

Yale EPS Graduate Advising Guidelines

A productive, healthy relationship between faculty advisers and students is critical for the professional development of advisees, the completion of quality research, and the overall well-being of the university community. This document outlines key guidelines and responsibilities for both parties to cultivate a healthy advising relationship.

General Expectations for Faculty Advisers: The role of the primary adviser is to provide guidance, mentorship, supervision, and support for the student during their time in the program. Advisers help their students develop skills, find relevant university resources, and produce quality publications. To that end, advisers should meet regularly with their students, and provide requested feedback and support in a timely fashion.

General Expectations for Student Advisees: Students are responsible for learning and following department and university guidelines. They should make consistent progress in completing required dissertation milestones, respond appropriately to constructive feedback, and give advisers sufficient notice for letters of recommendation. Incoming students should reach out to their advisers early on to establish mutual expectations for communication, teaching, and authorship.

RESPONSIBILITIES AT A GLANCE

Advisers

- Meet regularly with advisees.
- Provide guidance and written feedback.
- Provide mentoring and support.

Advisees

- Follow department guidelines.
- Make consistent dissertation progress.
- Give ample notice for requested support.

Both Parties

- Communicate regularly and often.
- Maintain work-life balance.
- If issues arise, contact the DGS.

Feedback, both written and oral, is critical to student growth and dissertation success. Students have the right to thorough feedback on major assignments, grant/fellowship applications, meeting abstracts, pre-publication manuscripts, and all Ph.D. milestones required by the Graduate Student Handbook. Advisers have the right to receive documents well in advance of deadlines, with a reasonable timeframe for providing feedback.

Mediation: Even the best adviser-advisee relationships may face challenges. Students should discuss challenges with their advisers openly. Students and faculty alike are encouraged to contact the DGS if they encounter difficulties. The DGS can offer help and advice informally and can also undertake more formal mediation if desired and needed. Beyond the DGS, several other mediation resources are available and discussed in this document.

Open, frequent adviser-advisee communication is critical, and both parties are expected to maintain contact and decide on a regular meeting schedule. All students should be able to meet individually with their adviser at least once every two weeks if necessary. Issues with adviser-advisee communication should be discussed with the DGS.

Work-life balance is invaluable for both students and advisers. Advisers and advisees should establish work-life expectations, like vacation leave policy, at the start of their program. Students and advisers should prioritize physical and mental health. Mental health and counseling services are available through Yale Health free of charge for students.

Introduction

A productive, healthy relationship between faculty advisers and graduate students is critical for the professional development of graduate students, the completion of quality research, and the overall well-being of the university community. Codification of advising guidelines promotes equity and inclusion within each department by providing each student – especially those from underrepresented backgrounds and first-generation students – with an equal foundation for how best to navigate advising relationships during their time in graduate school.

Our EPS guidelines were developed by an ad hoc committee composed of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and three current graduate students, in consultation with the EPS Program Review and Examination Committee (PREComm). They are based in part on material in the template for program-specific guidelines distributed by the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) and the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA), and on advising guidelines for the English Department that were shared with DGSs as an exemplar.

This document outlines some basic responsibilities and expectations on both sides of the advising relationship. Graduate students and their faculty advisers share responsibility for developing productive and rewarding advising relationships and should be in regular conversation about their goals and expectations. We encourage advisers and students to use this guide, along with the EPS Graduate Handbook, as a tool for cultivating adviser-advisee relationships and for navigating the EPS Ph.D. program.

General Expectations for Faculty Advisers

Taking on Ph.D. student advisees is a significant responsibility, and one that faculty in EPS take seriously. Faculty members have a number of responsibilities in their roles as graduate advisers. They help students develop academic and professional skills and collaborate with them on research. They provide timely written feedback on work as appropriate. Advisers help students set reasonable and realistic schedules for research progress and written work. They engage in regular meetings with their advisees, on a mutually agreed upon schedule that includes frequent meetings with students in the first two years of their program (leading up to the qualifying exam) and often beyond. They encourage and model dedication to high-quality research, teaching, and advising for their students. Faculty advisers should be capable of directing students to departmental and university resources to support students through challenges, and they report acts of discrimination or Title IX violations that come to their notice as advisers. Furthermore, and importantly, advisers recognize that students in the EPS graduate program come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and make as few assumptions as possible about what they want, need, or know; wherever they can, advisers should work to identify the “hidden curriculum” of graduate school and demystify it for their students.

Advisers help students understand the degree program’s requirements and support them in making timely progress. They acknowledge student contributions to research presented at seminars, colloquia, and conferences, and frequently co-author papers with students, most often with the students as first author. They respect and support students’ desired or chosen career paths, which may or may not be in academia, and they help students to acquire the professional skills necessary for the careers they hope to cultivate. They maintain a high level of professionalism in their work as advisers, abiding by all written Yale policies and procedures, including the Yale Teacher-Student Consensual Relations Policy. They do not impede students’ progress toward the degree to benefit from students’ proficiency as teaching or research assistants. They are attentive to signs of trouble with their advisees and assist students who may be experiencing some type of difficulty. Advisers interact with students, staff, and faculty colleagues in a respectful and professional manner, and they do not ask students (or others) for inappropriate personal favors. Finally, advisers remain aware that academic hierarchies may make it difficult or

uncomfortable for a student to set boundaries related to advising expectations; they remain critically attentive to their working relationships with their advisees.

Relationships with individual advisees are important; equally important is the culture of an adviser's laboratory or research group as a whole. Advisers should consider establishing a set of "core values" for their research groups that explain expectations about work produced, interactions with other research group members, etc. Advisers should consider explicitly articulating these core values, along with any laboratory or group policies and procedures, in a written document that is shared with research group members. All advisers should strive to build a productive and positive lab/group culture in which students and other trainees are empowered to ask questions and contribute, and all members are enabled to flourish and do their best work.

General Expectations for Student Advisees

In order to develop satisfying relationships with their faculty advisers, it is helpful for students to understand advisers' central role in graduate education, while also taking ownership for the direction and progress of their own scholarly work. Students should expect advisers to be responsive to requests for feedback, guidance, and advice, but should also be mindful of constraints on their time and willing to provide reminders of impending deadlines. Students play their part in fostering healthy advising relationships by recognizing that guidance from advisers should be taken seriously, although students should always feel free to ask questions, seek clarification, voice reservations, or suggest alternate approaches. They should recognize that faculty advisers are responsible for guiding their research and monitoring the validity and integrity of students' academic work. Students need to be aware of time constraints (and other demands) imposed on advisers by honoring agreed-upon deadlines for submitting work and avoiding last-minute requests for meetings, recommendation letters, and other time-intensive forms of support, to the extent possible. Students, along with advisers, are responsible for arriving at shared expectations about the frequency of meetings and forms of communication. Students should come prepared for advising meetings and must take the initiative to communicate with advisers as often as necessary to keep them informed of any factors that might affect their academic progress. They should consult with advisers, members of their advisory committee, the DGS, and/or others to resolve any problems in their working relationships. Students should recognize that their primary advisers, as important as they are, cannot serve in every role or meet every need, and students should seek to diversify and expand their advising and mentoring networks.

Graduate students are responsible for informing themselves of, and abiding by, departmental guidelines for the graduate program and other written documents such as the GSAS Programs and Policies bulletin and the Yale Teacher-Student Consensual Relations Policy. They are expected to fulfill the expectations of policies and requirements of the graduate program and request any necessary adjustments or accommodations if needed. They should seek clarification from the DGS, faculty, advisers, and/or staff if they are uncertain about the meaning or application of a regulation or policy.

Students maintain a high level of professionalism in their role as learners, scholars, researchers, and teachers. They maintain absolute integrity in taking examinations and in doing research, including the collection, analysis, presentation, and dissemination of data. They respond openly to fair and constructive feedback. They give advisers sufficient time to read and comment on works in progress and give due notice for requesting letters of recommendation or similar forms of support. Students are expected to interact with fellow students, staff, and faculty in a professional manner to create a safe, inclusive, welcoming, and respectful workplace.

Guidelines for Primary Advisers/Advisees

General information

Every entering graduate student is assigned a faculty adviser or advisers upon admission to the Ph.D. program. These pairings can be changed depending on individual preferences and how students' interests evolve. The role of the adviser is to provide guidance, mentorship, and support for the student during their time in the program and to supervise their research. Advisers are expected to meet regularly with their students, including during sabbatical leaves. If a faculty member is unavailable due to a sabbatical or parental leave, then a temporary adviser may be designated during a leave.

Advice for incoming students

It is beneficial for incoming students to reach out to their advisers prior to or just after their arrival at Yale with any questions about the program, their plans for coursework, or life in the department. Advisers should plan to meet with new advisees as early as possible at the start of the fall semester, and certainly no later than the end of the registration period, to confer about course selections and other plans for the academic year.

The following list of questions can be used to establish productive channels of communication and work processes. We recommend that students and advisers review this list together at the beginning of the advising relationship to facilitate conversations about how to work together most effectively.

1. What is each party's preferred mode of communication (e.g., email, phone call, video chat, in person, text, etc.)?
2. What is each party's expectations for the student's weekly work schedule (days, times of day, etc.)? How should the student handle vacation time (e.g., is notice needed)?
3. What is each party's expectation of the student's time to degree?
4. What are each party's expectations regarding the student's conference attendance and funding for conferences?
5. When the student collaborates on work with others, what are the adviser's expectations regarding the adviser's role in that work and subsequent authorship?
6. What is each party's approach to authorship norms?
7. What are the norms in the student's subfield and/or in the adviser's research group around a typical number of publications by students before graduation?
8. What are the adviser's expectations for the student's research progress during semesters in which the student has to fulfill other requirements (classes, teaching, qualifying exams, etc.)?
9. What professional development programs (writing, teaching, outreach, etc.) is the student interested in participating in?
10. What are the student's career goals? What are the career paths that the adviser feels equipped to advise?

Communication and meetings

Student and adviser pairs are expected to maintain open communication with one another about the status of research projects, major milestones, and concerns. We encourage first- and second-year students to meet with their advisers weekly, and many students beyond the first two years may benefit from standing weekly meetings as well. While student-adviser pairs may decide on a regular meeting schedule that works for them, **all students have the right to meet with their adviser in a one-on-one setting at a minimum of once every two weeks if desired.** While of course occasional cancellations will happen, advisers and students should make every effort not to regularly cancel or significantly postpone meetings. Should issues arise regarding scheduling meetings with an adviser, students should contact the DGS.

Students are encouraged to keep a record of the topics discussed during adviser meetings. To facilitate open communication, students may want to email a memo of the meeting to their adviser afterwards to minimize confusion about student expectations and track progress. Emails may include the topics discussed during the meeting and any expectations the adviser may have for the student, and *vice versa*.

Student and adviser meetings can take place in a variety of settings, ranging from the office to a coffee shop. The adviser should not substitute individual meetings with group lab meetings. Advisers should keep meetings with students professional and avoid favoritism in terms of assigning projects or resources made available to students among members of their research group. If there is ever a question about the appropriateness of a meeting topic or location, or if favoritism appears to be affecting student progress, the student should contact the DGS.

Minor Discourse Advisers and Advisory Committee Members

During the first two years of the graduate program, students will have regular contact with their minor discourse advisers and advisory committee members, in addition to regular meetings with their primary advisers. Students should select a minor discourse adviser and pick a minor project no later than the spring semester of their first year. Regular progress meetings with the minor discourse advisers are strongly encouraged over the course of the minor project; many advisor-advisee pairs find it beneficial to meet weekly. As with the major project, students have a right to expect regular meetings and feedback on the progress of the minor project; students should expect substantive feedback on discourse proposals and documents, as well as any publications based on minor projects.

A tentative advisory committee is assigned for each student at the beginning of their program. Students should be proactive in contacting members of their advisory committee each semester during their first two years (via email or, preferably, in person) to discuss their scientific interests, project plans, and coursework selection. After qualifying exams, the main avenue for contact with advisory committees is through required yearly committee meetings. Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of their advisory committee members' advice and expertise as their projects and thesis research develop. Involving advisory committee members as research progresses is a great way for students to leverage the broad scientific expertise we have here in the EPS during their time here. Members of the advisory committee can be changed at any time during a student's course of study by mutual agreement between the student and the primary adviser; students should email the DGS, with cc to the departmental registrar, to make changes.

Work-life balance expectations

Advisees are encouraged to discuss work-life expectations, such as vacation leave policy, with their advisers at the start of their program. Advisers should support students to set reasonable boundaries, establish nourishing work-life balances, and take formal vacation. The survey listed under "Primary Advisers" can help to articulate these expectations.

Students and advisers should prioritize their physical and mental health. Mental health and counseling services are available through Yale Health free of charge to students.

Tips for maintaining a healthy work-life balance:

1. Identify your peak productivity hours.
2. Consider creating a schedule that includes work and personal time.
3. Set aside at least one day a week where you don't do any work.

4. Separate your work and home spaces by leaving research materials at your office.
5. Exercise.
6. Cultivate hobbies and other non-academic pursuits.
7. Communicate with friends, family, and mental health professionals.

Faculty and students should practice mutual empathy and compassion, recognizing that changes in individual circumstances (e.g., personal or health-related) may mean that an adviser or student is unable to meet usual expectations for limited periods of time. Open communication should be the norm in these situations.

Funding

Graduate students in the EPS department are guaranteed funding, including stipend, tuition, and health insurance, through completion of the program assuming satisfactory progress. The EPS department also provides an additional \$2000 in travel support for each student, generally used in their first two years. Even so, students may find it advantageous to apply for additional grants or outside fellowships to support their research. Grant funds can help pay for research supplies, specimens, field work, and travel to and from workshops and conferences. In addition, they can help students build their CV, by showcasing their ability to fund their own research.

When applying for grants or fellowships, students should communicate with advisers early and often. Advisers are a critical resource for helping students to decide which grants and fellowship opportunities are worthwhile, and how to craft an application. Students should ask advisers to review and approve grant and fellowship application materials before they are sent. Many grant and fellowship applications also require recommendation letters from advisers and/or other faculty members. Students should give faculty members at least two weeks' notice to write recommendation letters. It is the responsibility of the student to let faculty members know about deadlines for grant applications and recommendation letters, send them all necessary submission information (e.g., links to submission portals), and send them consistent reminders to submit letters / feedback. It is the responsibility of advisers and other letter writers to give students timely feedback and submit letters of recommendation on time.

Feedback

Students should expect feedback on written assignments, grant/fellowship applications, Ph.D. milestones required by the Graduate Student Handbook, and documents such as meeting abstracts and pre-publication manuscripts. This includes the Pre-Proposal, Discourse Documents, and thesis chapters. We encourage students to discuss written feedback expectations with their advisers in advance, including reasonable timelines and the form that feedback should take for different types of documents. Though expectations, may vary with the length and purpose of the document, students should aim to give primary advisers and other committee members at least two weeks' notice when they request feedback. For example, if a student requests feedback on a pre-proposal from an advisor, and a student needs a week to incorporate that feedback, a draft should be sent to the adviser at least three weeks before the deadline. Students have the right to thorough feedback on proposals, discourses, manuscripts, abstracts, and application drafts; advisers have the right to receive documents well in advance of deadlines and with reasonable and mutually agreed upon timeframes for providing feedback. In addition, students should expect feedback from all faculty co-authors on paper manuscripts and presentation abstracts. Please note that the same timing guidelines apply.

Mediation

We strive for constructive, supportive, honest, productive, and rewarding advising relationships in the EPS department. However, problems or challenges may sometimes arise, and even the best adviser-advisee relationships may hit bumps in the road. Both students and faculty are advised to be proactive if challenges arise, and to discuss challenges openly and honestly with each other, rather than letting problems fester. Advising relationships are most likely to be successful if both parties are open to feedback and constructive criticism, and if both students and faculty are willing to honestly discuss any problems in a spirit of mutual growth, empathy, and support.

The DGS is an excellent resource for students and faculty who are experiencing challenges with adviser-advisee relationships. Students are encouraged to contact the DGS if they encounter difficulties with their advisers; the DGS can offer help and advice informally and can also undertake more formal mediation if desired and needed. Similarly, faculty are encouraged to contact the DGS about advising challenges; again, both informal discussion and more formal mediation is available. Adviser-advisee pairs may decide together to work with the DGS to mediate issues, and this is strongly encouraged. Other resources include the department chair, advisory committee members, the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office, and the MacDougal Fellows and Office for Graduate Student Development and Diversity (OGSDD) Fellows peer mentoring programs for students.

Professional Development and Job Market Advising

Graduates of the EPS Ph.D. program go on to a wide variety of careers, and our alums are currently employed in academia, government, and the private sector. Yale EPS alums are represented in faculty positions (at research institutions, primarily undergraduate institutions, and community colleges), at museums, in government agencies such as the USGS and national laboratories, in various non-profits, in private-sector roles such as consulting, data science, and the energy industry, and in science policy positions. We aspire to train exceptional scientists who leave our program with the potential to become leaders in their chosen fields, whatever that career path may be.

Students are encouraged to discuss their career hopes and plans with their advisers (both primary advisers and advisory committee members) early on in their graduate careers, although many students may find that their career plans shift over time. Open, honest, constructive, and supportive communication between students and advisers about career aspirations is essential and should take place early and often. Successful graduate advising requires diverse and expansive notions of career success, and both students and their advisers should maintain openness to imagining and pursuing a range of satisfying outcomes for post-Ph.D. work and life. Students should consider setting up designated meetings with advisers and other mentors to discuss career plans, ideally once a year in the later part of the Ph.D. program. While primary advisers can and should play a primary role in providing advising and support in the job search, students are encouraged to seek out other avenues for additional advice and mentoring. The DGS is always available to talk to students about career paths and help students find career resources. Members of advisory committees and formal and informal mentors both within and outside the department are also great resources. By default, faculty members are more knowledgeable about academic careers than other paths, but all faculty should be equipped to have constructive and supportive conversations with students regardless of their chosen career path. Furthermore, faculty are encouraged to work with students to help them find the advice and support they need to navigate their chosen career path, even if the faculty themselves cannot provide knowledgeable advice for all possible career choices.

In addition to the support provided by advisers and members of advisory committees, students should seek out support, resources, workshops, and consultations available outside the department, most notably through the Yale Office of Career Strategy (OCS).