Facilitating Success in Graduate Advising through Stakeholder-Centered Assessment

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Learning outcomes

1. Distinguish key factors associated with success of graduate advising.
2. Describe the role of different stakeholders in supporting the advising relationship.
3. Assess local institutional factors that promote good advising relationships.

Session timeline

- Context – why is this important?
- Project background
- Survey instrument
- Results
- Response plan
- Key takeaways
- Looking ahead

Context of Graduate Education

- Graduate students are important members contributing to the academic and research community.

- Recruiting students is expensive (time and money)

- Graduate advising can make or break a student's experience.
  - Poor advising is a top reason for attrition
  - Supportive advising relationships can mitigate the adverse effects of burnout caused by mental health challenges

- Graduate students are a vulnerable population
  - Funding usually tied to advisor (and advisors are typically determined before students arrive on campus)
  - Often students and employees, but roles are not clearly delineated.

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Context of Graduate Education, OSU

- Graduate program administration is decentralized
  - Difficulty overseeing and resolving graduate advising issues
  - Students can 'get the runaround'
  - Lots of offices dealing with graduate students

- Replete with resources, however fewer options may exist for Graduate Students vs Undergraduates
  - Difficult for students and faculty to find resources when needed
  - Can be unclear whether resources are available to graduate students

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Project background – Summer and Fall 2023

- CFAES Office for Research and Graduate Education (developed in 2019)
  - No direct oversight of graduate programs, this is done at the department level
  - Little control to create new policy, this is done at the department or university level
  - Supervise the college Graduate Student Advisory Council

- Held formal listening sessions in Wooster
  - Students named advising relationships as a top concern, but it was difficult to pinpoint the source of these challenges.

- Informal Columbus campus feedback from students

Why do an assessment?

- Faculty perspective is typically given more weight, while student experiences aren't consistently monitored
  - We were getting conflicting information from different stakeholders
- Other surveys and reports were not showing the full picture
  - CFAES Campus Climate Survey (2022)
  - OSU Ombuds Report (2023)
  - Grad Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey (2023)
- Needed more information to target solutions

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Key stakeholders

- Graduate Students
  - CFAES Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC)
- Graduate Faculty
- Program level administrators (faculty & staff)
- College level administrators
  - Office for Research and Graduate Education
  - Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- University level administrators
  - Graduate Student Ombuds
  - Counseling and Consultation Services (CFAES embedded counselors)
  - The Graduate School

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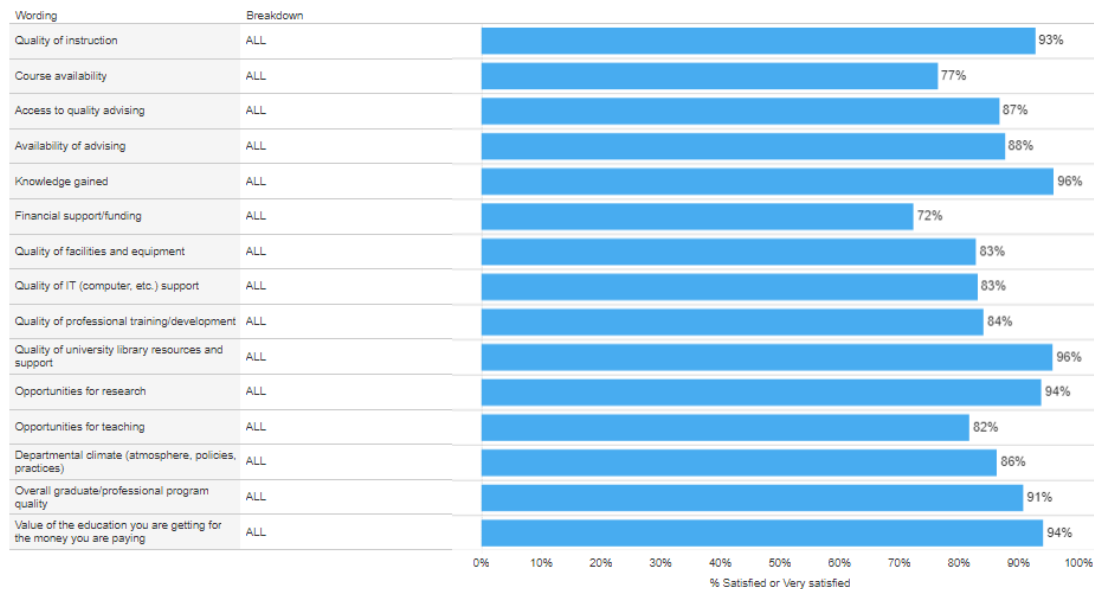
Grad SERU Results

Our college has programs represented in different 'colleges' as well as two main campus locations

"To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your graduate/professional program?"

Campus: COL
College: Graduate Agriculture
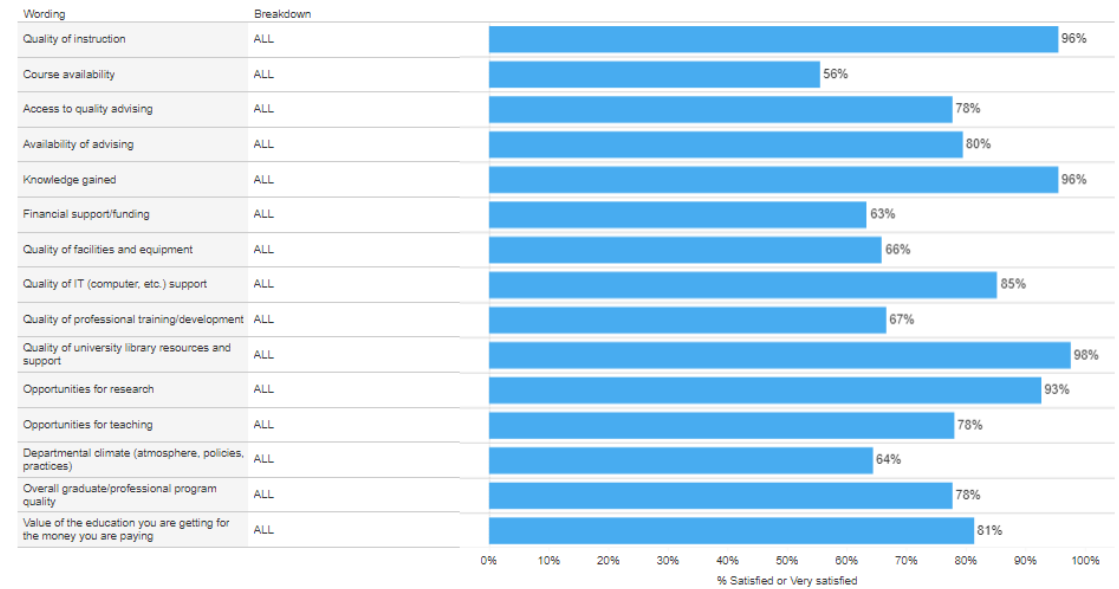**Program:** All
Breakdown: NO SELECTION
Number of Respondents: 87 to 99

Note: If there is no data in the chart below, the number of responses is too small to display.

Wording	Breakdown	% Satisfied or Very satisfied
Quality of instruction	ALL	93%
Course availability	ALL	77%
Access to quality advising	ALL	87%
Availability of advising	ALL	88%
Knowledge gained	ALL	96%
Financial support/funding	ALL	72%
Quality of facilities and equipment	ALL	83%
Quality of IT (computer, etc.) support	ALL	83%
Quality of professional training/development	ALL	84%
Quality of university library resources and support	ALL	96%
Opportunities for research	ALL	94%
Opportunities for teaching	ALL	82%
Departmental climate (atmosphere, policies, practices)	ALL	86%
Overall graduate/professional program quality	ALL	91%
Value of the education you are getting for the money you are paying	ALL	94%

"To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your graduate/professional program?"

Campus: COL
College: Grad Environment & Natural Res
Program: All
Breakdown: NO SELECTION
Number of Respondents: 32 to 45

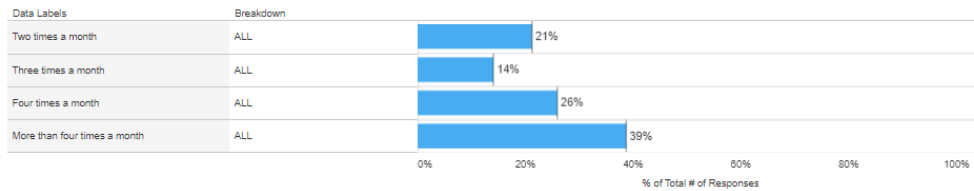*Note: If there is no data in the chart below, the number of responses is too small to display.*

Wording	Breakdown	% Satisfied or Very satisfied
Quality of instruction	ALL	96%
Course availability	ALL	56%
Access to quality advising	ALL	78%
Availability of advising	ALL	80%
Knowledge gained	ALL	96%
Financial support/funding	ALL	63%
Quality of facilities and equipment	ALL	66%
Quality of IT (computer, etc.) support	ALL	85%
Quality of professional training/development	ALL	67%
Quality of university library resources and support	ALL	98%
Opportunities for research	ALL	93%
Opportunities for teaching	ALL	78%
Departmental climate (atmosphere, policies, practices)	ALL	64%
Overall graduate/professional program quality	ALL	78%
Value of the education you are getting for the money you are paying	ALL	81%

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9

Grad SERU Results

"How often do you meet with your current, primary advisor in a typical month?"

Campus: COL
College: Graduate Agriculture
Program: All
Breakdown: NO SELECTION
Number of Respondents: 12 to 33

Note: For this item, while the minimum number of respondents to the prompt is set to 5, characteristics of the question type (multiple choice: single option) allow for specific response to be displayed with fewer than 5 responses as long as there were 5 people within a subgroup answering the question.

Data Labels	Breakdown	
Two times a month	ALL	21%
Three times a month	ALL	14%
Four times a month	ALL	26%
More than four times a month	ALL	39%

% of Total # of Responses

No ability for students to select less than 2 times per month; notice low response numbers

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning your current, primary advisor?"

Campus: COL
College: Graduate Agriculture
Program: All
Breakdown: NO SELECTION
Number of Respondents: 69 to 91

Note: If there is no data in the chart below, the number of responses is too small to display.

Wording	Breakdown	
My advisor has expertise in the area I am researching or studying.	ALL	97%
My advisor's intellectual interests match mine.	ALL	93%
My advisor is able to effectively help me.	ALL	96%
My advisor provides me with information that helps me think about my future career.	ALL	87%
My advisor has time for me when I need help or advice.	ALL	98%
My advisor helps me get financial support.	ALL	94%
My advisor assists me in writing for presentations/publications.	ALL	95%
My advisor advises me about teaching.	ALL	80%
My advisor teaches me the details of good research practice.	ALL	93%
My advisor is interested in collaborating with me on research.	ALL	94%
My advisor helps me network with other researchers and scholars.	ALL	88%
My advisor respects me as an individual.	ALL	99%
My advisor considers my personal abilities, talents, and interests when advising me.	ALL	93%
My advisor communicates the importance of maintaining an appropriate work/life balance.	ALL	88%
My advisor emphasizes the importance of transforming creative ideas and innovations into practical solutions.	ALL	92%
My advisor encourages the expression of intellectual differences or disagreements.	ALL	93%
I am satisfied with the mentorship my advisor provides to me.	ALL	94%
My advisor has a reputation of being a good advisor.	ALL	93%

% Agree or Strongly agree
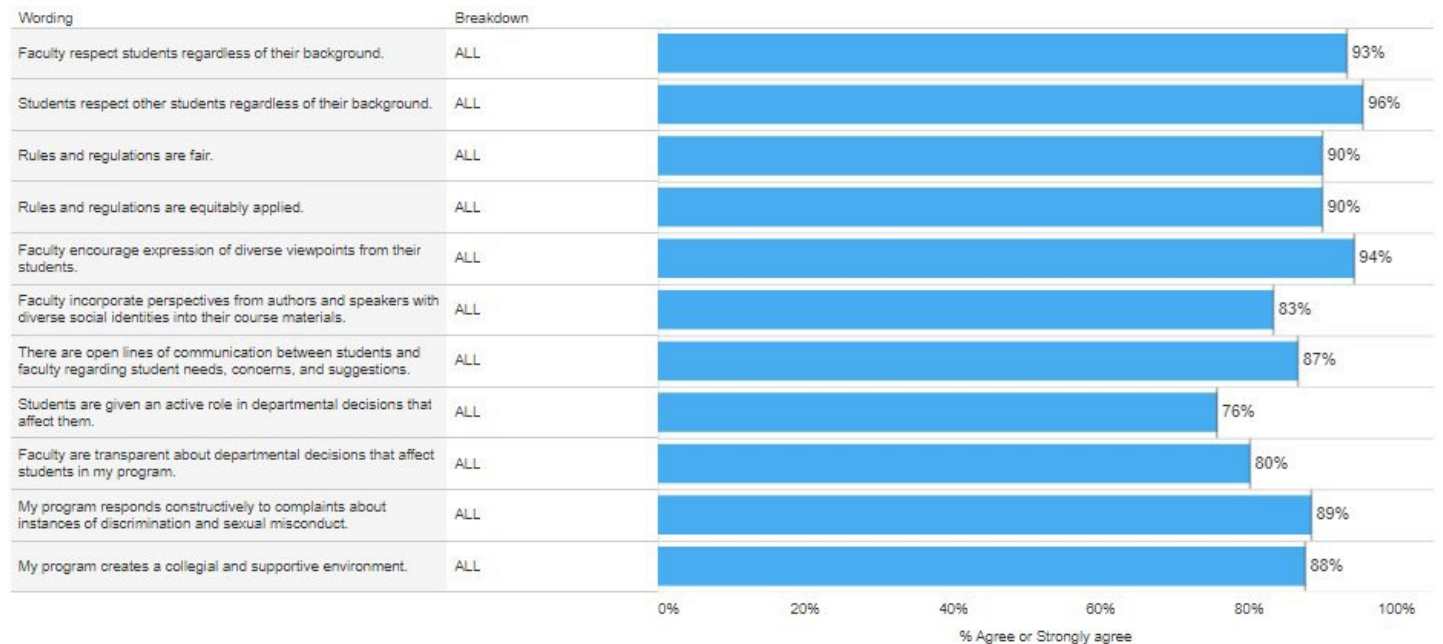
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Grad SERU Results

Overall these results seem good - so how to pinpoint what we were hearing outside of this survey?

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your current graduate/professional program?"

Campus: COL
College: Graduate Agriculture
Program: All
Breakdown: NO SELECTION
Number of Respondents: 87 to 91

Note: If there is no data in the chart below, the number of responses is too small to display.

Wording	Breakdown	% Agree or Strongly agree
Faculty respect students regardless of their background.	ALL	93%
Students respect other students regardless of their background.	ALL	96%
Rules and regulations are fair.	ALL	90%
Rules and regulations are equitably applied.	ALL	90%
Faculty encourage expression of diverse viewpoints from their students.	ALL	94%
Faculty incorporate perspectives from authors and speakers with diverse social identities into their course materials.	ALL	83%
There are open lines of communication between students and faculty regarding student needs, concerns, and suggestions.	ALL	87%
Students are given an active role in departmental decisions that affect them.	ALL	76%
Faculty are transparent about departmental decisions that affect students in my program.	ALL	80%
My program responds constructively to complaints about instances of discrimination and sexual misconduct.	ALL	89%
My program creates a collegial and supportive environment.	ALL	88%

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OSU Grad Student Ombuds Report (2023)

- "Students reported several challenges with their advisors, **including toxic behavior**, lack of timely feedback, insufficient exam guidance, and **non-constructive criticism**. They felt **disrespected and unsupported**, particularly regarding mental health issues and necessary accommodations.

- Conflicts often arose from heavy workloads and perceived hindrances to their research progress. Many students **feared retribution** if they raised concerns, leading some to seek advice from the GPS ombuds or consider formal complaints, sometimes waiting until after graduation to do so."

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Graduate Student Survey

- Purpose: Assess the quality of graduate student advising in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES)

- 23 Likert scale items

- 1 open-ended question

- Open from January 31, 2024 – March 1, 2024

- 152 completed responses (23% response rate)

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Faculty Survey

- Purpose: Assess the quality of graduate student advising in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES)

- 21 Likert scale items

- 8 multiple-choice questions

- 3 open-ended questions

- Open from April 22, 2024 – May 10, 2024

- 99 completed responses (30% response rate)

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Major Findings

Differences between groups (e.g., gender, race, campus)

I am comfortable sharing my professional goals with my advisor.

- Men graduate students felt more comfortable when compared with the overall mean ($p < 0.05$)

- Columbus students felt more comfortable than Wooster campus ($p < 0.05$)

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Major Findings

	Mean	SD
I feel that graduate students begin their program with the academic rigor they need to succeed.	3.37	1.08
I know how to direct international graduate students to appropriate resources (e.g., visa questions, work requirements).	3.08	1.20
I know the resources available for international graduate students.	3.03	1.11

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Major findings – Dept Differences

	CFAES	Dept
I am supportive of my advisee(s) taking time away from graduate work for occasionally outside activity (e.g., doctor's appointment, family emergency).	4.75	4.67
I provide a safe environment for my advisee(s).	4.68	4.67
I am able to meet with my advisee(s)in a timely manner.	4.67	4.73
I provide guidance to my advisee(s)on producing publications and presenting research.	4.63	4.80
I support professional development opportunities (e.g., involvement in professional associations, networking) for my advisee(s).	4.58	4.80
It is important to advise students based on their specific needs/wants.	4.54	4.67
I am supportive of my advisee(s) taking time to manage school-life balance.	4.50	4.53
My advisee(s)are comfortable sharing their professional goals with me.	4.47	4.67
I allow for flexibility for my advisee(s)' work/lab schedule (e.g., work from home, flexible hours).	4.45	4.13
My advisee(s) respect me.	4.34	4.40

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Differences Between Students and Faculty

	Mean
Faculty: It is important to advise students based on their specific needs/wants.	4.54
Student: I feel comfortable approaching my advisor when I need personal support (e.g., mental health, family emergency).	3.88

	Mean
Faculty: I provide clear expectations to my advisee(s).	4.32
Student: My advisor provides clear expectations.	3.78

	Mean
Faculty: I provide guidance to my advisee(s) on producing publications and presenting research.	4.63
Student: I feel my advisor provides guidance to produce publications and present research.	4.08

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Dissemination of Survey Results

- Meetings with departmental leadership and faculty

- Graduate Program Coordinators and Faculty Administrators

- Graduate students
  - Presented results to CFAES GSAC
  - Orientation

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	Mean	XX	Range
I know my advisor's expectations for taking time away from lab work.	3.88	3.29	3.29 – 4.83
Comfortable approaching my advisor when I need personal support (e.g., mental health, family emergency).	3.88	3.50	3.50 – 4.50
My advisor has helped me to integrate into the profession.	3.88	3.50	3.39 – 4.83
I am given timely feedback by my advisor on progress towards graduation.	3.86	3.57	3.22 – 4.50
My advisor provides clear expectations.	3.78	3.29	3.29 – 4.50
My department has provided me opportunities to serve the department or university in various capacities outside of teaching or research.	3.73	3.64	3.33 – 4.22
I am satisfied with the quality of advising I have received from my department.	3.64	3.07	3.07 – 4.13

	SD, D	SD, D, N	A, SA
I know my advisor's expectations for taking time away from lab work.	28.8	49.9	50.1
Comfortable approaching my advisor when I need personal support (e.g., mental health, family emergency).	28.5	49.9	50.1
My advisor has helped me to integrate into the profession.	21.4	57.1	42.9
I am given timely feedback by my advisor on progress towards graduation.	28.5	35.6	64.3
My advisor provides clear expectations.	28.6	42.9	57.2
My department has provided me opportunities to serve the department or university in various capacities outside of teaching or research.	14.2	35.6	64.4
I am satisfied with the quality of advising I have received from my department.	35.7	50.0	50.0

Targeted Response Plan

Survey Identified:
Misaligned expectations

We are:

- Disseminating results
- Developing Rights and Responsibilities documents for students and faculty

Survey identified:
Knowledge gaps for faculty

- Developing resources and workshops to target skills (i.e. resources for faculty to support international students)
- Encouraging further mentoring training
  - Ohio State Mentoring Initiative

Survey Identified:
Skill gaps for students

- Developing first-year series
  - Communication
  - Time management
  - Resilience and Mental Health
  - Career development
- Centralizing educational opportunities online

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Targeted Response Plan

We are:

Survey Identified:
Strain on Faculty Time

- Enhancing resources to streamline advising
  - Mentoring plans
  - Assessment
  - International scholars
- Sharing college and university resources
  - SLDS
  - DEI coaching

Survey identified:
Unclear consequences for bad behavior

- Speaking with college and departmental leadership so they understand their options
- Clarifying grievance procedures and consequences

23

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Graduate Student Professional Rights and Responsibilities (summary)

This document serves to outline expectations for graduate students within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. It was developed in 2024 by the CFAES Graduate Student Advisory Council in coordination with the CFAES Office for Research and Graduate Education. Full details can be found on the CFAES Graduate Education webpage: https://grad.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/

1. Responsibilities of Graduate Students

As a graduate student, you have several key responsibilities that are crucial for your academic and professional development. As a student, you are expected to meet the following standards:

- **Knowledge of Policies:** You are primarily responsible for knowing the rules and policies outlined in the Graduate School handbook and your Graduate Program handbook, as well as monitoring your progress throughout your degree. It is crucial to stay informed and compliant with institutional guidelines.
- **Academic Progress:** You should make satisfactory progress in your academic program. This includes meeting all program requirements, maintaining a good academic standing, and adhering to timelines for degree completion.
- **Professional Conduct:** You are expected to exhibit professionalism in all academic and research activities. This includes maintaining integrity, being respectful in interactions, and adhering to ethical standards in research and scholarship.
- **Respect for Diversity:** Embrace and respect the diversity of the academic community, including differences in ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives.
- **Communication:** You are expected to maintain open and timely communication with your advisor and other members of your academic committee. This includes regular updates on your progress, seeking feedback, and discussing any issues that may affect your academic journey.
- **Engagement:** Active participation in your academic community is essential. This includes attending seminars, workshops, and conferences, contributing to research projects, and engaging with peers and faculty. Take initiative in your academic and professional development. Seek out opportunities for learning, networking, and skill development.

2. Rights of Graduate Students

Graduate students are granted certain rights that protect their interests and ensure a

Student Rights and Responsibilities

- University of Colorado Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, 2010 – link

- Pennsylvania State University Graduate Student Bill of Rights, 2012 - link

- CFAES Graduate Student Advisory Council, 2024 - link

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Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

- University of Colorado, Boulder: Professional Rights and Responsibilities of Faculty Members and Roles and Professional Responsibilities of Academic Leaders, early 1980s (link)

- Pennsylvania State University Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, 1973 - link

- CFAES working on this

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What did we learn?

- Faculty think they are doing a better job than is perceived by the students
- Advising vs. Mentoring mindset
- Poor advising relationships can create a toxic culture. Environment also important
- Stakeholder groups and expectations vary
- Need for improved oversight
  - Who is responsible to resolve issues? More clearly defined levels of administrative authority
  - Promotion and tenure or faculty P status
  - Annual assessment processes
  - Two-way performance evaluations

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Faculty Reactions Varied

- Deflect
  - Validity of survey
  - There is nothing we can do
  - We are not trained to address mental health issues
  - Students lack preparation and work ethic
- Accept
  - We can do better
  - Champions for the students

Looking ahead

- Understand that a power dynamic (financial, academic, visa) exists but should never be exploited.

- Provide individualized advising without sacrificing standards.

- Acknowledge that student preparation and expectations can be issues.

- Regularly meet with and provide feedback to advisees.

- Appropriately address conflicts.

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Looking ahead

- Balancing critical feedback with encouragement
- Some advising philosophies are not appropriate
  - Sink or swim
  - Frustration/fear is good

- Most graduate students will not become faculty
- Mental health issues are more prevalent
- Faculty "badges of honor" can negatively impact graduate advising
  - International travel, service duties, invited lectures, etc.
  - Must make provisions for your absence

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Looking ahead

- New funding requirements and revamped training
- CITI RCR Training: Mentoring and Healthy Research Environments
- NSF Mentoring Requirements (PAPPG (Chapters VII.B.7 and VII.D.1.b[iv])
  - Mentoring Plans created by faculty (OSU specific templates)
  - Individual Development Plans created by trainee

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