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Introduction

The Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to creating positive, healthy, and productive advising relationships between faculty advisors and their graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. To that end, we have prepared this guidebook for faculty mentors. We recognize that mentor/mentee relationships are highly individualistic, and even experienced mentors might encounter new challenges with every new mentee. Thus, we've tried to organize this manual so that mentors can dip in and find what they need, although new faculty might wish to read it more thoroughly from the beginning.

This handbook draws heavily on the following sources. The University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School's "How to Mentor Graduate Students: A Guide for Faculty" (https://rackham.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Fmentoring.pdf) is widely viewed as an excellent model and has been adapted across the nation; this handbook uses some of its language by permission. Johnson's *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty* is especially comprehensive. In addition, we drew upon Pfund et al. (2014) and the excellent mentor training program established by the National Research Mentoring Network, including material both from printed work and from their in-person program. Shore's *The Graduate Advisor Handbook: A Student-Centered Approach* is also a good read. Other references are listed throughout. For readability and brevity, we opted not to have in-text citations but to provide sources as a list.

Good mentoring starts with each graduate program, and we have tried to "UMass-ify" this where possible, providing examples of effective strategies from many different programs. This is a living document, so if you have comments, criticisms, or examples of best practices to share, please contact the Graduate School.

While this handbook is meant to aid individual faculty as they work with their mentees, at the end of each section we offer some suggestions for best practices at the level of the graduate program.

Notes on language

Although much of this manual is relevant to the mentorship of postdoctoral scholars and undergraduate researchers as well as graduate students, we refer to mentees as "students" for ease of language.

We use the pronouns "they" and "their" as both singular and plural, as the most inclusive choice.
The Effects of Good Mentoring

Mentors take an interest in developing another person’s career and well-being, and helping them advance their academic and professional goals. It's a broader role than just being a supervisor or a boss, as the mentee's own professional growth is key. Mentoring is tailored to the individual, and depends on the mentee’s experience, preparation, goals, identity, learning preferences and cultural background, among other factors.

One multifaceted definition of mentors includes those who:

- take an interest in developing another person’s career and well-being.
- have an interpersonal as well as a professional relationship with those whom they mentor.
- advance specific academic and professional goals tailored to the career aspirations of the mentee.
- tailor mentoring styles and content to the individual, including adjustments due to differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, learning style and so on.

Not all mentors are advisors—graduate students and postdocs should develop a network of mentors that could be other professors, people in related industries, family, friends, etc. Conversely, not all advisors are mentors—some advisors focus their relationship with their graduate students and postdocs solely around supervision of research rather than true mentorship.

Why be a mentor rather than just an advisor?

First, your mentees will benefit. Research shows that having an effective mentor correlates with

- graduate program completion
- persistence
- increased research productivity
- higher career satisfaction
- enhanced feelings of self-efficacy
- increased recruitment and retention of members of underrepresented groups

Second, you will benefit. Mentorship comprises a large part of faculty time, and many faculty members describe fostering the success of their mentees as one of the most rewarding aspects of their careers.

Most faculty members get little or no formal training as mentors, and develop their mentoring strategies by following examples (good or bad) set by others, and by trial and error. Many faculty members don’t explicitly think about effective mentorship, but expect mentoring relationships to evolve naturally. Sometimes they do, but a mentoring relationship gone sour can take up a great deal of time and emotional energy, to everyone’s detriment.
Given that mentoring relationships have been the subject of academic study, with a toolkit of best practices well supported by evidence, it makes sense to think carefully about how to establish and maintain your relationships with your graduate students, postdocs, and undergraduate researchers.
Reflecting on Your Own Mentoring Practice

Many faculty members find that their mentorship evolves with experience. Regardless of your career stage, it is useful to occasionally set aside time to reflect on your own mentoring practices and to make an intentional plan for your mentoring practice.

Here are some questions that may help guide your thinking about mentorship.

- How would you characterize your own experience with your mentors in graduate school? Was it effective? Was it lacking in any way? Would your mentors' style be suitable for every mentee?
- How did your mentors think about graduate education? Was it a test where only the best rose to the top, a collaborative effort between student and mentor, or something in between?
- What values about graduate education do you bring to your mentoring? Have you adopted these thoughtfully or are you replicating your own experience as a student?
- What have you learned from mentoring others?
- Have you articulated a mentoring philosophy?

Recommended practices at the program level

- Normalize the discussion of mentoring practices among faculty members by providing time during meetings or retreats.
- Regularly ask the graduate students and postdocs for feedback on how the program is going, what mentoring they receive, and what kind of additional mentoring would be helpful.
- Pair new mentors with experienced, successful mentors and encourage regular conversation.
- Encourage the development of a team mentoring model, so that students receive feedback and mentoring from a range of mentors who may have strengths in a variety of areas.
- Recognize excellent mentorship in the same way we recognize excellent research and teaching. Programs should routinely nominate their outstanding mentors for the Graduate School's Mentor Award, awarded at Graduate Commencement every year.
Establishing Mutual Expectations With A New Mentee

Your new graduate student may have a very different understanding of the advisor/student relationship than you do. Perhaps their view is colored by their undergraduate research experience or previous graduate experience, by their friends’ experiences, by their mentoring experiences in other countries, or by what they’ve read. They may enter the program viewing you as a boss, judge, advocate, collaborator, friend, parental figure, or teacher—or some combination. These expectations of you may also reflect your mentee’s assumptions about mentors of your gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, etc. In turn, your own expectations of your mentoring relationship have no doubt been shaped by your own experiences, both positive and negative, from your own time as a student, as an advisor to previous students, and by conversations with colleagues.

It is much easier to get on the same page at the start of the mentoring relationship than to recalibrate expectations when things go awry. The mentoring literature suggests having an organized, concrete discussion at the start of your mentoring relationship about the expectations you have for your new student, as well as the expectations your student should have of you. You may want to spread this discussion over the course of several meetings.

Here are some questions to stimulate your planning.

What does your graduate student need to know?

- **Program requirements and policies.** The Graduate Student Handbook ([https://www.umass.edu/graduate/policies/handbook](https://www.umass.edu/graduate/policies/handbook)) and the Graduate School Bulletin ([https://www.umass.edu/graduate/policies/graduate-school-bulletin](https://www.umass.edu/graduate/policies/graduate-school-bulletin)) contain the policies for all graduate students at the University. Your graduate program should also have its own handbook—make sure your new student knows about all these resources. Your student may have attended the Graduate Student Orientation offered by the Grad School, as well as an orientation offered by their graduate program, so they might have a good sense of what's expected. They may also be feeling overwhelmed by too much information. Thus, it's good to check with them about what information they have received, and how confident they are in what they need to know. Many problems can be traced to students not understanding how to maintain progress or how their progress will be evaluated.

- **How their time will be spent as they move through their degree.** New students sometimes try to do everything (e.g., research, teaching, taking classes, and volunteering for outreach events) without recognizing that they will have time later in their programs for particular opportunities. Talking to students about how they might view graduate school (and their later careers) as a book with many chapters, allowing them to gain experience in different facets of their career over time, rather than all at once, can be very helpful. Conversely, some students may need to be motivated to explore certain avenues that will help them reach their goals. Introducing students to the academic vitae, and showing them examples of vitas for students “on the market,” might help give them a sense of the kinds of experience they will aim to develop over time.
• **Funding sources and work obligations.** What does the student's funding plan look like over the course of their degree? Will your student be a TA? If so, for how many hours? If your student is going to be funded by you as a research assistant, how many hours per week will that involve? How will the work relate to the student's thesis work?

• **Fieldwork.** If your discipline involves fieldwork, how will it be funded? Will the student travel alone or with others? How will communication be maintained if either of you is traveling?

• **Authorship.** What are the publication requirements for graduation? What does the dissertation look like? For fields in which co-authored work is common, what are your expectations for authorship? Will you automatically be included as a co-author on your student's work? Will your student be included as a co-author on all projects that they work on? How will the authorship of other researchers (e.g., undergraduate assistants) be determined?

• **Meetings.** How often will you meet with your student, and using what modalities? What are your expectations for these meetings? Who sets the agenda?

• **Group dynamics and organization.** If you have a group of researchers, how do they interact? Is it a hierarchical or flat organization? Who will introduce your new student to the remainder of your group?

• **Working hours.** When do you expect your student to be on campus? Is it OK if they work off-site or do you want them in a particular place at particular times?

• **Conference attendance.** Do you expect your student to attend conferences? Which ones, and who pays? Is there money available from the graduate program?

• **Social events.** Are there social events on the horizon, either for your research group or the graduate program, that you should point out?

• **Career preparation.** While graduation can feel quite distant, it takes time to explore and cultivate career aspirations, develop synergistic skill sets, and build professional networks. By starting early, students can apply an efficient, intentional approach to skill development and career planning that enhances and supports their academic training. Give your mentee permission and even the expectation that they will devote time and energy to career preparation. Are there events or programs, such as those offered by the Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development) that you specifically recommend?

What can your student expect of you?

This initial conversation is also a good time to acknowledge explicitly that you too have responsibilities in the relationship and to make it clear how you will meet them.

• **Communication.** What's the best way to communicate with you? Will you communicate by email, text, phone, social media, Slack, Skype?

• **A plan for developing independence.** How will you help your student develop as an independent researcher? Do you, for example, have a phased plan that you prefer to follow? For example, in some disciplines, it is natural to have
mentees first join an ongoing project in order to learn particular techniques, and then gradually transition to more independent projects.

- **Feedback.** Do you prefer small chunks of work to review (e.g., sections of a paper, figures one by one) or do you prefer longer pieces? How quickly will you provide feedback on drafts? While typical expectations of responsiveness varies by field, it is recommended that you provide feedback on submitted work *ideally within two weeks and within a month* at the maximum.

- **Letters of recommendation.** How much lead time do you need to provide a letter? What information do you need from your mentee in order to write the letter?

- **Confidentiality.** What is your policy for the confidentiality of your conversations? Can you clarify under what circumstances you might disclose something to others, and to whom? (Be aware of your responsibilities under Title IX rules, as explained later in this guide.)

- **Responsiveness to changes in your mentee’s needs.** Your mentee’s goals, life circumstances, and interests may all change over the course of your relationship. What is your plan to review these periodically with your mentee?

- **Checking in for potential problems.** Often we find that mentors don’t know that their students are facing difficulties and blithely assume that all is well, whereas mentees may be afraid or embarrassed to bring up problems. It’s good to routinely ask your mentee about what is going wrong as well as what is going right, and give them space to answer.

- **Support for work/life balance.** Your mentee will be happier, more productive, and less likely to burn out if they take breaks from work to be with friends and family, exercise, and take vacations. What is your plan to support work/life balance? In some fields that are time-constrained (e.g., seasonal fieldwork, lab animals that need care, working with children at the start of a school year), perhaps there are predictable patterns in workload that you should discuss with your mentee. Can you lay out the plan for busy and less busy times? Can you role model for them how you work to maintain balance? Be aware of relevant policies outlined in the current Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) bargaining agreement (https://www.geouaw.org/).

**Ideas for how to have this conversation**

Remember that it is your responsibility to initiate this conversation. Don’t expect your new student to know what to ask, or to feel comfortable in asking.

Depending on their personality, advisors differ on how they prefer to approach this conversation.

- Some UMass mentors go through a list of discussion items together, such as the one above, with the student, and come to an agreement about each. It is useful to follow up with an email that outlines what was discussed.

- Others use a compact, or a written agreement with the student that the mentor designs in advance. Some examples are at https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentoring-compactscontracts-examples/ and more are at https://tinyurl.com/SampleCompacts. If you choose to create a
compact, be sure that it is in line with the UMass collective bargaining agreement with the Graduate Employment Organization (GEO) (https://www.geouaw.org/); for example, avoid language that suggests that the student must work more hours on their RA or TAship than what they are paid for.

- Some UMass mentors recommend starting with a sample compact and editing it together with their students. If you work with multiple students, it can be great to do this all together so that everyone has a sense of shared ownership.

**Recommended practices at the program level**

Graduate programs should have a graduate student handbook with deadlines, policies, and evaluation metrics clearly specified. This should be updated annually. Problems that come to the attention of the Graduate School can often be traced back to the lack of a detailed, clear and updated handbook.

It should be clear how a student should best study for comprehensive exams, and how those exams are evaluated. Uncertainty about exams is enormously stressful for graduate students; we can mitigate some of that stress while still having a challenging exam. In programs with written exams that are given to a group of students, it is best practice for the answers to be graded by examiners that are blind to student identity. With oral exams, some programs have an independent moderator present, who is neither the student's advisor nor on the exam committee, who keeps time and ensures that the student is treated fairly. An experienced moderator can offer perspective during the discussion by the committee about how the questions asked and the student's performance compare to other exams.

All programs on campus should have an orientation session for incoming graduate students.

Many programs assign peer mentors to incoming graduate students that can help with everything from giving new students a realistic time estimate required by different courses or TAships, as well as getting settled, finding grocery stores, etc.

**Additional resources**

A useful list of resources and tips are provided in a Graduate Student Guide to Campus Resources (https://www.umass.edu/ombuds/student/graduate-student-resources). Direct your new student to it.

Information about off-campus housing can be found at https://offcampushousing.umass.edu/, and on-campus at https://www.umass.edu/living/assign/grad-students.

The Graduate School provides many services, including guidance on policies and procedures, assistance with grant and fellowship applications (including the NSF
Graduate Research Fellowship), as well as hundreds of events through the Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development) (see Professional Development chapter for details) and the Office of Inclusion and Engagement (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/inclusion).

The Graduate Student Senate (https://www.umass.edu/gss/) provides social engagement, leadership and advocacy opportunities.

The Graduate Employment Organization (https://www.geouaw.org/) is the graduate student bargaining unit, and advocates for graduate students on wages, healthcare, and other benefits. A list of benefits is provided by the UAW/UMass Trust (https://www.uawumasstrustfund.org/).
Communication and Guidance During an Evolving Relationship

“A hallmark of excellent mentorship is progressive change in the relationship.” (from Johnson’s *On Being a Mentor*)

As you move through the mentoring relationship with a student, the student should transition from being someone akin to an apprentice to being a colleague. As an advocate and guide for your student, consider these axes of development.

- **Academic development**: This is the core of what faculty often think of when we first consider mentorship. Depending on the graduate program, necessary skills may include how to read the literature in the discipline; connect prior coursework with disciplinary research; plan and carry out research; and analyze results.

- **Communication skills**: Mentees develop their skills in communicating with their mentor, their collaborators, funding agencies (through grant writing), and in presenting their research in different formats and to different audiences.

- **Leadership and professionalism**: Mentees learn about the norms of their discipline and take increasingly more substantive leadership positions. These might include providing feedback on work or help in preparing for qualifying exams for their peers, taking leadership roles within their graduate program or in other parts of the University, or become a student member of a committee in a disciplinary society. Students going into industry or the public sector may seek out experience with those areas.

- **Career preparation**: Mentees should become increasingly able to identify the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their chosen career, to identify their own weaknesses, and to strategically seek opportunities to fill those gaps. Career preparation is addressed in detail in a later chapter.

How you support your mentee’s development changes as they progress through their program. Remember that no one person can have all the answers! Strong mentorship also means being aware of other resources and directing mentees to them when appropriate, and helping them to establish a team of mentors. You may know next to nothing about careers outside of academia, for example, but the Office of Professional Development ([https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development](https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development)) offers many opportunities for your mentee to pick up relevant skills.

**Early in your graduate student’s program**

**Academic development**, Professors are experts in their disciplines. It is easy for experts to forget what a beginning student might know. What assumptions are you making about a new student's background knowledge, both about the intellectual framework of the work as well as the mechanics involved in how to do the work?

- Ask questions about your student's classwork and prior research experience, framed in such a way so that the student knows that your goal is to help them identify and fill in gaps, rather than to judge them on what they do not know.

- Inform students that asking questions is an essential, expected and respectful part of the learning process. Foster a culture where questions are welcome. Be
aware that some of your mentees may come from backgrounds where questions are not encouraged, and they may need time and extra encouragement to acclimate to this aspect of U.S. academic life.

- Be aware that students may experience difficulty in transitioning from very structured undergraduate work to less structured graduate work. You can help by working with them to develop short-term, concrete goals and strategies for measuring their progress.
- Have an explicit plan for teaching the student how to acquire necessary skills. To help students develop technical skills, UMass mentors recommend having them watch someone else perform the task, do the task themselves, and eventually teach the task to others.
- Check in with your mentee about how required coursework is going.
- Encourage your mentee to connect with other faculty and students, both inside and outside their program, through social events, seminars, training workshops and graduate student organizations.

Communication skills. Early-stage graduate students will be learning how to interact with people in their research group, other students in their program, faculty teaching their classes, and other faculty mentors. You can help by stressing the importance of creating a network of mentors, among both peers (at different stages) and faculty members, and helping students learn where to go with questions on different topics.

The Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development) and the Office of Inclusion and Engagement (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/inclusion) offer a variety of programs to help students develop networking skills, improve their writing and presentation skills, craft compelling funding applications, and build a mentoring network.

Leadership and professionalism. At this stage, students are most likely beginning to learn the norms of the discipline, and observe how others behave in leadership roles. You can help by explicitly discussing norms and pointing out leadership roles that they may be interested in assuming later on.

The middle period of your graduate student's program

Academic development. At this stage, the student has completed most of the initial requirements and is deep into their research. With the easing of externally imposed deadlines such as exams and course requirements, some students struggle to make steady progress. You can help your student define goals that are challenging but within reach.

- Schedule a meeting with your student at least monthly. Frequent contact with the advisor correlates highly with student success. For this meeting, agree with the student on an agenda in advance; be sure to allow time for the student to ask questions or share concerns.
- Have an open-door policy within reasonable constraints determined by your travel and your own deadlines.
• Consider both short-term and long-term goals in your discussion with your student. Demonstrate how you go about planning a project with a deadline (e.g., getting ready for a conference) and one without. The Office of Professional Development offers workshops on setting SMART Goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

• Help your student set high expectations. At the same time, be pragmatic, and check in with your student about other responsibilities they may have in the same time frame. If your student misses a deadline, address it with them, find out what the reason was, and establish a new deadline. Recognize how life events (family needs, illnesses, other personal issues) may be affecting student progress, and provide advice aimed at moving forward despite constraints. (See advice for helping with writing issues later in this handbook.)

• Provide honest feedback and constructive criticism on a regular basis. Don't offer negative feedback without offering a solution for the student to try.

• Celebrate success and reiterate the value of failure. All too often academics let a moment of success go by without acknowledgment and move on immediately to the next task. Take a moment to publicly acknowledge successes, both small and large, of your students, be it getting a paper accepted or mastering a new research skill. Similarly, remind students that failures are essential data points that inspire new research directions and fuel innovative thinking.

Communication skills. At every stage, but especially at this period, you can intentionally help to demystify academia. This is especially appropriate for students who will be seeking an academic career, but it is helpful for any student to understand how a complex job works.

• Model how you do tasks and involve your students as appropriate. Involve them in grant writing, demonstrate how you approach writing projects of different lengths, describe how you prepare for committee work, or invite them to watch you teach.

• Think out loud about the decisions you make.

Leadership and professionalism. Recommend that your student complete an Individual Development Plan, or IDP, and update it regularly. First developed for STEM (http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/) and later adapted to social sciences and the humanities (https://www.imaginephd.com/), IDPs help students and postdocs set goals over the next 6-12 months that include research project goals, skill development goals, and career advancement goals based on self-assessment of their progress. For mentors, a good practice is to review with your mentee only the research project goals; sometimes students are reluctant to divulge professional aspirations and self-assessments that are addressed in other parts of the IDP. The IDP helps students see the big picture, focus their efforts, become empowered to actively direct their own planning, and become more productive. The Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development) offers workshops on completing an IDP.
Helping your student finish well

Academic development and communication: helping your students write. In mentoring training workshops, one of the most common frustrations we hear from advisors, regardless of discipline, is that many of their mentees encounter trouble with writing. In some disciplines, writing is parsed out over individual published manuscripts, which may be in more manageable chunks for the student. In others, the student writes one major piece of work, which can be especially daunting. In helping your students overcome writing issues, try the following:

- Encourage your students to write as they go rather than saving the writing until the end.
- Emphasize the importance of breaking large tasks into small goals (e.g., "Write the methods section for Experiment 2" or "Write a summary of these three references on Topic X" rather than "Work on dissertation"). SMART goals work for writing too!
- Encourage your students to join or establish a writing group. It is not necessary that they share writing, but just hold each other accountable for their progress. Several writing groups, both online and in person, are in the Amherst area.
- Books that might be inspirational while offering solid advice include Silva's How to Write a Lot, which identifies specious barriers to writing and offers firm instructions, backed up by data, on the importance of establishing a regular writing habit. Similarly, Write Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day has helped UMass Amherst graduate students get their work completed. Sword's Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful Academics Write draws on interviews with one hundred academic writers and is filled with many strategies to try out. Practical advice for both writers and mentors of writers can be found in How to Fix Your Academic Writing Trouble by Mewburn, Firth, and Lehmann.
- Encourage your mentee to apply to a dissertation writing retreat held by the Office of Professional Development during summer and the January break, or to a writing retreat sponsored by the Graduate Student Senate.
- Provide constructive feedback in 2-4 weeks or less. Address large issues in content and organization before copy-editing sentences.
- The UMass Writing Center (https://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/) has well-trained tutors who can work with your student, and for larger projects, it is possible to meet with the same tutor repeatedly.
- Encourage your students to take advantage of our institutional membership in the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity (www.facultydiversity.org), which offers dissertation writing support.

Academic development and communication: helping your students communicate orally. Regardless of their career goals, all students will benefit from presenting their research to appreciative audiences.

- Support your students' presentations at disciplinary conferences, and structure their preparation so that there is adequate time for incorporating feedback from you and others.
• Encourage your students to participate in events for broader audiences, such as the Three-Minute Thesis competition.

• Encourage your student to attend OPD workshops (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development/events) that allow them to practice public speaking, "elevator pitches," and the like.

Professional development. Realize that your student may be shifting their efforts to finding the next position, be it a postdoctoral position, an industry career, a teaching-intensive job, or some other path. Job searching takes time, but a student with a job to look forward to is a student that is motivated to finish their degree.

• Support your student in allocating time for the search process.

• Introduce your student to any additional relevant members of your professional networks.

• Discuss with your student your timeline for writing letters of recommendation and be prompt with them.

• Help your student through periods of discouragement. Remind them that failure is common—in fact, recently academics have been posting "CVs of failure" that list their rejections rather than accomplishments as a way to normalize failure (e.g., https://www.princeton.edu/~joha/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures.pdf).

A note about relationship boundaries

Professors sometimes struggle with the appropriate tone of the relationship with their students: some prefer to be more formal, and some more friendly. Evidence suggests that some personal disclosure by the mentor can help in forming a productive mentoring relationship (e.g., sharing struggles with being a person of color in academia with a mentee of similar background). However, a mentor/mentee relationship cannot be a typical friendship because of the power dynamic. A student may feel obligated to participate in social activities with, or do favors for, a mentor that they would otherwise decline. In addition, socializing more with one student will likely be viewed as differential treatment by other students. Many UMass mentors also avoid befriending mentees on some social media platforms in order to separate professional and personal relationships.

At UMass Amherst, there is a bright line that you cannot cross: faculty are prohibited from entering into a sexual relationship with any student or postdoc for whom the faculty member has any responsibility for supervision, evaluation, grading, advising, employment, or other instructional or supervisory activity. If you find that a relationship is evolving into something romantic, you must immediately disclose the relationship to your supervisor and take steps to remove yourself from any of the above roles. Here is the policy in full: https://www.umass.edu/provost/sites/default/files/uploads/Policy%20on%20consensual%20relationships%20between%20faculty%20and%20students.pdf

Remember that as a faculty member, you always have the power in the relationship, which means you are the person responsible for maintaining appropriate boundaries.
If serious conflicts arise between you and your mentee

Some mentor/mentee relationships do not work as planned. Sometimes a student realizes that their research interests pull them in a different direction and part ways from a mentor with no ill will; in other cases, the relationship degrades and becomes painful. Researchers on mentorship label a relationship as dysfunctional if the primary needs of one or both partners are not being met, the long term costs for one or both partners outweigh the benefits, or one or both partners are suffering distress as a result of being in the relationship (from Johnson’s *On Being a Mentor*, which offers a detailed analysis). Possible causes are nearly endless, including unrealistic expectations by either party, jealousy, taking undue credit for the other's ideas, or over-involvement in personal lives.

Steps to take include slowing down the process and not responding out of anger or anxiety to a problem; evaluating one's personal contributions to the problem; considering ethical and professional obligations to the mentee; or seeking consultation with a trusted colleague or the Ombuds Office (https://www.umass.edu/ombuds/). The Office of Workplace and Learning Development (https://www.umass.edu/wld/) offers in-person and online training for employees on developing relevant skills. Develop a proactive and compassionate response to your mentee. Throughout, document your interactions.

Recommended practices at the program level

Successful graduate programs have the following characteristics:

- Providing settings for informal interactions between students and faculty that foster a sense of community, such as social hours, holiday parties, picnics, etc.
- Ensuring that advisors have common expectations for students.
- Many UMass Amherst programs have an annual review in which faculty beyond the student's advisor and committee provide an assessment of the student's progress. At the minimum, the student is given a thumbs up or down on their annual progress. Other programs offer a more extensive chance for the student to have a conversation with a group of faculty and get perspective beyond that of their committee, to ask questions, to provide feedback to the program about how well the program is working and about the advisor, and to have a role in guiding the review.
- Providing opportunities for preparing for the academic job market, including mock interviews, practice job talks, workshopping letters of application, teaching portfolios, research statements, CVs, etc. Some programs on campus offer semester-long classes on how to succeed in job seeking.
- In disciplines tied to industry or other non-academic areas, pull in invited speakers who can discuss strategies for getting a job.
Program characteristics shown to lead to poor mentoring relationships:

Some program characteristics have been shown to be detrimental to student success (drawn from *On Being a Mentor*). These include:

- Encouraging students to compete for limited resources.
- A disconnect between faculty and student priorities (e.g., faculty focused on publication and grants when a student is focused on preparing for a practitioner role).
- Inequity across faculty in the unit in their mentoring loads.
- Poor collegiality among the faculty.
- Diffusion of training, such as when practicum experiences are farmed out with little oversight from the home program.
- Infrequent opportunities for interaction among peers and with faculty (a particular concern for online and professional programs).

Additional resources

The following book goes into extensive detail about how to mentor effectively, and has interesting case studies as well as concrete suggestions at both the individual and programmatic level.

Strategies for Fostering an Inclusive Community

Creating an inclusive, supportive community is an explicitly stated goal of UMass Amherst (https://www.umass.edu/planning/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Plan%202018%20final.pdf). The substantial benefits to all of us of creating a diverse and vibrant academy are well documented, and we won't belabor them here.

The graduate student population nationwide and at UMass Amherst is increasingly diverse. It's no longer relevant to consider students as either "traditional" or "non-traditional." If we include women in traditionally male-dominated fields, students from historically underrepresented groups, international students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and students with children with other care-giving roles, these "non-traditional" students from decades past now comprise the majority of graduate students in the nation.

- Recognize that if your mentee is in an underrepresented group, they may find it more difficult to form connections. Ask your student about their interests, and help them get connected with people that share them.

- A student may select a thesis topic that is more aligned with the values or culture of their community rather than one centered in the traditional area of the discipline. If at all possible, support the student in their choice, perhaps by enlisting additional faculty as members of the student's mentor network.

- Recognize that there are many ways to be an effective graduate student and that being flexible with expectations can help your students succeed. For example, graduate students with caregiving responsibilities or religious obligations may be constrained in when they can be on campus. Work with your mentee to ensure to plan accordingly. Remember that often students with substantial obligations beyond graduate school effectively balance these obligations by being more time-efficient.

- Be aware of your own limitations and biases. Research suggests that few of us are free of implicit biases, fostered by our cultural surroundings, and in fact one can be biased against one's own identity group. It is worth examining one's own unconscious biases—you might try some of the exercises at Harvard's Project Implicit (https://implicit.harvard.edu). The good news is that we can mitigate the effect of unconscious biases through awareness of them and conscious intentionality against them.

- When working with international students, be aware that their undergraduate experience may have been very different than at an American university. You can support your mentee in understanding the "hidden curriculum" of American university culture, such as expectations for engaging in class discussion and asking questions, the informality of the mentor/mentee relationship compared to some other cultures, and the expectation that students can and should advocate for themselves. International students working as teaching assistants may have had very different classroom experiences as undergraduates, and may need information about typical undergraduate academic preparation and undergraduate expectations about classroom dynamics.
Mentees that are pregnant, adopting a child, or who are parents may require a leave of absence or extra flexibility in order to succeed with their degree. Pregnant and parenting students have rights under Title IX and under the Graduate Employment Organization contract. A helpful summary can be found at http://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources/pregnant-and-parenting-students. Familiarize yourself with these rights and resources. Initiate conversations with your mentee about support that they may need.

**Recommended practices at the program level**

- Be a visible advocate for inclusion. If your program is not very diverse, work for change. Be alert for recruitment opportunities; for example, the Graduate School brings groups of prospective students such as McNair Scholars to campus.
- GPDs may nominate eligible incoming students for the Spaulding-Smith and Research Enhancement and Leadership (REAL) fellowships offered by the Graduate School Office of Inclusion and Engagement (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/inclusion).
- Use a holistic application review. Recognize that metrics traditionally used for admission to graduate programs are poor predictors of student success. In each student application, be attentive to leadership qualities, barriers that have been overcome and evidence of integrity as demonstrated in the personal statement and letters of recommendation. More information about the holistic review can be found on the ETS website (http://www.holisticadmissions.org/). Please note: the Graduate School does not require GRE scores; individual programs may decide whether to require them.
- Attend and encourage both students and faculty peers to attend reading groups and talks that focus on issues related to diversity and inclusion (www.umass.edu/diversity/umass-learning-communities).
- Encourage your students, especially those from underrepresented groups, to take advantage of our institutional membership in the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity (wwwfacultydiversity.org), which includes programs geared toward graduate students and postdocs.

**Additional resources**

The Grad School's Office of Inclusion and Engagement (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/inclusion) provides support, programming and fellowships for students from diverse backgrounds.

The Office of Equity and Inclusion (https://www.umass.edu/diversity/office-equity-inclusion) provides leadership and programming to support diversity, equity, and inclusion on the UMass Amherst campus.
The UMass ADVANCE Program (https://www.umass.edu/advance/) also offers workshops and other resources.

The International Program Office (IPO) (https://www.umass.edu/ipo/iss) provides information and support for international students, including a mandatory orientation for new arrivals.

For reporting incidents of bias and identifying resources for targets of bias, see https://www.umass.edu/umatter/bias/follow-up.
Resilience and Well-Being

Recent studies nationwide show that mental health concerns, especially depression and anxiety, are significantly higher in graduate students than in their peers who are not in graduate school. In one study, graduate students were six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the general population.

These studies show that some of the major factors affecting graduate student mental health are financial concerns, poor work-life balance, negative interactions with their mentor, uncertain job prospects, and isolation and lack of social support.

How to be a supportive mentor

- Open the door for your students to share their concerns. As the more powerful person in the mentor-mentee relationship, you can play a critical role in destigmatizing mental health issues. UMass students report that they feel reassured if they believe that faculty understand the prevalence of mental health issues in academia and that they will be sympathetic.

- Listen. Your non-judgmental and active attention and listening are incredibly valuable in supporting students. Set aside time. Choose a private setting. Give your full attention. For more information on active listening skills see https://www.umass.edu/wld/effective-listening-new.

- Do not assume that the only students who need help are those who ask for it. If a student is falling behind in their work, resist jumping to the conclusion that this shows a lack of commitment.

- Recognize that you are not a counselor and that there are many professional resources on campus to help your mentee. Your role is to direct students to the appropriate help, not to provide help that you are not trained to give. The Center for Counseling and Psychological Health is available for consultation about how to help students, and the about available services. For more information about CCPH services please see: https://www.umass.edu/counseling/. Students can also reach out to the Psychological Services Center (https://www.umass.edu/psc/), which offers longer-term treatment options at a low fee.

- You can be particularly helpful in making concrete suggestions about how a student prioritizes their work during a difficult time. Helping your student to break large tasks into smaller ones can help them overcome feelings of being overwhelmed.

- Engage students in reflective conversations about self-management including strategies for resilience, sustained effort, and identifying signs that restoration and self-care strategies are needed.

- Model good work-life balance and mental health self-care. Often, academics have a tendency to emphasize their long work bouts, pre-deadline late nights, etc. It’s valuable to let your mentee know that you are taking a break, going for a run, spending time with your family, meditating, etc. Seek guidance from your own mentors if you are feeling overwhelmed.
Stress and anxiety can manifest in unexpected ways – sometimes, it's not about what you think it's about. For example, anxiety about the uncertainty of future events (funding, finding a job, visa status, etc.) can stall productivity as students avoid moving into this stage of unknowns. Have conversations with your student about their futures. When students feel more confident about their future, they are more motivated to get there.

A common problem: the impostor syndrome

Students may experience impostor syndrome—the feeling that they are frauds that do not deserve their success and will soon be found out. Signs of impostor syndrome can be anxiety, self-doubt, unwillingness to speak up in meetings or classes, or comments about how they were "just lucky" to be admitted or that they are far less prepared than their peers. People suffering from the impostor syndrome may have trouble in taking credit for their accomplishments. Some strategies to help your student include:

- Acknowledging the commonness of impostor syndrome among academics (perhaps even in yourself) and naming it. At Graduate Orientation sessions, students seem relieved when the majority of other students put up their hands to acknowledge that they have experienced impostor syndrome.
- Assure your student of the meaningfulness of their accomplishments, based on your experience and perspective. If you've established a relationship of trust with your student by giving them honest feedback, both positive and negative, it will be easier to help your student overcome unwarranted self-doubts.

Your responsibilities under Title IX at UMass Amherst

It may be that a student discloses to you that they are the victim of sexual harassment or sexual violence. We have both ethical and legal obligations to help our students and to take the training offered by the University.

Department chairs, GPDs, deans, and others are considered responsible employees for Title IX issues. If you hold one of these roles, you must report incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, and other sexual misconduct that your mentee discloses. It is best practice to inform your mentee of your status as a responsible employee before the student discloses information to you, and to provide information about options for confidential reporting and counseling (http://www.umass.edu/titleix/reporting/my-reporting-options/whom-should-i-report).

Faculty that do not hold these roles are not mandated to file a report if a student discloses an incident, but are encouraged to do so, as described in the faculty collective bargaining agreement (Appendix H). Faculty are required to provide students with information about campus resources, such as their next steps for immediate care (https://www.umass.edu/titleix/what-to-do); to help them review their options for reporting (https://www.umass.edu/titleix/sites/default/files/documents/sexual_violence_resource_guide-2019.pdf), and to aid them in making a report if they choose to do so.

In addition, to repeat what we said about "Relationship Boundaries": faculty are prohibited from entering into a sexual relationship with any student or postdoc for whom the faculty member has any responsibility for supervision, evaluation, grading, advising, employment, or other instructional or supervisory activity. If you find that a relationship is
evolving into something romantic, you must immediately disclose the relationship to your supervisor and take steps to remove yourself from any of the above roles.

Recommended practices at the program level

Foster a culture where out-of-office activities are encouraged. Many programs on campus routinely host picnics, holiday parties, hiking or canoe trips, and other joint ventures where both faculty and students can be together in a non-academic setting. Remember that alcohol is not allowed on campus unless a catering license is acquired.

Be sure that all personnel are up to date on their required Title IX trainings.

Additional resources

Here is the link to the Title IX information (http://www.umass.edu/titleix/), including training, at UMass.

The Maroon Folder (https://www.umass.edu/umatter/sites/default/files/Maroon_folder2018.pdf) provides a well-organized, in-depth list of resources, and even includes words you can use when speaking to a person that you are concerned about.

The Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) provides a list (https://cimerproject.org/-/research/publications) of publications and other resources.
Helping Your Mentee Prepare for a Career

It is unlikely that your student will end up in a career exactly like yours. There are far more Ph.D.s than tenure-track jobs at research institutions, and it is likely that most of your students will not want to or will not be able to follow your career path. Faculty often worry about how to advise students about other career choices because they don’t have direct experience with these other career paths, and may do their mentees a disservice by avoiding the conversation altogether. Luckily, you don’t have to become an expert yourself—UMass has excellent resources. Your role is to encourage your student to take advantage of them.

Open the door to a conversation about careers. Many graduate students hide their evolving career aspirations from their advisors because they think that their advisor will respond negatively—and indeed, some advisors, and some program cultures, do explicitly or implicitly favor students that intend to stay in academia. For example, some advisors might award first authorship on a paper not to the person who most merits it, but to the person who "needs" it most for their career. Thus, it may seem to your graduate student that dismissing a research career is tantamount to insulting you and your choices, or that you will think that you have thrown away your investment in them. They may suspect that you will think less of them or even withhold access to resources such as funds for conference travel or the time you devote to them. One way to forestall these worries is to look for opportunities to make positive comments about others who have gone into such careers and to explicitly ask your student about their career plans without passing judgment.

Balancing career preparation with conducting research. Some advisors are concerned that attending career-related events detract from time spent on research. However, participants report that their research progress is not slowed. Indeed, a student excited and optimistic about career opportunities becomes more motivated and directed.

Encourage your students to attend on-campus events created for career planning. The following opportunities are advertised directly to your students. However, your students are much more likely to attend if you encourage them.

Careers outside of academia

Across the nation, PhDs are increasingly choosing non-academic careers, and UMass students are eager for this information. In response, the Graduate School has an incredibly effective Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development) with nearly 300 offerings each year. Building upon the technical and academic expertise of the students they serve, OPD provides professional skills training in the areas of Career Preparation, Communication, Teaching, Grants & Fellowships, and Personal Development. Their programs can help your students develop self-awareness, learn new strategies (time management, negotiation), engage others (mentors, networks), and overcome challenges (imposter syndrome, perfectionism, conflict resolution). Their career-focused workshops can help your students explore career paths and navigate the job application process. See the current list of events at https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development/events.
Careers with a focus on teaching

If your student's goal is to become a faculty member, especially at a teaching-intensive institution, help them find authentic teaching experiences (rather than just, say, being a grader). Encourage your student to find TAships that offer increased independence and to seek opportunity for guest lectureships. For example, most Colleges at UMass Amherst now invite graduate students and postdocs to teach in the First-Year Seminar Series as the instructor of record. The seminars meet only once per week, so it is a reasonable commitment. Points of contact vary for each college; check with the office of your Dean.

You can also encourage your students to get familiar with the most current, evidence-based pedagogical practices. There are many resources on campus to help with this:

- The Office of Professional Development’s workshops range from course design and syllabus workshops to practical topics, such as discussion, grading, feedback on writing, and time management, as well as career preparation (e.g., crafting a teaching statement, panel discussions offered by teachers at smaller institutions).

- The Cetner for Teaching and Learning (https://www.umass.edu/ctl/home) often invites graduate students and postdocs to participate in their workshops alongside faculty. Many of these workshops focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion—important areas that universities and colleges are increasingly expecting their new hires to be conversant in.

- The Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) is a national network of Research-1 institutions with a shared goal of improving the preparation of STEM graduate students and postdocs for careers that include college and university teaching. UMass grad students and postdocs have two different kinds of opportunities: on-campus workshops and online offerings. The online options include full-semester courses, workshops, coffee hours, and the like: https://www.cirtl.net/ At UMass Amherst, we also offer a mentored program in which students carry out an evidence-based teaching project in order to become a CIRTL Practitioner or CIRTL Scholar.

- UMass's Instructional Innovation office offers workshops all semester, open to all students and postdocs, to help better use technology (such as Moodle, Echo360, or Camtasia) in the classroom. https://innovate.umass.edu/

Recommended practices at the program level

- Share advertisement for events offered by the Office of Professional Development (https://www.umass.edu/graduate/professional-development). Normalize attendance at professional development events and support for students who are pursuing careers outside of academia.
• Request that OPD offer one of their workshops especially for students in your program (opd@grad.umass.edu). Having a workshop at a regularly scheduled seminar time can improve attendance.

• Consider hosting seminar speakers from relevant disciplines beyond academia.
In-Person Mentor Training at UMass Amherst

For further discussion of the material presented in this handbook, and for a chance to discuss real-life scenarios with your colleagues, the Graduate School at UMass Amherst is pleased to offer in-person mentor training. We use the 8-hour long training program developed by the National Research Mentoring Network. This is a very well-crafted program that has been offered at numerous institutions and is recommended by many organizations, such as HHMI and the National Academies. Every component of the training has been tested and evaluated, and the training has been shown to be effective at improving the knowledge and confidence of mentors and the performance and satisfaction of the mentees.

The training focuses on a series of items for discussion—interesting case studies, sample contracts you might have with your students, etc. In a small group (ideally 8-12), participants discuss these materials with the help of a trained facilitator. Topics include aligning expectations with your mentee, maintaining effective communications, addressing equity and inclusion, fostering independence, and promoting professional development.

Training is offered periodically and advertised through email. You may also arrange training for your group. Please contact the Graduate School for further information.
For Further Reading


