

Faculty Advising and Mentoring Task Force: Recommendations for Faculty Working with Graduate Students

In the spring of 2016, Dr. Jodie Hanzlik, Dean of the Graduate School, organized a task group of faculty at Colorado State University with the purpose of identifying best practices for advising and mentoring leading to increased student retention and timely completion of graduate degree programs. Chaired by Tammi Vacha-Haase, Associate Dean of the Graduate School, the task force included Patrick Byrne, Debbie Crans, Jessica Gonzalez, Matthew Hickey, Kris Kodrich, Sid Suryanarayanan, Sally Sutton, Quint Winger, and Mark Zabel.

Any mentoring activity is a collaborative process requiring input, commitment, and responsibility by the student, faculty members, College, Department, and University. This document is an initial step in the outlining and clarification of faculty responsibilities in the advising and mentoring process. The following material is offered as a springboard for consideration of faculty responsibilities and practices, with the hope of promoting continued discussion, increased insights, and generation of additional resources.

As faculty members at Colorado State University, mentoring goals for graduate students are to:

- Foster growth, retention, and timely completion toward degree completion;
- Provide honest and realistic guidance for professional planning and assist with preparation for success in their future profession; and,
- Create a supportive relationship based on the best interest of student.

For the purposes of this document, mentoring activities are thought to include, but are not limited to, three general areas: 1) coursework and other academic progress, 2) research and scholarship, and 3) professional development and additional resources. There often will be overlap among many of these activities, and faculty members are encouraged to tailor these activities to the specific discipline, role, and needs of the student.

Foundational to all mentoring is ongoing communication between the student and the faculty member regarding how each views the mentoring process, and the expectations that may emerge on each side. Students should be encouraged to have an active role in the advising relationship, taking responsibility for initiating meetings and asking for information as appropriate.

In addition, sensitivity to individual differences is inherent in the mentoring process. Awareness of a student's unique needs based on his or her background is vital. Mentoring and advising may be most successful when faculty remain not only sensitive to, but responsive to, issues of individual differences. Culturally conscious and deliberate engagement in working with students from diverse backgrounds helps to increase competent mentoring and advising for all students.

Appreciating individual differences and manifesting diversity promoting attitudes and behaviors can serve as key strategies for effective mentoring and advising. Faculty are encouraged to recognize when their own implicit biases might be activated, and strive to better understand how these assumptions or stereotypes might impact the mentoring relationship.

Recommended mentoring activities include:

Coursework and Other Academic Progress

- Provide guidance regarding course selection
- Offer direction regarding relevant degree requirements
- Support completion of Graduate School forms, such as the GS-6 and GS-25 forms
- Discuss and assist with selection of committee members
- Reinforce quality academic practices and integrity
- Be knowledgeable about the *Graduate and Professional Bulletin* and departmental graduate student handbook and policies
- Discuss a realistic timeline for important milestones toward degree completion
 - Conduct annual review of the student's progress
 - Recommend academic support services when appropriate

Research and Scholarship

- Provide project ideas and support the student through research discussions
- Schedule regular meetings with the student; adjust as needed as the student moves through the system
- Facilitate the exploration of avenues for funding
- Ensure student is aware of ethical standards and best practice in pursuing discipline research/scholarship activities
- Discuss realistic work expectations about own research commitments, but also in graduate assistantship roles
- Create opportunities for collaborative research and creative projects with CSU faculty, including conference presentations and publications
- Develop forums and workshops for sharing student research, scholarship, and creative artistry
- Oversee independent studies, portfolios, research projects, creative activities
- Support academic professionalization efforts
- Serve as committee member for theses, research projects, and portfolios
- Consult and collaborate with others regarding students needs in research, advising, and mentoring relationships
- Provide timely feedback on student work
- Respond in a timely manner to questions

- In the case of co-advisors, clarify the responsibilities of each

Professional Development and Resources

- Develop specific individual mentoring and support, as needed
- Clarify financial responsibilities (e.g., what does an assistantship cover)
- Introduce issues of participation in professional activities
- Provide information on career choices and sources for more information
- Offer guidance regarding teaching, internships, doctoral programs, post-doctoral positions, post-degree careers, etc.
- Develop events, workshops, community projects to foster student and community interactions
- Provide honest assessment in letters of recommendation
- Assist with application process for doctoral program or postdoctoral fellow positions, or entry level career positions
- Assist with resolving conflicts or other problematic situations
- Ensure students are aware of relevant resources (e.g., Career Services, TILT, Case Management) on campus either by direct referral or by referral to someone in the department with such information
- Encourage development of professional skills building (e.g., writing, oral presentation) that will assist with attainment of future career goals
- Introduce importance of participating in professional activities

The members of this task force would like to thank the CSU English Department for sharing the department's "*Graduate Faculty Mentoring Activities*" which served as a model for the present document.