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, students should be paired by the department with faculty advisors who assist them in planning a program of study to meet degree requirements.

The department should also ensure that doctoral students are informed in a timely fashion about procedures for selecting a 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 advisor.

Students are obliged to follow department procedures for identifying advisors and committee members for their dissertation reading and university oral examinations (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 and their programs.

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1. Co-Advisors

At their discretion, students may identify co-advisors, normally both are members of the Academic Council. If a former Stanford Academic Council member, emeritus professor, or non-Academic Council member is serving as the principal dissertation advisor, the appointment of a co-advisor who is currently on the Academic Council is required (see GAP 4.8, Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees [3]).

2. Change or Replacement of Advisor

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. If the department decides to grant the request, every reasonable effort must be made to pair the student with another suitable advisor. This 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 [4] form).

In the event that a student’s advisor leaves Stanford University or becomes emeritus, that advisor may continue to work with the graduate student, including, upon approval of the appropriate petition, serving on the orals or dissertation reading committee. If this individual is to continue to serve as the principal dissertation advisor, however, the appointment of a co-advisor who is currently on the Academic Council is required (see GAP 4.8, Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees [3]).

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. Departmental approval is conveyed by means of recording the name of the advisor in the PeopleSoft Student Administration record.
4. Responsibilities of Advisors

General Responsibilities of Faculty Advisors

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.

Dissertation Advisors

The dissertation advisor (also called thesis advisor or research advisor) establishes a critically important relationship with the doctoral student. The 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 graduate studies director, or a specially designated departmental resource.

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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 [5]

Related Information and Forms
- Guidelines for Good Practices in the Graduate Student - Faculty Advisor Relationship [6] (pdf)
- Change of Dissertation Adviser or Reading Committee Member form [4] (pdf)

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