“Navigating Difficult Conversations with Graduate Students”

UW ADVANCE
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Challenging conversations with your students*

1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices

- Student 1: Does not appear to be engaged in grad school
- Postdoc 1: Can’t write a paper to save his life
- Student 2: “I think an academic career is not for me”
- Postdoc 2: “I don’t think I’m good enough”

*undergrad, postbac, grad, postdoc
1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices

- Head in the sand – whose?
- The one-one conversation rarely goes the way one thinks it would
- Humans vary over n-dimensional space
- The conversation is about the progress, goals, results, climate – less about either you or the person
1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices

- It is not all on your shoulders. That is what committees are about
- The process of annual evaluations and milestones is really helpful but few faculty enforce them.
- Document conversations
- Establishing mutually agreed upon expectations on day one help immensely
- Official warnings are necessary
- Weekly meetings work wonderfully (with goal setting)
- Ask if this program and this degree is a good fit (not are they good enough for your program and degree).

Some resources

http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/
https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/06/12/advice-how-have-difficult-conversations-essay
MARTY HOWELL

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Graduate Student Academic Progress: Expectations, Conversations, and Documentation(s)

Martin Howell
Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs
UW College of Education
Setting Expectations

- Define Satisfactory Academic Progress in your department, as well as how you assess it
  - Graduate School Memo 16, Unsatisfactory Performance & Progress
  - Grades
  - Program milestones
  - Performance in internships, labs, research seminars, etc.
- Discuss and provide information to students
- Involve other faculty in progress reviews
- A note about employment
Having (Difficult) Conversations

- Prepare for the conversation with the student in mind
- Invite others to join the conversation as needed
- Provide specific information about areas of challenge
- Focus and refocus the conversation as needed
- Conclude with a support and improvement plan
  - Describe needed improvements in specific terms
  - Describe available supports
Creating Documentation

- Document all concerns and conversations
- Write objectively and impartially (your documentation will become student record)
  - Write in the third person
  - Describe observed actions and behaviors
  - Be as specific as possible
- Consult with colleagues as needed
- Communicate with the student
Creating Documentation

Document concerns and conversations

Do:
- be objective and impartial; your documentation will become student record
- include dates and document while your memory is fresh
- write in the third person
- describe observed actions and behaviors
- be as specific as possible

Don’t:
- treat your notes as “for your eyes only”
- include labels or judgments
- include personal feelings
- be vague
- let your questions go unanswered!
- You can contact the Office of Student Services or the Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs for help.
Questions?