

Advising Proposal for RLL Graduate Programs Spring 2021

This proposal is based on conversations held in fall 2020 and spring 2021 between DGS, faculty members and graduate students. It takes into account the results of the two mental health surveys done in fall 2018 and fall 2020, followed by conversations with Dr. Paul Barreira.

In spring 2020 the DGS and the graduate representatives sent brief surveys to RLL graduate students and faculty members asking specifically if they were in favor of establishing guidelines for advising meetings, and, if that was the case, how many meetings per term they would recommend for pre-generals and for post-generals. These surveys elicited a good rate of answers, and comments were often added, bringing various aspects of advising into focus.

From these conversations and surveys, it appears that a majority of students and faculty are in favor of establishing guidelines and a mandatory basis for advising meetings. This will help levelling the ground for cohorts coming from more and more diverse educational, cultural, and social backgrounds, and will facilitate establishing from the start a mutually productive frame for the advising relationship. Many faculty and students ask also for flexibility, and the recognition that advising is "highly individual and individualized" and that "each advising relationship is a universe in itself."

Mandatory Meetings

Pre-generals:

2 meetings per term

Post-Generals:

With the whole committee

1 prospectus meeting

1 chapter meeting for each chapter

With the main adviser:

1 meeting per term

All mandatory meetings should be at least 30 mn long.

Guidelines

The mandatory meetings are a bare minimum. They do not preclude more meetings or other forms of communication (emails for instance). They should include exchange about expectations on both sides, regarding the best channels of communication, how many meetings in the coming term or year, as well as subjects of interest and anxiety to be addressed. We don't require a formal "advising compact" but recommend that space be made for expression of wishes, needs, and readjustments when necessary. The advising relation should not be taken for granted and should remain negotiated all the way.

We recommend that the following topics (listed in alphabetical order) be addressed at the appropriate times:

- Anxieties
- Balancing teaching and research time
- Belonging
- Campus life
- Courses
- Committees (general examination, dissertation)
- Conferences
- Examinations (first year presentation, general examinations)
- Funding
- Job market
- Networking
- Publications
- Research abroad
- Resources
- Teaching
- Well-being

The main topic should still remain the intellectual and professional development of the doctoral candidates. Their interests, research and scholarship should be at the center of the advising relationship from the beginning to the end.

Scheduling meetings:

We are still not sure what is the best way to trigger and keep track of the scheduling. The graduate coordinator can organize the prospectus and chapter meetings with the dissertation committee, but cannot possibly organize all the meetings with the main adviser. One way could be for advisers to use the advising journal in "my harvard" to note at least that a meeting took place. Another way would be for students to keep a shared document with adviser and coordinator where they would note the date of meetings. In one way or the other, the coordinator should be able to check once or twice a year whether meetings are registered.