

Mentoring Graduate Students in English

Success in the English department's three graduate programs (MA, MFA, PhD) requires close collaboration among faculty and students with shared areas of interest. While the adviser/advisee relationship is crucial to getting our students to thrive, it is important to recognize that people have different relationship styles and that there is a diversity of models for what this professional relation can look like. It is equally important for students to have as much clarity as possible regarding their committee's expectations throughout their graduate career.

In order to help ensure a successful relationship, the department suggests that students discuss the following points with their adviser at the beginning of their relationship:

- The student's personal timeline and the timing of committee formation and other program milestones. *For all students, no matter their path (MA, PhD, MFA), securing a primary adviser should occur ideally no later than the end of their first year of studies.*
- The adviser's preferred communication method and frequency. *Does the adviser want to meet to discuss drafts? Does the adviser prefer to send marked up drafts via email? Or some combination?*
- The expected supervisory model or style. *Much of what doctoral students do in preparation for and subsequent to the qualifying exams is drafting (lists, prospectuses, dissertation chapters). How many drafts will depend on both the adviser and the process by which the student works. To a certain extent this principle applies as well to MA and MFA students, who are also frequently engaged in drafting documents, whether lists or theses. See below as well about the role ancillary committee members are expected to take in the drafting process.*
- Students might consider asking:
 - How quickly can you expect your adviser to respond to written submissions turned in on time? *Department guidelines will specify that a two-week turnaround on a student draft should be the norm, though there is a normal range of time to give feedback that might sometimes exceed the two-week period.*
 - How quickly can you expect your adviser to respond to requests to schedule meetings or conversations?
 - How regularly does your adviser like to meet? *Checking in with one's adviser should occur at least once a semester.*
 - How often would your adviser like a written report of your progress along degree milestones? What format should this report take?
 - What role does your adviser expect 2nd and 3rd (internal) committee members and the external committee member (in the case of doctoral committees) to take in the advising of the thesis? In some cases, advisers like a close tie to the student with committee members in the background; in other cases, advisers like the committee members to be reading drafts throughout every stage of the writing process. There is a range of options, and it is best for the student and adviser to figure out precisely what the expectations here are.

Advisers should:

- Maintain regular communication with advisees while in residence.
- Advise students on the choice of committee members, and be willing to reach out to colleagues to help students fill out their committees satisfactorily. This intervention includes external members drawn from other departments.
- Ensure that advisees are formally supported (either by themselves or another faculty member) when the adviser is on sabbatical or research leave.
- Be aware of advisees' course choices and be proactive in steering them in the direction best suited for successful qualifying exams and/or thesis writing.
- Be mindful of departmental and Graduate School deadlines. *These include deadlines for fellowship applications, letters of recommendation, and college and university awards.*
- Monitor GPAs, draft submissions, and other indicators of student performance.
- Review closely (for accuracy, appropriate timeline, and other details) and sign off on the annual student progress reports.
- Help advisees identify opportunities to participate in the larger profession of English studies by proposing and delivering conference presentations as well as drafting work for submission to refereed journals.
- Mentor students about professional norms and provide guidance as they enter the discipline. This mentoring must include realistic and practical advice about preparation for the job market in English studies, with an eye toward maximizing the advisee's chances (from conference-going to publishing in peer-reviewed venues) for securing tenure-track employment in college teaching. The advisee should also be committed to helping students imagine gainful and satisfying employment in the non-professorial (alt-ac) world.

Advisees should:

- Feel comfortable initiating regular communication with adviser. Such communication should involve everything from what deadlines the student has set for timely completion of work and feedback to what the advisee's ideal job plans (teaching college, non-tenure-track employment, alt-ac employment) might be and how to foster the best path to such employment.
- Inform adviser of the courses the student plans to enroll in and keep adviser informed of progress or problems.
- Work with adviser to create an agreed upon timeline for reaching program milestones and maintaining timely progress toward degree.

- Learn and comply with departmental and Graduate School deadlines and regulations.
- Consult with adviser about how to best take a role in the discipline of English studies by participating in professional meetings or other appropriate forums. Not least of these roles is the preparation and submission of manuscripts to the appropriate journals in the discipline or sub-discipline of the student's specialization.

If students have concerns about the advising they are receiving, they should arrange to speak confidentially with the Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, or a member of the Advisory Committee (depending on the personnel involved). The department wants to support graduate students to the best of our ability and we will take these concerns seriously. Students may also seek out the guidance of the Academic Ombudsman (<http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/>). Any student, after due consideration and consultation with the DGS and the agreement of the faculty to serve, may change adviser or committee members at any point prior to the qualifying exams. In fact, students have a great deal of discretion with respect to the makeup of their committees. They can opt to replace members without the say-so of those members, though courtesy dictates that any replaced member will be notified ahead of time of such replacement.