

UC San Diego Political Science Mentoring Guidelines

This document has been developed and written by the 2024-2025 Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with staff, graduate students, and faculty. It offers a set of mentoring best practices based on concerns and issues identified during the consultation process. These best practices are written first and foremost with the principal faculty advisor-graduate student advisee relationship in mind, but can apply to anyone in an academic mentorship role, including graduate student mentors participating in the Political Science Research Apprenticeship Program or any faculty or student acting as an informal mentor.

The issues identified include:

- Choosing the right advisor and changing advisors
- Setting two-sided expectations about the content, frequency, and mode of mentorship
- Dealing with an unresponsive advisor

A detailed description of the process involved and feedback received in developing this document is provided [here](#).

Choosing the right advisor, changing advisors

The DGS assigns one to two mentors to each incoming student. To do so, the DGS asks each student in the spring before they matriculate, to list three to four faculty members with whom they would like to work. The DGS then reaches out to the listed faculty to establish a match that works for both parties. Admitted students are encouraged to do some research about the department faculty ahead of time. Students can learn [more](#) about how to choose an academic advisor from one of our own faculty members, Prof. Noble.

The department has institutionalized mechanisms to provide students the opportunity to re-affirm or change a student's advisor three times throughout the program.

1. Before the start of year 2, a student must identify a second-year comprehensive exam advisor. This must be confirmed via a form due to the graduate student coordinator by the Friday of the 9th week of Spring quarter of year 1.
2. Before the start of year 3, a student must identify a third-year prospectus advisor. This must be confirmed via a form due to the graduate student coordinator by the end of Spring quarter of year 2.
3. Finally, at least 6 weeks before their prospectus defense, a student must identify their dissertation committee and email its members' names to the graduate student coordinator so they can submit it for approval by GEPA.

Additionally, a student may change their advisor at any time outside these institutionalized deadlines. To do so, a student must fill out this [form](#), which is also linked on our department

website [here](#) and [here](#). The form asks the student to confirm that they have discussed the change with their former and new advisors.

Setting expectations about the content, frequency, and mode of mentorship

To ensure the mentor-mentee relationship is as fruitful as possible, mentors are advised to schedule regular meetings with each advisee, with the minimum frequency listed below.

- Before a student advances to candidacy, mentors should at minimum meet once a quarter with their mentees. Before candidacy, students have multiple deadlines and requirements they must meet. By meeting at least once a quarter to check in on these requirements, mentors are offering regular opportunities to ensure their students are accountable and to help them achieve their deadlines.
- After a student advances to candidacy, mentors should at minimum meet twice a year with their mentees. At the beginning of each year, mentors can check in with their mentees about their goals for the year; at the end of each year, mentors and mentees can evaluate which goals were met and which were not, and adjust plans accordingly.

Mentors are also advised to explicitly address the following topics in their communications with their advisees:

- Expectations about frequency and mode of meetings. Some mentors may need to meet remotely; others prefer to meet in person in one-on-one meetings. Still others hold regular lab meetings with their mentees as a group. These expectations should be communicated to mentees.
- Expectations about frequency and mode of communication. Some mentors are active on email. Others prefer to use Slack. Still others are not active digital communicators, but work better with regular in-person sign-ups. These preferences should be communicated to mentees.
- Expectations about the content of feedback on:
 - The student's dissertation. Some mentors provide detailed written feedback on all the written work submitted by the student. Others provide feedback on only a set number of iterations. Still others prefer that the student present their work orally for spontaneous feedback. Many variations exist; mentors and mentees should discuss what works best for them.
 - The student's other research. Some mentors provide feedback on all the student's research, while others focus only on the dissertation. This should be explicitly communicated to mentees.
 - The student's career goals and options. Some mentors offer professional development advice, while others may feel less comfortable engaging on this topic. Mentors should communicate about what topics they are happy to discuss, and which topics are off-limits.
- Expectations about mentee responsiveness and preparedness. Some mentors expect their advisees to approach each meeting with a clear set of objectives, deliverables, and/or requests. Others prefer a less structured approach to meetings. The mentor's expectations of their mentees should be communicated as early and clearly as possible.

We note that there currently exists an institutionalized method of addressing the above best practices: students should enroll in POLI298 (pre-candidacy) or POLI299 (post-candidacy) with their mentor(s). These classes now have official syllabi, where these expectations should be addressed.

Finally, mentors should familiarize themselves with [department rules and guidelines](#). For ease of access, year-by-year expectations and deadlines are summarized below:

Year	Expectations	Deadlines
1	Complete 9 courses, including the 4 core classes (203A, 203B, 204A, 204B) Maintain GPA of 3.3 or better Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence	Identify comp exam advisor in form due to GSC by Friday of 9th week of Spring quarter.
2	Complete 9 courses 15 of your 18 courses over years 1 and 2 should be in POLI Finish field requirements Maintain GPA of 3.3 or better Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence Stand for comprehensive exam	Comprehensive exam deadlines are communicated by GSC throughout the year. If a student fails their first attempt, they can try again once, must resubmit by September 1, and pass before Fall quarter of year 3. Identify prospectus advisor in form due to GSC by end of Spring quarter.
3	Make progress on dissertation prospectus Form prospectus committee Defend prospectus Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence	October 15: submit form to GSC identifying dissertation topic. Int'l students must pass to candidacy by end of year 3 to avoid paying NRST starting in year 4
4	Make progress on dissertation prospectus Form prospectus committee Defend prospectus Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence	Pass to candidacy by end of year 4
5	Write dissertation Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence Defend dissertation	End of guaranteed funding by end of year 5
6+	Write dissertation Enroll in first field workshop if in-residence Defend dissertation	

Dealing with an unresponsive advisor

An anonymous survey of our graduate students was fielded in February 2025. The response rate was 64%, with less-than-majority representation only for years 1 and 6+ (33% each). According to this survey, a plurality of students (40%) meet every other week, and fewer than 10% meet less than once a quarter. 70% of respondents are satisfied with the frequency of meetings, and 70% of respondents are extremely satisfied with their advisor's responsiveness to their requests for feedback and meetings. Still, 10% of respondents are somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with their advisors' responsiveness. Possible solutions to address this include:

- Offering students an opportunity to provide feedback about their mentor at the end of each academic year, to be communicated anonymously or not (per the student's choice) to the DGS and Chair and to be included in the mentor's promotion material
- Conducting an annual survey of graduate student satisfaction with mentoring (as was done for this document) and reporting results to the faculty to raise awareness and reaffirm mentorship norms
- Communicating to students that the DGS and Chair are available to hear their grievances and discuss possible solutions