

UConn | THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate Student Mentoring

A Mentor's Guide

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Preface

This document outlines best practices for graduate faculty and departments at UConn. These best practices were developed by The Graduate School working with faculty, professional staff, and graduate students from across the university. The practices outlined below are intended as a baseline to graduate student mentoring. Departments and programs are encouraged to develop specific guidelines as it pertains to their programmatic needs.

Definition of a graduate student

A graduate student is a student enrolled in a graduate degree or certificate program. The program may be either full- or part-time, online and/or located at any campus. Graduate students have diverse backgrounds, life experiences, and goals. They also have many different expectations, needs, roles, and responsibilities including student, employee, scholar, educator, mentor, emerging and advancing professional, and responsible citizen. A graduate assistant is a graduate student who holds either a teaching assistantship or a research assistantship. About one-third of graduate students at UConn hold graduate assistantships.

Academic culture and environment at UConn

UConn aspires to provide a supportive and inclusive environment where students can grow through the exploration and articulation of ideas, regardless of their background. The [University's Code of Conduct](#) describes the responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students to one another and to their profession. Among other things the Code requires every member of the UConn community to:

- Promote a spirit of civility and collegiality while fostering open and constructive debate.
- Promote an environment in which all are welcome, regardless of their background.
- Respect the confidentiality of faculty, staff, student, and patient records.
- Perform their duties in a fair and ethical manner.
- Carry out their duties with professionalism.
- Adhere to the Connecticut Code of Ethics for Public Officials and State Employees.

Graduate student mentoring at UConn

Members of the UConn graduate faculty play a vital role in the success of graduate students at the University of Connecticut. Only members of the graduate faculty in a student's field of study can serve as major advisors for masters or doctoral students, and the advisory committee of every graduate student must contain at least two members of the graduate faculty. Graduate faculty provide intellectual guidance in support of graduate students' research, scholarly, creative, and pedagogical activities, and they are responsible for the ongoing evaluation of the graduate student's academic performance. As mentors and advisors, graduate faculty are expected to cultivate an inclusive and supportive environment for graduate students to develop the professional, research, teaching, and networking skills that are required for success in a variety of careers, both within and outside academia. Members of the graduate faculty are expected to advise and mentor graduate students as part of their regular duties.

In their role as mentors and advisors, members of the graduate faculty at the University of Connecticut are expected to:

- Support the progress of their students toward a degree,
- Provide guidance to their students on scholarly, research, clinical and creative practices and the ethics associated with such practices,
- Foster the professional and personal development of their students, including developing their skills in teaching and communication,
- Be aware of the graduate union contract and follow best practices in supervising graduate assistants,
- Promote self-care and well-being,
- Work with their departments to cultivate an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and heard, and
- Strengthen their mentoring skills.

The following sections outline practices towards supporting our graduate students' academic, career and personal goals.

Supporting the degree progress of their students:

- Collaborate with their colleagues to maintain an up-to-date graduate student handbook with clear guidelines on degree requirements and milestones.
- Clearly communicate their expectations of graduate students whom they advise by describing the requirements the student must meet, including coursework, research and creative tools, examinations, and written theses, dissertations, or other final evaluations.
- Meet with graduate student advisees at a frequency consistent with the student's needs to provide help, support, and constructive feedback on coursework, research, and the thesis/dissertation process.
- Conduct factual, specific performance reviews based on criteria understood by the faculty advisor and the student that are consistent with norms in the students' field of study and with requirements of the degree program and The Graduate School including expectations of time to degree.
- Support students' research or progress toward a degree by encouraging students to collaborate with or seek advice from colleagues even when the advisor may have personal animosities or intellectual differences with such colleagues.

Providing guidance on research practices:

- Ensure a safe, secure, and inclusive working environment.
- Provide supports to students in culturally sensitive ways that recognize student needs regardless of background or identity. Meet with graduate students they advise at a frequency consistent with the student's needs to provide help, support, and constructive feedback on coursework, research, and the thesis/dissertation process.
- Provide rigorous intellectual guidance on students' educational programs and on their research or creative projects.
- Respect students' research interests and goals and assist students in achieving them unless those research interests and goals change in ways that the faculty member no longer feels competent to advise them.
- Provide appropriate and timely guidelines for completion of research or creative projects.
- Work with graduate students as early as possible to determine authorship order or to

acknowledge authorship contributions in other ways in accordance with expectations in the students' field of study when research activities are expected to lead to publication.

- Create an environment of the highest ethical standards and act as role models for ethical behavior in all professional activities including standards associated with the responsible conduct of research.
- Promote a collaborative environment when serving on student committees.

Fostering the professional and career development of students:

- Assist graduate students in developing professionally relevant skills in accordance with expectations in their field of study and students' career goals.
- Encourage graduate students to pursue professional training programs, seminars, and courses that enhance their professional and personal growth and development.
- Encourage graduate students to participate in professional meetings or to display their work in public forums and exhibitions.
- Continue to support and advise graduate students after they have graduated.

Supervising graduate assistants:

- Assign tasks to graduate assistants that are consistent with the scope of their contractual obligations and the workload expectations associated with their appointment.
- Communicate clear expectations associated with assistantships and document these expectations in a supplemental description of duties before appointments begin. Adhere to all contractual requirements and university policies regarding graduate student employees.
- Recognize that the employment of international students in F-1 and J-1 visa status is strictly limited by immigration regulations and assist international students to stay within these limitations.
- Regularly evaluate graduate assistants and provide timely feedback on the performance of their assistantship duties.

Promoting self-care and well-being:

- Recognize that graduate student success depends on their individual health and wellness.
- Encourage graduate students to take advantage of resources that support a healthy lifestyle.
- Be aware of signs of stress in graduate students, especially during times and events that are most likely to be stressful and help them to find resources for managing stress and encourage them to use those resources.
- Help graduate students to establish an appropriate balance between work responsibilities and personal life by setting reasonable performance expectations in accordance with their field of study or as determined by certifying bodies/professional organizations associated with specific programs.
- Promote departmental and University policies that support a healthy balance between scholarship, study, and personal lives.

Building a sense of community and belonging among graduate students:

- Treat all students, faculty, and staff with dignity and respect.
- Treat students in culturally respectful ways.
- Be aware of and offer meaningful research and development experiences to all students. Ask, “Who is not getting opportunity? Who is not at the table?” Act fairly, impartially, and professionally towards graduate students, including behaving in ways that support University policy prohibiting discrimination and bullying.
- Do not exploit or demean students or behave in other ways that abuse the mentor-mentee relationship.
- Create an ethos of collegiality in the classroom, laboratory, clinic, or studio so that individual and collaborative learning takes place within a community of scholars.
- Be aware of and support students’ right to privacy and confidentiality.
- Support opportunities for networking and collaboration among students and facilitate social connections among them.

Strengthen your mentoring skills:

- Create a mechanism for obtaining anonymous feedback on your mentoring on a regular basis.
- Remain open to constructive feedback on how you can improve as a leader and mentor.
- Use the feedback received to reflect upon your mentoring and leadership skills to set goals for your own development. Share your goals with those you mentor.
- Be willing to share your own struggles and failures. Model a humble, always-learning, always professional attitude.
- See mentorship and leadership as a constant learning process. Engage in learning to grow your leadership and communication skills.
- Be aware of and participate in mentor training opportunities offered through the UConn graduate school, career center and CETL.
- Coach others with whom you work so that they can grow as mentors and leaders as well. Remember that how you mentor doesn't just impact your current group members. Many (if not most) students will go on to lead and mentor others, and they will emulate what they see you do.