Faculty Focus Workshop Resources:
“Successfully Supervising Thesis/Dissertation Students”
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General Advice and Tips for Thesis/Dissertation Committee Chairs

- Keep in mind that students have differing work styles and levels of abilities. Some have more knowledge about the academic world (e.g., norms, etc.) than others. Some students are very independent and would rather not meet frequently. Other students will need and want to meet more frequently with you. They might also need more structure and clarity on expectations. Thus, your advising style and expectations might be different with each student.

- Students also have different levels of interest, passion, and reasons for writing theses and dissertations. Some advisees plan to follow traditional paths to academia. For others, the thesis or dissertation is a steppingstone to a career, a promotion, and/or a higher salary.

- Be sure to clarify your expectations of your work with your advisee (refer to “Best Practices” in this packet).

- Advisors have different styles. Some see the student as an apprentice or mentee, while others see their students as colleagues or potential colleagues. Think about your “model” for advising and consider the pros and cons of different styles. Regardless of your style, we are usually trying to move students to be more independent.

- Have university and Graduate College resources at your fingertips for students (refer to the “Resources for Thesis and Dissertation Student Advisees” in this packet).

- Think very intentionally about how you will provide feedback, including how much you are willing to provide help with student writing. Try to put yourself in your students’ shoes. Line-by-line editing isn’t always the best way to provide feedback. Consider when to provide feedback and the content and format of your feedback.

- Recommend professional skills and professional development to advisees.

- Depending on your comfort level, you can make recommendations about balancing research/work/life/family.

- When students are not making progress, ask them to create several simple action items based on what was covered in your meeting with them. The action items must be completed in writing before the next meeting. Some advisors will not meet with them again until they have done at least a percentage of the tasks on that list. It helps students break down overwhelming tasks AND make steps towards progress.
  - For example: Depending on your advising style, you can ask advisees to describe their intentions for the term, list deadlines they need to remember, and list deadlines for sending paperwork to the program graduate coordinator/advisor/staff and/or The Graduate College.

- Take a look at theses and dissertations in your department so you can calibrate the scope of the project (i.e., not ask too much or too little from your advisees):
  - Digital Collections Repository, at https://digital.library.txstate.edu/
  - Click on the Dissertations and Theses section of Digital Collections, which will bring you to this site: https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/134
Best Practices:
Clarifying Expectations with Thesis/Dissertation Advisees

What follows are potential points of discussion you might have with your new thesis/dissertation advisees (depending on your preferences, advising style, and the guidelines, expectations, and policies of your particular program, etc.):

- Let advisees know that the thesis/dissertation usually takes longer than students expect.
- Discuss approvals for IRB or IACUC (if needed). For example, for projects involving human subjects, the IRB application process itself can take a couple of weeks or more depending on the nature of the study and level of IRB approval.
- Discuss how and why expectations for the thesis/dissertation are higher than those in most of the graduate classes.
- Discuss expectations about feedback that you will provide. It is useful for advisees to know that they will receive lots of feedback about their writing and ideas. Discuss how criticism is not personal but serves to make their work better.
- Discuss how revisions are constant in this project.
- Inform advisees’ that it is their responsibility to determine all deadlines, formats, and administrative work (e.g., forms and signatures needed) related to the project and the defense.
- Let advisees know how much time you typically need to read drafts of chapters and other written work (e.g., 1-2 weeks per chapter). Some students are unaware of the fact that faculty have significant workloads in teaching, research, and service and expect a fast turnaround.
- Inform advisees that they can utilize lots of resources on campus that will support their journey.
- Discuss why advisees should stay in contact with you on a regular basis (e.g., otherwise, you cannot know which resources they need, how to help them get “unstuck,” etc.)
- Discuss how often do you want to meet and your communication methods preferences (email, phone, Teams, Zoom, etc.).
- Discuss when advisees should submit drafts, e.g., at an early outline stages or more polished stages.
- Discuss to what extent the thesis or dissertation committee is involved throughout the process. When do you prefer for the advisee to send chapters to the committee members (e.g., several drafts throughout the process or complete drafts only)?
- Discuss your expectations about emailing (for example, perhaps you do not respond to emails on weekends).
- Discuss professional goals with your advisee.
- Encourage your students to take strategic breaks (e.g., walk outside, leave their office once a day).
- Discuss whether you prefer that your advisees join in on your current research projects or whether you prefer that advisees pursue their own research agenda (with your approval and support).
Recommended Reading:
Mentoring and Advising Graduate Students


University and Graduate College Resources for Students

Resources Specific to Completing the Thesis or Dissertation

- **Graduate College Shop Talks** (recorded and/or live), e.g., Formatting Your Thesis and Dissertation (offered each semester), Copyright Issues for Graduate Students, Graduate-Level Research Writing, Strategies for a Successful Thesis/Dissertation
- Graduate College Thesis and Dissertations **Guides, Templates, and Videos**
- **Library workshops**, e.g., “Copyright in 15 Mins.: Public Domain: What is it and How do I Use It?”, “Author’s Rights, Copyright, & Plagiarism”

General Support and Resources

- **The Writing Center** offers one-on-one appointments and workshops.
- Graduate College **New Graduate Student Orientation** Canvas Site: It’s not just for new students! There are many excellent resources on writing and reading at the graduate level. In particular, refer to the modules, “Key Advice from Graduate Advisors” and “Finding Support Throughout your Studies.”
- Graduate College list of **Student Support Services**
- Graduate College Internal and External **Funding Opportunities**
- Graduate College **Graduate Student Handbook**
- Texas State **Counseling Center** (individual and group counseling; the Center often offers group counseling for graduate students only)
- **COMM Lab** for advice and support in delivering presentations, e.g., thesis and dissertation defenses, conference presentations; COMM Lab offers individual appointments with students from all departments and programs
- For international students:
  - Questions about visas can be directed to the International Student and Scholar Services office: 512-245-7966, international@txstate.edu
  - Enroll in the Graduate College Canvas site, “International Success for International Graduate Students”—an excellent self-paced online orientation about American social norms, cultural adjustment, communicating with faculty, etc.
Resources on Writing and Productivity for Thesis and Dissertation Students

Advisors can share these resources on program websites, in your graduate student handbook, on your program’s Canvas site, and/or simply have them at your fingertips to share with student advisees. Note that some of these resources discuss tips for faculty writing and/or doctoral student writing but all of the resources are applicable to master’s and doctoral graduate students’ writing and productivity.


Mayzak Cathy. Writing with Cathy Mazak (blog, podcast, and other resources on academic writing). Retrieved February 10, 2022.

