

M.A. Program Graduate Advising Guidelines

Closely mentoring the graduate students is an essential factor of their successful progress through the M.A. program. This document presents departmental guidelines in view of implementing the best practices in the student-advisor relationship. A student's Academic Advisor will help them design a sound course of studies, navigate the program requirements, assess their progress toward the degree, resolve difficulties, and elaborate plans for the future. In addition, students should not hesitate to contact the M.A. Coordinator and/or the Graduate Program Director for advisement.

Regular contact between students and advisors is indispensable

- Both students and advisors should take a proactive role in ensuring that communication is established and maintained.
- They should agree on a schedule of meetings at the beginning of each semester.
- Advisee and Academic Advisor should meet a minimum of at least twice per semester.

Reports

- All advising relationships should involve a formal documentation of the meetings.
- The advisee writes a short summary of the meeting so as to record what has been discussed and agreed.
- The advisee submits this summary to their advisor.
- The Academic Advisor approves or adds comments, and uploads the report in their advising folder for the student.

The remainder of the present document spells out the respective roles and responsibilities of the advisee and Academic Advisor, and specifies the steps to be taken at the different stages in the program. The intention is to ensure that the expectations of all parties are established clearly at the outset and are followed up throughout the student's time in the program.

Student's Role

The department expects that advisees will:

- Take responsibility for their research activity and learning.
- Become familiar with the program requirements and milestones, and with departmental and university regulations and policies.
- Request in due time an Academic Advisor in case they have not been assigned one.
- Contact their advisors as soon as they know them, and keep in touch regularly for the whole time of the advising relationship.
- Expect an answer only within work days and hours.
- Attend the schedule of meetings established at the beginning of the semester, and discuss progress and objectives with the Academic Advisor regularly.

- Notify their advisor when they cannot come to a scheduled meeting, and reschedule it.
- Send written work well ahead of the meeting so that the advisor has sufficient time to read it.
- Allow for a reasonable amount of time for getting recommendation letters, feedback on documents, etc.
- Contribute a summary of the meetings.
- Carefully consider the advice they receive and make every effort to implement it.
- Strive to achieve in a timely manner the course assignments, the goals and milestones defined in the graduate studies handbook, and the particular goals agreed upon with the advisor.
- Adapt their research to the resources the department can offer and avoid projects on topics for which they cannot be supervised competently.
- Report in a timely fashion any difficulty that may arise, to their Academic Advisor, the Graduate Program Director, or the Chair.
- Contribute to the program community, for example by attending other students' presentations, providing feedback and generally being supportive of other students' research activities and efforts.

Academic Advisor's Role

In all advising relationships, Academic Advisors will:

- Make themselves available at the request of the advisee, during work periods and within reasonable limits; expect similarly a response of the advisee during work days and hours.
- Get in touch with their advisee and make sure that regular communication is maintained.
- Establish a schedule of the meetings at the beginning of each semester.
- Check the meeting reports sent by the student and upload them in the Canvas advising folder.
- Inform the advisee and the Graduate Program Director about any extended period of absence.
- Check whether the student is falling behind regarding coursework and grades, and review the student's progress against the objectives of the program.
- Check whether the advisee is aware of the university and departmental regulations and policies, regarding such topics as degree requirements, academic integrity, and teaching responsibilities, when applicable.
- Pay special attention to international students, who have stringent time limits because of their visa (the advisor should be familiar with the requirements implemented by the Office of International Students and Scholars), and who might struggle with language or cultural differences. See below for further information regarding international students.
- Provide guidance regarding research methodologies and resources, and best practice in studying and learning.

- Suggest any useful additional resources (e.g., seminars, workshops, and conferences in or outside the department, Career Center, counseling, etc.)
- Motivate the student.
- Check on the student's general well-being.
- Alert the Graduate Program Director or the Chair as soon as an academic problem is detected, a worry arises, or when the advisee does not attend the advising meetings.
- Alert the relevant BC services when non-academic problems are detected (such as psychological crisis, harassment, sexual assault).
- Advise the student on which courses to take.
- Guide the advisee in the preparation of the M.A. Qualifying Paper and selection of a Qualifying Paper Mentor.
- Discuss with the advisee what personal, academic and professional skills the student needs to develop in order to complete his/her studies and prepare a future career.
- Guide the advisee in the preparation of applications to doctoral programs, especially for:
 - selection of programs to which to apply
 - preparation of cover letters, statements of purpose, and/ or CV
 - the writing sample and possible use of the Qualifying Paper
 - obtaining recommendation letters
- Guide, to the extent of their competence, the student in the preparation of applications to other degree programs or to professional positions.

Immigration Regulations and Policies for International Students

Contact Information

Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS)
 Hovey House
 258 Hammond Street
 617-552-8005
 www.bc.edu/oiss
 Hours: Mon–Fri, 9:00–4:00 p.m.

OISS Advisor for Philosophy

Susan Shea, Associate Director OISS, sheasc@bc.edu

Walk-in advising hours

Please check their website

Note on visa type:

The following section of the guide pertains to students on F-1 or J-1 student visas. Very occasionally, a student may be studying as dependent of spouse working in the U.S. or with another visa type. Please consult with OISS in that case.

Timeline to complete the degree

Immigration regulations state that students are required to be making “normal progress towards the degree” and finish in that time frame. OISS issues the immigration form (called an I-20 for F-1 student and a DS-2019 for J-1 students) for the length of time determined to be the normal length of study by the department and the GSAS Dean’s Office. This is how long students may remain in the U.S. to finish their degree in most cases.

- M.A. Degree: Two Years, from August of the first year to May of the following academic year, including the Comprehensive Exam or Qualifying Paper. M.A. students are generally expected to take 5 courses each year for a total of 10 courses. They will therefore have two semesters with only 6 credits (see full-time requirement, below).
- Ph.D.: between 5 years and 8 years.
- Note: Immigration extensions cannot be given for incompletes or failures. It is important that students and their advisors take action on any failure or incomplete prior to the end of the allowed period.

Full-time study requirement

- Students on student visas are required to be considered full-time students during the academic semesters. OISS reports their full-time status to the U.S. Government every semester. Students must register every semester of their allowed period.
- Any graduate student registered for under nine credits in a semester will be flagged as less than full-time in the University System. Those students will receive an email from OISS and will be asked to follow up with their department. (n.b., for the Ph.D. program exception to this rule, see below).
- The University System will not let students drop below full-time status or register less than full-time without OISS permission to Student Services. This is a safety in place to ensure students stay in immigration compliance. Please contact OISS for any help registering a student for less than full-time.
 - M.A. students: Since M.A. students have some semesters with six credits only but are approved as full-time by the department (given that they have, for instance, to write a qualifying paper in addition), OISS will need a brief email verification from the department stating that the student is considered full time by department with six credits. If the student has trouble registering for less than nine credits in the system, please contact OISS.
 - Ph.D. Students: Ph.D. students with assistantships will automatically be classified as full-time in the University System. Doctoral Continuation also classifies the student as full-time. However, there are sometimes glitches in the system. If this is the case, contact OISS and they will contact Student Services. Ph.D. students are expected to be in contact with their Academic Advisor about the dissertation progress in order to maintain their immigration status.

Other Immigration Approved Reasons for a Reduced Course Load (must be approved by OISS):

- Academic Difficulties (typically for the first semester only), such as initial difficulties with the English language; unfamiliarity with American Teaching Methods;

improper course placement. This will require documentation from the department for justification.

- Documented illness or medical condition up to 12 months total during the degree.
- Students are allowed to be less than full-time in their last semester if they are taking their last required class to finish. No documentation is needed.

Additional Resources for Advisors

Student Distress

- If you have concerns regarding the psychological or physical well-being of a student, contact the Student Outreach and Support Team, at 617-552-3470 or through the online Student of Concern Reporting Form.
- If you have an urgent concern after 5:00 p.m. or on weekends or holidays, contact BC Police Department at 617-552-4440. They will be able to access appropriate assistance for you.
- If the situation is an emergency (immediate threat to safety), call directly BCPD at 911.
- If a student is open to receiving psychological help, direct the student to University Counseling Services, Gasson Hall 001. Phone: 617-552-3310 (same day consultation possible).

Non-emergency questions

Caroline Davis, Associate Dean of Students
caroline.davis.2@bc.edu
617-552-3470

Sexual misconduct

- If you have knowledge of a sexual misconduct case, by law (Title IX) you must report it to TitleIXCoordinator@bc.edu, 617-552-3334. You should tell the student who discloses the case that you are under legal obligation to report it. Students should also be encouraged, but not pressured, to utilize university resources such as the Sexual Assault Network hotline, BC Police, or University Counseling services. It is up to the student to pursue these options, but support for the student for doing so can be helpful.

Discriminatory Harassment

- The following are considered discriminatory harassment:
 - Conduct that, by reference to the race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, or any other legally protected status of a member or members of the University community, intentionally or recklessly abuses, mocks, or disparages a person or persons so as to affect their educational performance or living or working environment at Boston College.
 - Offensive sexual behavior whenever toleration of such conduct or rejection of it is the basis for a personnel or academic decision affecting an individual;

or such conduct has the purpose or effect of creating a hostile or stressful living, learning, or working environment. Examples of behavior that may constitute sexual harassment include sexual advances, any form of retaliation or threat of retaliation against an individual who rejects such advances, sexual epithets, jokes, or comments, comment or inquiry about an individual's body or sexual experiences, unwelcome leering, whistling, brushing against the body, sexual gestures, and displaying sexually suggestive images. A full description of BC policy may be found online.

- If you witness a hate crime or a bias-related incident, you should report it. Contact BC Police Department at 617-552-4440.
- If a hate crime or a bias-related incident is reported to you, assist the student to identify the most appropriate path. The Hate Crimes and Bias-Related Incidents Protocol may be found online.

Privacy Policy

- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants four specific rights to a postsecondary student:
 - to see the records that the institution is keeping on the student.
 - to seek amendment to those records and in certain cases append a statement to the record.
 - to withhold the disclosure of a student's educational records except for situations involving legitimate educational interest or as may be required by law.
 - to file a complaint with the FERPA Office in Washington.
- A full presentation of FERPA may be found online.
- A University employee has a legitimate educational interest in access to information when that information is appropriate for use in connection with performing a task that is related to the student's education (which is your case).
- Responsibilities under FERPA:
 - As a general principle, you may not disclose student information in oral, written, or electronic form to anyone except BC staff and faculty who need the information to perform their university functions and have a legitimate educational interest.
 - You have a legal responsibility to protect the privacy of the student educational records in your possession, which are classified as confidential information under BC's Data Security Policy. You may not access educational records for personal reasons.
 - You may not release lists or files with student information to any third party outside your college or departmental unit.
 - Student information stored in an electronic format must be secure and available only to those entitled to access that information. Student information should not be stored on laptops or home computers unless it is encrypted. Personal digital assistants used to read confidential data should be password protected.

- Student information in paper format must be shredded before disposal or placed in a locked bin for disposal.