

Process Questions for Faculty and Graduate Students

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Many new faculty have experienced only one type of faculty mentoring and advising relationship, the relationship they had with their own graduate advisor. Thus it is not surprising that new faculty may be unsure how to promote an effective, productive, and successful professional relationship with their own graduate students. When things go wrong and research is not progressing, these symptoms may indicate a problem with the advising and mentoring process.

In addition to learning about alternative models by asking peers and colleagues how they advise and mentor their students, new faculty could ask prospective and current graduate students process questions that will help illuminate what environments would foster productive and effective work. Faculty need not completely change their own way of doing things, but the information gained through these questions can help illuminate potential problems and suggest creative ways to improve the situation. Often, just having this type of conversation is enough to remove or loosen roadblocks.

What follows are a series of process questions faculty can ask of themselves and of their students to help establish a strong foundation in their faculty-student relationship. If faculty and students are unsure how to answer these questions, sample answers such as those given in the parentheses can be provided. Also, faculty could provide these questions in advance, for example sharing them with the student one week ahead of time and have a discussion the following week. For each of these questions, the faculty member might also share his/her answer and describe his/her own style of working.

- How do you like to communicate? (structured meeting times, ad-hoc meetings, regularly email, etc.)
- How do you like to work? (regular deadlines, open deadlines, discuss all details, share just the final results, interactively, individually, etc.)
- How do you like to give feedback?
- How do you like to receive feedback?
- When you've done a good job, how would you like me to acknowledge you and your work?
- When things aren't going well, how should that issue be addressed?
- When you are stressed, how does that pressure manifest itself?
- When you are stressed, what is the best way to help you be successful during that stressful time?
- When things are going well, how is that success reflected?
- How do you think/feel about time? (e.g. time is elastic, time is fixed)
- What are your expectations of my role as your advisor?
- What are your expectations of your roles as a graduate student?

It is important to treat all students fairly, but this does not necessarily mean treating them all the same (e.g. everyone must have a weekly one-hour meeting). Faculty need not completely change or ignore his/her own preferences and recognizing others' preferences will help foster a more productive and satisfying experience for all involved. This type of discussion will also encourage professional growth and development. Clearly identifying expectations and understanding how people work help both the faculty and the student.

Other General Mentoring Graduate Student References:

- University of Washington Graduate School's How to Mentor Graduate Students: <http://grad.washington.edu/mentoring/GradFacultyMentor.pdf>