

Department of Geographical Sciences
Graduate Student Mentoring Guideline

Graduate student mentoring at the Department of Geographical Sciences (GEOG) is a collaborative effort among several parties, including graduate students and their primary advisors, the Portfolio Advisory Committee (PAC), the Doctoral Student Advisory Committee (DSAC) and the Dissertation Examining Committee (DEC), as well as with the support from the Graduate Director and graduate peer-to-peer mentorship program. The mentoring activities are led and coordinated mainly through the student's primary academic advisor.

1. Composition of Mentors

1.1 Primary advisor

All doctoral students are required to have a faculty advisor. The faculty advisor is the student's first point of contact among the faculty. The student's faculty advisor will normally serve as the Chair of the PAC, the Doctoral Student Advisory Committee (DSAC) and the Dissertation Examining Committee (DEC). If the student's advisor is a member of the Research Faculty of the department, the Chair of the Dissertation Examining Committee shall be the tenured/tenure-track co-advisor and the Research Faculty advisor shall serve as the co-chair.

The primary advisor of a graduate student is determined in the process of student recruiting. This assignment is based on the student's research interests and discussions between the student, candidate advisors, and the Graduate Director. At the recruiting stage two faculty members are associated with the student's application. The application is vetted by all T/TT Faculty. For a student with a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA), the Principal Investigator (PI) of the project funding the student usually serves as the student's primary advisor.

1.2. Portfolio Advisory Committee (PAC)

At GEOG, the Comprehensive Portfolio Assessment (CPA) serves the purpose of comprehensive examinations. A PAC is appointed by the Graduate Director to guide and assess a student's CPA. A PAC consists of three faculty members of the department with the primary advisor normally serving as the Chair of the committee. At its first meeting the PAC assesses the student's needs in terms of course work, directed reading, individual study etc., in the context of their area of research interest.

1.3. Doctoral Student Advisory Committee (DSAC) and Dissertation Examining Committee (DEC)

DSAC and DEC are responsible for guiding the student's dissertation research at different stage. The DSAC and DEC should include at least one member external to the Department. The student and the Doctoral Student Advisory Committee should meet as a group once a semester and no less than once a year to review the student's progress, and is required to meet at least one time as a group at least one month prior to the Dissertation Proposal Defense. Students are encouraged to consult with their Committee Members for more formal and informal meetings. The committees also evaluate the student's proposal and dissertation defense.

1.4. Changing Advisors

On occasion, it may be necessary for a graduate student to change advisors. Under such circumstances, the student should contact the Graduate Director to discuss the need for a change. If the Director of Graduate Studies is the advisor, the graduate student should contact the Department Chair. After discussions between the student and the Director (or Chair), the Director (or Chair) will contact the affected parties and discuss the desired changes. The student and affected parties must then complete the Request for Change of PhD Department Advisor form. The student should consider changing advisors carefully, as it is not advisable to do so often.

2. Mentoring Goal and Plan

At the beginning of the graduate program, the student meets with the primary advisor to set up goals, expectations and plans for the graduate study. The student and advisor revisit the goals and plans as the graduate study and dissertation research progress. The student work load and responsibilities contract are developed and co-signed each academic year or when the student status is changed. Teaching Assistant performance assessment is provided by the instructor of record. The Associate Chair meets with the Teaching Assistants to discuss their performance and is available to address any concerns of the Graduate Student or the Instructor.

3. Annual Assessment

All GEOG faculty meet together every year to evaluate the performance of the graduate students towards completing their degree. A grade of satisfactory, conditional satisfactory and unsatisfactory will be assigned based on the factors specified in the Graduate Handbooks.

4. The Authorship of a Scholarly Publication

Following the commonly accepted standard, each author should have made a significant contribution to the work described. A significant contribution means a substantial role in the conceptualization, design, execution, or interpretation of data, and writing and revision of the manuscript.

5. Special Concern and Grievance Procedures

Should students have special concerns or grievances with their faculty advisors, PAC committees, dissertation committees, or on other faculty affair matters, they should make an appointment to discuss these issues with the Graduate Director. If the special concern involves the Graduate Director, students should make an appointment to discuss with the Department Chair.

DOCTORAL STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

This form is to be completed after each meeting. One copy is provided to the student, the other added to the student's file in the departmental academic records.

Date of meeting:
Student:
Advisor:
Committee members:
Written materials submitted before meeting? ___Y___N Date received:

Student's progress ___ has exceeded expectations
 ___ has met expectations
 ___ is below expectations
 ___ is unsatisfactory

SUMMARY OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS AND ACTIONS

Additional written response(s) to student? ___ Y ___ N. If yes, please attach.

If this is the Annual Progress Report, I certify the student ___ has ___ has not made satisfactory progress over the past year towards completion of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Geography

Signature of Advisor Date

Signature of Student Date

NOTE: The student should meet with the Members of the Doctoral Student Advisory Committee (either as a group or individually) as often as is necessary to make satisfactory progress in the development of her/his dissertation proposal and dissertation research. The student and the Doctoral Student Advisory Committee should meet as a group at least once per year to review the student's progress, and is required to meet at least one time as a group at least one month prior to the Dissertation Proposal Defense. (PhD Handbook, 1.4.5). This form may also be used for the Annual Progress Report for Doctoral Students in April of each year. (PhD Handbook, 1.5.1).



Statement of Mutual Expectations For Graduate Assistants and Supervisors

By providing professional experience and mentorship, graduate assistantships are an integral part of the education of graduate students. A Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME) outlines in writing the nature of an assistantship and its supervision. It is not a formal contract, but rather a structured conversation to ensure that a graduate student and their supervisor share a clear understanding of what to expect from each other. The Graduate School requires supervisors to meet with the student at the start of their assistantship and at least once a year going forward, and are encouraged to use this template to structure this meeting and to record the understanding. Given the wide variety of research, administrative, and teaching assistantships, this template is meant to be customized as needed.

Student Name
Student ID Number
Supervisor Name
Supervisor Title

Assistantship Title
Avg. hours/week
Start Date
End Date

Responsibilities of Assistant: Include the most important duties of the assistantship. Potential topics include specific responsibilities, goals, deliverables (if any) and how they are to be submitted. For teaching assistantships (whether serving as the instructor of record or in a support role), include the course(s) and section(s).

Responsibilities of Supervisor: Specify the responsibilities of the supervisor. Potential topics include how the graduate assistant will receive continuing guidance and support, times when the supervisor will be available to meet, any training schedule, and supplies to be made available.

Scheduling: When the assistantship is to be performed, including work hours, regularly scheduled meetings, degree of flexibility in work schedule, and personal and sick leave procedures.

Worksites: Locations where the assistantship is to be performed. If a significant portion of the responsibilities will be satisfied remotely, supervisors should provide guidance on expectations and limitations.

Health & Safety: If there are in-person meetings, what procedures are required to ensure the health and safety of everyone? See <https://umd.edu/4Maryland/health-plan> for details.

Procedures and Best Practices: Required training, standard methods, required record-keeping, security protocols, and/or procedures for ordering supplies. For teaching assistantships, see Appendix A.

Professional Development and Individual Development Plan: Topics include skills to be developed during the appointment, training resources other than those provided directly by the supervisor, whether publications will result from the student's work and, if so, expectations for authorship, and/or expectations for travel. See <https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/school-policies/#text> for further guidance on co-authorship for faculty-student interactions and collaborations.

Organizational Culture: Considerations such as office space, workspace, dress codes, appropriate titles and means of address, and/or team norms.

Other comments:

Please note that all graduate assistantships are subject to University of Maryland policies and procedures as set forth in the Graduate Catalog: academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships. Nothing in the SME should contradict them, but if they do, the Graduate Catalog policies and procedures govern.

We have met in person or synchronously online to review and discuss this agreement on the date noted below. The graduate assistant was given an opportunity to ask and receive answers to any questions about the assistantship:

Student Signature	
Date	

Supervisor Signature	
Date	

If meeting online, you can save the document as a PDF and then add your digital signatures. For instructions visit helpx.adobe.com/reader/using/sign-pdfs.html

Appendix A

Graduate Teaching Assistantship Guidance

Some teaching assistants serve as the instructor of record, while most support a course by leading discussion or lab meetings, grading student work, and assisting with course logistics. This list provides additional topics for the teaching assistant and supervising faculty member to discuss.

- What are expectations about TA presence in class meetings?
- How can the TA and instructor work together to create and contribute to a positive and inclusive climate for the students?
- If the TA will be grading student work...

- What are the grading deadlines?
- What standards (e.g., rubrics) and procedures will be used to ensure transparency, accuracy, and consistency?
- Student communication...
 - How should the students contact the TA?
 - What are expectations for TA response times to student emails, phone messages, etc.?
- University policies for undergraduate courses – see go.umd.edu/ug-policy
 - How will students be made aware of these policies?
 - How will academic integrity be ensured?
 - What conduct is prohibited and what conduct is allowed when using UMD computing resources?
 - How will student information covered by the Federal Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) be protected?
 - What are the expectations for student conduct?
 - What are the policies related to sexual misconduct, discrimination, civility, and safety?
 - How will we ensure that course materials meet standard accessibility standards?
 - What is the process for identifying and offering academic accommodations for students?
 - What constitutes an excused absence and how will they be accommodated?
 - What other rights are guaranteed for students in the course?
- What are the expectations related to professional conduct?
- What resources might the TA refer students to? See tltc.umd.edu/supporting-whole-student for guidance.
- To whom should the TA report concerns about student conduct or wellbeing?
- How should the TA communicate with their supervisor if an illness or other unavoidable absence conflicts with their duties?
- What training or support is recommended or required? See tltc.umd.edu for upcoming workshops.