How should students request letters of recommendation? What are the faculty members expectations for notice and supporting materials? How should students inquire about scheduling exams? What are the faculty members expectations for notice and supporting materials?
- **Personal life**. Both faculty and students can vary in the kinds of boundaries they draw around discussing their personal lives. For some, sharing information about their personal history, family life, financial situation, and/or physical, mental and emotional health are key aspects of feeling connected and supported in their academic community and worklife. Others may prefer to keep personal matters entirely outside the workspace. What are the advisor's and advisee's expectations around privacy and personal life? Are there aspects of one's personal life that impact how you participate in the program that you want to share?

Given these expectations, how do you plan on communicating about work-related problems that are related to challenges in one's personal life?

- **Collaborations and resources.** Faculty vary a great deal on how often they publish with students, the roles they expect students to play in these collaborations, and what kinds of funding opportunities and material resources they have available for student collaborators. In some cases, advisors may attend events or conferences with their students. What are the advisor's and advisee's preferences and priorities on these issues?

Dealing with anxiety

Graduate school often induces anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. These are very common feelings, and students often benefit from discussing these feelings openly with their faculty advisors. Faculty advisors can be especially helpful in helping students recognize how the academe is structured in ways that perpetuate these feelings of inadequacy, especially among traditionally marginalized populations (see https://diverseeducation.com/article/212555/). In some cases, the faculty members most helpful in dealing with these feelings may not be a student's primary advisor, and it is completely appropriate for the student to reach out to the DGS, department chair, or other member of the faculty with whom they feel comfortable. Faculty should realize that these feelings of inadequacy are likely to be especially acute in the first year before the student has close ties with advisors. We encourage first-year advisors to specifically, and continually, check in with advisees about general wellbeing and needs for support.

Additional resources and support

It is common for graduate students to have needs for guidance and support that lie outside the talents, abilities, or purview of their primary advisors. For instance, some students thrive with relatively firm systems of accountability but work with advisors who expect students to independently manage deadlines. Or students may be interested in learning more about work/life balance, and advisors may feel unable to provide sufficiently helpful guidance on the topic. In general, we suggest that the student bring their questions to their faculty advisors; even if the advisors cannot help, they should be able to work with the student to consider other strategies or resources that may be beneficial. That said, official advisors are only one of the many places where students can get advice and guidance as they progress through the program. We encourage graduate students to take advantage of the following additional resources.

- **Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)**. The Director of Graduate Studies serves as Chair of the Department's Graduate Program Committee and is a point person for any question you may have about the graduate program. A key part of the DGS's job is to provide ongoing guidance and support to all our students. The DGS can: provide students with advice in dealing with conflicts with the advisor; help identify faculty and other resources on campus to fill unmet student needs; and/or answer questions about aspects of graduate training that are not always obvious.

- **Proseminar**. In addition to the first-year advisors, incoming students all take the department's Proseminar course (SOC 501), which is typically taught by the Director of

Graduate Studies. With visits from multiple faculty members, the Proseminar is new students' primary first introduction to the norms of the department/program, the university, and the field/discipline. This course is designed to provide a general orientation to graduate school, academia, and the department. In addition to being a forum for meeting faculty members and graduate students, the Proseminar will cover many topics that are important for succeeding in graduate school. These include may include such topics as: how to think about working towards academic and non-academic jobs; dealing with stress and overwhelm; accessing resources in the university for BIPOC students; getting funding; what to do over the summer; how to set up appointments with, and talk to, faculty members; how the publishing process works; and how to request letters of recommendation.

- **Teaching Sociology (SOC 502).** This class is designed to prepare students to teach their own courses as instructor of record. Students must complete the course and defend their MA thesis to be eligible to teach their own course. In the Teaching Sociology course, students will learn the essential building blocks of good teaching. It will cover setting course objectives/goals, selecting topics for a syllabus, creating meaningful assignments, creating grading rubrics, choosing level-appropriate reading, planning effective lessons, designing in-class activities, how to manage a classroom with diverse students and diverse knowledge levels, how to provide mentorship to students outside of class, and strategies for managing teaching workloads. In addition, this course will prepare students for the academic job market by requiring students to write a high-quality teaching statement and begin developing a teaching portfolio.

- **Graduate Professionalization Seminar**. This series, coordinated jointly by members of the Graduate Program Committee and the Graduate Student Association, is dedicated to making implicit aspects of graduate school explicit and more equitable. The sessions focus on developing specific professional knowledge in an inclusive, open, and affirming space that fosters professional exploration. Students are encouraged to suggest topics for discussion in the series.

- **Department Chair.** One of the most important parts of the job of the Department Chair is serving as a general sounding board and resource for all members of the department. Any student is welcome to reach out to the Department Chair at any time to discuss concerns and troubleshoot problems.

- **Center for Teaching and Learning**. Among the many resources it offers, the CTL provides Individual or group consultations for identifying and solving challenges in the classroom.

- **University-level Graduate Resources.** The University has an array of programs and a wealth of resources for graduate students on the UW graduate school mentoring page. The Office of the Ombud provides guidance, advice, and resources for conflict resolution. The Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, the Office of Student Life and the president's Race & Equity Initiative also have a tool for Reporting Bias Incidents.

- **Informal Supports.** Some aspects of navigating graduate school life and academic development will be best served by informal advisors, collaborators, RA or TA supervisors, other graduate students, or graduate student leaders like the Graduate Student Association President. This advice may include help in managing relationships with specific faculty, tips about useful resources, accountability for to work deadlines, and general social support.

While addressing the importance of clear expectations in official advising relationships, we acknowledge that all members of our community may offer useful substantive expertise, professional advice, and personal insight.

What to do if there is a problem in the advising relationship?
Sometimes there are conflicts that the advisor and student may find themselves unable to resolve. In such cases students often reach out to members of the departmental community for advice. This may be fellow graduate students, other committee or faculty members. In addition to this, the Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair are available for advice and conflict resolution. At the level of the University, the Office of the Ombud provides guidance, advice, and resources for conflict resolution.

Faculty capacity and workload
Effective advising takes a lot of hard work. While working with graduate students is a crucial faculty responsibility, the capacity to do this work varies across the stage of the faculty career. For example, faculty working toward tenure may have limited availability to provide effective advising, while faculty nearing retirement may choose to scale back the amount and intensity of committee work. Similarly, faculty may be less available for intensive advising during times of unusually heavy teaching, research, or administration, or when faced with intensive health or care work demands. Faculty are encouraged to be open with students about their evolving capacity to provide intensive advising, and to work with the Department Chair to develop rank-appropriate expectations for the level and intensity of this work.

These guidelines were approved by the faculty on April 4, 2024. The Graduate Program Chair is encouraged to share these guidelines with students and review them biannually.