



QUICK TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES: MENTORING

- Assign advisors early. Practices vary widely among graduate degree programs when it comes to matching students with research and dissertation advisors, but all incoming students should have a formally assigned faculty member to help him/her interpret expectations from the outset. Make certain it is possible for students to change advisors when appropriate.
- Develop opportunities for students to consider possible mentor matches. They will need not only a dissertation advisor but others who can steer them through the doctoral process. Use lab rotations, faculty seminars, even social events. Well-prepared staff can play a role in widening a student's perspective on sources of mentorship.
- Encourage students to seek multiple mentors. Students benefit from multiple sources of guidance. Remind students to look to faculty both inside and outside their program who may share overlapping research interests or career goals. More advanced graduate students can also provide the valuable support of peer mentoring.
- Facilitate peer mentoring relationships, both formal and informal. Being active in peer mentoring, both as an incoming student and advanced student, provides the opportunity to learn from others' experience and to share thoughtful advice with new students as more senior students advance—valuable experience for your mentee's future role.
- Introduce new students to policies, responsibilities, expectations and resources as a regular part of your meetings with them, especially during the first two years. Encourage students to attend orientation-type programs sponsored by Rackham, the school or college, the International Center, and by CRLT.
- Mentors and mentees should meet on a regular basis. In the beginning you may want to use a set agenda, shared in advance with the student, of topics you'd like to cover. This should encourage the student to hone time management and organizational skills. Regular meetings should also increase the student's comfort level so that when a problem emerges he/she is more likely to seek your advice.
- Provide a department handbook. Students need a guide that clarifies expectations and serves as a roadmap for the graduate degree program. Include detailed, up-to-date information about requirements and resources for each stage of the doctoral experience. Include forms and deadlines. Make it available in print and on the website.
- Establish milestones between candidacy and completion. These can be tailored to what you have seen of the student's personality and needs during the early years. For many students, knowing that his/her

mentor has set expectations, and the context of those expectations, is enough to keep research and writing on track.

- Draw up a “contract” with your mentee—an articulated set of responsibilities and expectations for both parties in the mentoring relationship. Discussing the creation of such a written agreement early in the relationship can help to identify students who may not be a good fit for your research and personality.
- Demystify graduate school. Many aspects of graduate education are unwritten and new students frequently do not know what questions to ask. You can help by clarifying your program’s expectations for each stage of the student’s program; discuss the prevailing norms and criteria used to define quality performance.
- Review graduate student progress. At least once a year formally assess student progress, set goals and identify milestones for the coming year. Students can complete in advance a form detailing which requirements are fulfilled and plans for the coming year. The advisor can solicit input from faculty who work directly with the student. A detailed summary should be provided in writing to the student and a copy placed in the file.
- Model professional responsibility. It’s not enough to act with integrity in every aspect of your work as teacher, researcher and author. You need to help students understand the reasons for your actions. Share the right skills at the right time. Remember that there are multiple phases in the doctoral process so it’s best to introduce students to the skills they are most likely to need currently or in the near future.
- Encourage the effective use of time. Share techniques and practices that have been useful for others but recognize that people are different.
- Oversee professional development. Activities that have become second nature to you need to be made explicit to students, such as procuring grants, managing budgets, and being able to explain one’s research to anyone outside the discipline. Mentors help their students master all of the elements of the profession.
- Recognize that not every student who sought your mentorship will choose the same career. Draw on colleagues and alumni to help students evaluate career options. Introduce mentees to a broad network of contacts and encourage them to learn about job opportunities in related fields.

For more information about the resources available through the Rackham Graduate School, contact Emma Flores at 615-3692 or emxf@umich.edu.