

# Stanford

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## 3.3.1 Academic Advising: Policy

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### Summary

Provides that all graduate students are to receive appropriate advising throughout their degree programs.

### Rationale

Effective academic advising is a critical component of a successful graduate degree program. At Stanford, all matriculated graduate students are to be advised by a member of the faculty. The nature of academic advising may differ for different programs and at different stages in a degree program.

### Policy

By the start of their first term of graduate study, students should select or be paired by the department with faculty advisors who assist them in planning a program of study to meet degree requirements. The process for the selection or assignment of advisors for incoming students, sometimes referred to as program advisors, academic advisors, or first-year advisors, varies and should be explained in writing to incoming students. The timing and process by which students may change from this initial advisor to a more permanent advisor should also be explained.

The department should also ensure that doctoral students are informed in a timely fashion about procedures for selecting a principal dissertation advisor, reading committee members, and orals committee members. Departments should make every effort to assist doctoral students who are not yet admitted to candidacy in finding an appropriate principal dissertation advisor, and dissertation co-advisor if appropriate.

Students are obliged to follow department procedures for identifying advisors and committee members for their dissertation reading and university oral examinations and ensure the membership of those committees is aligned with University policies (see GAP 4.7, [Doctoral Degrees: University Orals Examinations and Committees](#) [1], and GAP 4.8, [Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees](#) [2]).

#### Authority:

- Committee on Graduate Studies (policy)
- Departments and degree programs (implementation)

#### Applicability:

Applicable to all graduate students, faculty who advise graduate students, and departments and programs.

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## 1. Responsibilities of Advisors

### General Responsibilities of Faculty Advisors

The University requires that within each department or program minimum advising expectations be set for both advisor and advisee. Such minimum expectations must differentiate between master's and doctoral programs, and between different types of advisors (academic/program vs. research.) These department or program expectations must be distributed to faculty and graduate students on an annual basis at the start of each academic year and must be easily accessible on the web. Faculty are expected to affirm that they have received the advising expectations. Each faculty member has the prerogative to augment the departmental advising expectations with their specific additional expectations, while remaining consistent with the departmental advising policies.

Faculty advisors are to:

- serve as intellectual and professional mentors to their graduate students
- provide knowledgeable support concerning the academic and non-academic policies that pertain to graduate students
- help to prepare students to be competitive for employment
- maintain a high level of professionalism in the relationship
- establish and collaboratively maintain expectations of the advisor/advisee relationship, consistent with departmental standards.

### Dissertation Advisors

The principal dissertation advisor (also called thesis advisor or research advisor), who must be a member of the Academic Council, establishes a critically important relationship with the doctoral student. The principal dissertation advisor provides guidance and direction to the doctoral student's research, as well as evaluation of the student's progress, often in the context of a research group. As a mentor and a role model, the dissertation advisor plays a critical role in the student's development as an academic researcher. In many cases, the dissertation advisor is expected to provide financial support for the doctoral student, typically from research grants and contracts.

The dissertation advisor will normally serve as a member of the student's oral examination committee, and as the chair of the student's doctoral dissertation reading committee.

Because of the critical importance of this role, and the potential significance of difficulties that may arise in this relationship, departments should designate a resource for faculty members and graduate students to call on for assistance in resolving difficulties. This role may be filled by the department chair, the faculty Director of Graduate Studies, or a specially designated departmental resource. Students, faculty, and staff may also consult with campus resources including VPGE, the [Graduate Life Office](#) [3], the [School Dean's Offices](#) [4], and the [University Ombuds](#) [5] or [School of Medicine](#) [6] Ombuds.

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## 2. Co-Advisors

At their discretion, students may identify a co-advisor in addition to the principal dissertation advisor; normally both principal advisor and co-advisor are members of the Academic Council. A former Stanford Academic Council member, emeritus professor, or non-Academic Council member may serve as co-advisor with the appointment of a principal dissertation advisor who is currently on the Academic Council (see GAP 4.8, [Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees](#) [2]). Professors who have recently become emeritus and have been recalled to active duty may serve as principal dissertation advisors, though they are no longer members of the Academic Council. Requests for further exceptions to the requirement that the principal dissertation advisor be a current member of the Academic Council, for example for recently retired emeritus professors who are still actively engaged on campus, but not recalled to active duty, will be reviewed by the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

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## 3. Advisors from Other than the Student's Home Department

It is expected that faculty advisors will hold an appointment in the student's major department or program. An advisor may be appointed from outside the major department subject to the approval of the major department; a co-advisor who is a member of the department is recommended. Departmental approval is conveyed by means of recording the name of the advisor in the PeopleSoft Student Administration record. Students enrolled in an interdisciplinary graduate program (IDP) should have a faculty advisor who is affiliated with the program. Interdisciplinary program approval of an advisor outside the department is automatic, since by definition IDPs only have affiliated faculty, not departmental faculty.

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## 4. Change or Replacement of Advisor

Students may change advisors at different time points in their program. For example, in some departments and programs it is typical to change sometime within the first two years from an assigned first-year or program advisor to a principal dissertation advisor selected by agreement of the student, faculty, and department. Students may change advisors for other reasons, for example, if their research interests change or if their advisor leaves Stanford. Occasionally, a student's research may diverge from the area of competence of the advisor, or

irreconcilable differences may occur between the student and the faculty advisor. In such cases, the student or the faculty advisor may request a change in assignment. The department should make every reasonable effort to facilitate the change and to pair the student with another suitable advisor, which may entail some modification of the student's research project.

In the rare case where a student's dissertation research on an approved project is in an advanced stage and the dissertation advisor is no longer available, every reasonable effort must be made to appoint a new advisor, usually from the student's reading committee. This may also require that a new member be added to the reading committee before the draft dissertation is evaluated, to keep the reconstituted committee in compliance with the University requirements for its composition. (Advisor changes are made with the [Change of Dissertation Adviser or Reading Committee Member](#) [7] form).

In the event that a student's advisor leaves Stanford University or becomes emeritus, and has not been recalled to active duty, that advisor may continue to work with the graduate student as a co-advisor and serve on the oral and dissertation reading committees, with the appointment of a principal dissertation advisor who is currently a member of the Academic Council (see GAP 4.8, [Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees](#) [2]). Professors who have recently become emeritus and have been recalled to active duty may serve as principal dissertation advisor, though they are no longer members of the Academic Council. Requests for further exceptions to the requirement that the principal dissertation advisor be a current member of the Academic Council, for example for recently retired emeritus professors who are still actively engaged on campus, will be reviewed by the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

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#### **Related Content:**

##### Related Policies

- GAP 4.7, [Doctoral Degrees: University Oral Examinations and Committees](#) [1]
- GAP 4.8, [Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees](#) [2]

##### Related Bulletin Sections

- [Advising](#) [8]

##### Related Information and Forms

- [Policies & Best Practices for Advising Relationships at Stanford](#) [9] (pdf)
- [Guidelines for Faculty-Student Advising at Stanford](#) [10] (pdf)
- [Change of Dissertation Adviser or Reading Committee Member form](#) [7] (pdf)

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#### **Links**

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[2] <https://gap.stanford.edu/handbooks/gap-handbook/chapter-4/subchapter-8/page-4-8-1>

[3] <https://glo.stanford.edu>

[4] <https://vpge.stanford.edu/academic-guidance/problem-solving-crisis-intervention/school-deans-office-contacts>

[5] <https://ombuds.stanford.edu>

[6] <http://med.stanford.edu/ombuds/>

[7] <https://stanford.app.box.com/docrdngcomm>

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