

Department of Animal Sciences

Advising and Mentoring

Advisor Assignments: Given the diverse scope of activities in the department's research focus areas, at the time of application the Program encourages the applicants to communicate with one or more faculty who would be best suited to their background, research interests and goals. Typically, only applicants that have identified one or more faculty, who are interested in working with that student, are accepted into the Program. In the letter offering a graduate assistantship (teaching/research), the Director and the Chair of the department providing the assistantship will assign the identified faculty member as the student's advisor upon their enrollment in the Program. As stated elsewhere, the Dean of the Graduate School sends the official letter of admission to the selected applicants.

There is a period of several months between the offer of admission and actual enrollment of a student into the Graduate Program. The student and faculty advisor should continue their communication during this period prior to the start of the semester to explore further their mutual research interests before the arrival of the student. The Program realizes that a student may find subsequently that his/her research interests do not match the initial advisor and may want to select another advisor with the approval of the Graduate Education Committee and the Director of the Program. Please note that some potential advisors may not be willing to accept a new student into their laboratory owing to limitations of funding and resources or suitability of the applicant's background. All graduate students, whether working for the M.S. or Ph.D. degree, are advised to finalize their advisor before the end of their first semester. Students cannot remain in the ANSC program without an advisor.

Change of Degree Objective: Students wishing to change their degree objective from M.S. to Ph.D. or vice versa should first obtain approval from their Advisory Committee. Document this decision, including the motivation for this change, using the [Advisory Committee Report Form](#) and submit the signed report form to the ANSC Graduate Program office. Requests should be submitted during Fall or Spring semester allowing time for processing by the program and Graduate School. The Graduate Director and Graduate Education Committee will then consider the request and inform the student and advisor of their decision within a week. See regulations regarding [Change of Status or Program](#) provided on the Graduate School website for policy details and deadlines. Students are responsible for reading and following the Graduate School regulations. Doctoral students switching to the M.S. program must complete all coursework and thesis requirements of the ANSC M.S. program.

Mutual Expectations: Early in the process of working together, the student and advisor will complete a Statement of Mutual Expectations ([Current Students | Animal Sciences \(umd.edu\)](#)). A Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME) is a written document that outlines the nature of the working relationship between the advisee and advisor. It is not a formal contract, but rather a structured conversation to ensure that a graduate student and their advisor have a clear understanding of what to expect from each other.

Graduate Students & Graduate Assistants: The research advisor and the graduate student will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of required

duties and activities. This summary should include how research expectations may be affected by course work and/or teaching duties.

- The research advisor-graduate student SME should be reviewed yearly and updated, as needed.
- Teaching Assistants will meet with the instructor of their assigned class prior to the beginning of the semester to complete an SME regarding their duties during that semester.
- To facilitate the discussions, SMEs for Research Assistants and Teaching Assistants can be found on the ANSC Current Graduate Students website (Forms for [Current Students | Animal Sciences \(umd.edu\)](#)).
- Completed SMEs are to be submitted to the ANSC Graduate Program office (ansc-gradprogram@umd.edu). Please include your last name in the file title, e.g., RA_SME_Name.doc or TA_SME_Name.pdf.

Schedule of Meetings

Student-Advisor: The ANSC Graduate Program requires that the student and advisor meet on a regular basis both individually and as part of a lab group, as appropriate. It is expected that the individual meetings will be held at least once a month, if not more frequently. The frequency and nature of these interactions should be mutually agreeable and designed to meet the stage of the program (e.g., more frequently (weekly or biweekly) when optimizing research protocols).

Student-Advisory Committee: Before the end of the first semester of entry into the Program, the student and the advisor together propose a Graduate Advisory Committee and submit the specified form for approval by the Graduate Education Committee and endorsement by the Director. The student should meet with their Advisory Committee on a regular basis, with a minimum of one meeting per academic year, although more frequent meetings are encouraged. After consulting with their advisor, students should send out a Doodle poll to set the time and date of the committee meeting. The student should work with the program coordinator to reserve a room for the meeting. The Advisory Committee meeting is documented using the report form, which should be submitted to the ANSC Graduate Program prior to the annual review of graduate students. Forms are available on the ANSC Graduate Program website.

Proposal and Plan of Study: During the first two semesters, the student and the advisor should discuss and develop a research plan which the student will complete toward the M.S. or Ph.D. degree. A Research Proposal must be presented to the student's Graduate Advisory Committee for approval and routed to the Graduate Education Committee by the end of the second semester for M.S. students and the end of the 3rd semester for Ph.D. students. [Guidelines](#) for preparing a research proposal are available on the Current Graduate Student webpage.

All students should have an approved Plan of Study (timeline and list of coursework needed to complete ANSC requirements) by the end of their second semester. After the Graduate Education Director has endorsed the Research Proposal and the Plan of Study, the documents

become a record in the ANSC Graduate Program Office. It is recognized that sometimes a Research Proposal may require a major shift in direction to provide the student with a successful project. In such circumstances, a revised proposal, duly approved and endorsed by the above committees, should be on file in the Program Office. Minor alterations can be documented in the Advisory Committee Meeting Report Form. It should be emphasized that a delay or delinquency in the submission of the Plan of Study and the Research Proposal within the stipulated time may adversely affect and risk the student being put on academic probation. Should this happen, the student will be notified and asked to remove the deficiency within one semester or risk dismissal.

It is worth noting that, more often than not, a research project takes longer to complete than initially anticipated. The student and the advisor, along with the Graduate Advisory Committee, should continually monitor the progress and work diligently to achieve the goal together with fulfillment of all other requirements for completion of the degree. It is at this point that the advisor assumes the responsibility of a mentor.

Mentoring: The mentor supports, enables, and facilitates the professional advancement of the student and acts as a role model by setting high professional standards and ethics. The two act together with other professionals who contribute to the fulfillment of the goals of the student. Indeed, a graduate student may have more than one mentor, e.g., members of their Graduate Advisory Committee or even other professors and scientists, both in and outside of the ANSC Graduate Program.

Statement of Mutual Expectations: See forms provided on the ANSC current graduate student website.

Mentor Responsibilities

Clear communication is essential for successful mentoring. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Be responsive. Establish expectations for response times for communication and feedback and document this in the SME (e.g., response time for emails would be shorter (24 to 48 hours during the work week) than feedback on proposal or manuscript drafts (five to ten days)).
- Communicate with students about goals and expectations. Clearly describe your expectations in the SME, but also learn about the student's goals and expectations. Their future career goals may impact how you need to mentor them. Talk about different career paths and the expectations and duties involved in those paths.
- Document meetings and student progress. Keep a record of set goals and accomplishments so that you can recognize failure to progress early in the student's program and take action to identify and remedy any problems quickly.
 - It is suggested that after individual meetings between the mentor and mentee that the student provide to the advisor a list of the actions and expectations that had been agreed upon during the meeting. This summary

list could be provided in an email, Google doc, or other form as agreed upon by the student and advisor. In this manner, the mentor and mentee can determine that they both interpreted the discussions in the same way and have documented their discussion.

- Be cognizant of the student's other responsibilities (e.g., TA duties) and factor those commitments into your expectations.
- Treat your students with respect. Graduate students should be treated as peers in the profession. Faculty should not ask students to do work outside of the profession for them. Keep in mind that faculty are in a relative position of power over graduate students, and thus they should maintain professional boundaries accordingly.
- Provide constructive criticism in all aspects of a student's graduate training.
- Work with students to enhance their technical skills and oral and written scientific communication skills.
- Know program and university policies and resources.
- Understand challenges that students may be encountering. Students from underrepresented groups face additional challenges in graduate school. Faculty should actively seek to understand these experiences.
- Faculty should avoid giving unsolicited advice on topics such as reproduction and family formation (when to have children), marriage and domestic relationships, physical appearance, and issues related to sexual orientation. Mentors may share their own experiences in this area if asked directly by a student.
- Address any issues that arise with respect to the mentoring relationship as soon as possible with your mentee, the Director of Graduate Studies, and/or the Director of Administrative Services in the department. The mentor should have a log of meetings that includes a brief list of general topics.

Student Responsibilities

Do your part to facilitate a productive mentor-mentee relationship. Students should approach the mentoring relationship as a professional:

- Respect your mentor's time.
- Be responsive. Establish expectations for response times for communication and feedback and document this in the SME (e.g., response times for emails would be shorter (24 to 48 hours during the work week) than corrections/feedback on proposals or manuscript drafts (five to ten days)).
- Recognize and understand that graduate school is a training experience, not a job. Hours and responsibilities will therefore differ than employment in other fields, or even in other graduate programs on and off campus. While an average weekly time commitment of 20 hours per week working for the department by teaching and/or working for your advisor is expected of a full-time graduate assistant, this is in addition to coursework and your own research project. In order to progress and

meet degree benchmarks, you will need to commit additional time towards completing your own research which may include evenings and weekends, as necessitated by the experimental design and protocols. Learn to schedule your time and set expectations effectively to avoid burn-out. Discuss your time commitments with your advisor so that conflicts in research expectations and other responsibilities (coursework/teaching responsibilities) can be avoided.

- Understand that your enrollment in the graduate program and completion of course work does not equate with the granting of a degree (<https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies>). In other words, do not assume that your acceptance in the program guarantees you a degree. Hard work is required to meet this goal.
- Be respectful. Just as mentors have a responsibility to treat their mentees with respect, students must also interact with faculty in a respectful and professional manner.
- Be proactive and take initiative to meet your goals and fulfill program requirements.
- Be informed. Know the program and university policies.
- Read voraciously. Ask for reading recommendations, use PubMed and literature alerts to be aware of progress in your field. Don't forget to investigate the history of your field. Read your mentor's papers, even those that don't directly relate to your project! There is no minimum amount of time that a student should spend reading, as this depends on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, how quickly one reads, the length and nature of the article, etc. Learn how to quickly scan articles to determine whether or not you need to read them more carefully or if you can move on. Typically, the research proposal cites 50 to 100 articles, and the thesis/dissertation will cite even more. More are read than cited.
- Ask for, and respond to, constructive criticism to improve your work.
- Interact with your fellow graduate students. They may help you resolve a problem by suggesting other approaches or provide a break to just relax and talk.
- Address any issues that arise with respect to the mentoring relationship as soon as possible with the primary mentor, the Director of Graduate Studies, and/or the Director of Administrative Services in the department. Note that failure to progress in your program may result in dismissal.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Respect

A diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community increases our ability to successfully carry out our land-grant mission of research, education, and extension. Please see the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) website for more information on the College's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Respect (DEIR) initiative and additional resources: [Diversity](#),

[Equity, Inclusion & Respect | College of Agriculture & Natural Resources at UMD](https://agnr.umd.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion-respect)
<https://agnr.umd.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion-respect>

UMD Graduate School Resources

[Advisor Policy](#)

[Career self-management and the Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#)

[Co-authorship for Faculty-student Interactions and Collaborations](#)

[Statement of Mutual Expectations for GAs and Supervisors](#)

[Working with Graduate Students: A Mentoring Guide](#)

Other Resources

[University of Michigan Mentoring and Advising](#)

[University of Washington Mentoring: A Guide for Faculty](#)

[Vanderbilt University: Mentoring Graduate Students](#)