

Guidelines for both Graduate Students and their Advisors
in the
Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies
at the
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Updated August 24, 2020

The Nelson Institute's Environment and Resources (E&R) program requires a research thesis/dissertation of all M.S. and Ph.D. students. For any graduate research work, the student-advisor relationship plays a large role in student success.

The Nelson Institute has unique characteristics affecting graduate advising. Nelson Institute faculty advisors are drawn from over 30 departments on campus, offering our graduate students a wide range of potential academic and research experiences. Each student can connect with an advisor who fits their learning goals and work style, and can engage additional faculty expertise through their thesis committee or as co-advisors.

This interdisciplinary richness is a strength which might also lead to some challenges. Some advisors may not have had experience working with interdisciplinary students, and may bring different departmental cultures and disciplinary norms to bear on the advising relationship. This may increase the risk of mismatch in expectations, especially around funding, accountability, authorship, and the differing roles of students within a research group. These characteristics of interdisciplinary programs may compound recognized challenges in graduate advising such as advisor feedback on student work, disagreement among the committee members, authorship on publications, rate of student progress, appropriate boundaries for personal relationships, work environment, and sexual harassment¹. Students and advisors may wish to review available national resources such as the National Academy of Science's "[On Being a Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research](#)."²

Here we set forward the expectations and norms for Nelson Institute graduate advising. By ensuring that both students and advisors understand the basic tenets of graduate advising within the Nelson Institute, all members of the community have a basis for building successful and productive advising relationships.

¹ <http://chronicle.com/article/Dealing-With-a-Difficult/64035/>

² http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=12192

For Students

- * **Communication is key.** If you feel you are unable to have frank and helpful conversations with an advisor on subjects related to your program and your prospects after graduation, you should probably consider changing advisors. You have a right to do this, though you should be respectful and courteous in the process.
- * **Take responsibility for your program.** Your advisor is expected to be a supportive mentor. Part of that should include being aware of your progress, encouraging you when things are going well, and expressing concerns if problems are perceived. However, you have primary responsibility for getting through your program. Many significant problems will not be apparent to an advisor, and it is your responsibility to come to them (or to someone) with your concerns.
- * **Do not expect your advisor to know the rules or to be aware of or be sensitive to deadlines.** This recognition is especially important if your advisor has not advised many E&R students in the past. You are responsible for scheduling meetings with your advisor, and for keeping track of deadlines and requirements. You can find these from Jim Miller in the Academic Programs Office (70 Science Hall) as well as from the following links.
For MS: <https://nelson.wisc.edu/graduate/environment-and-resources/requirements-and-forms-ms.php>
For PhD: <https://nelson.wisc.edu/graduate/environment-and-resources/requirements-and-forms-phd.php>
Dates & Deadlines: <https://registrar.wisc.edu/dates/>
- * **Be aware of the major milestones for your degrees and the associated requirements.** Also note that for Ph.D. students, the nature of the qualifying and preliminary exams is not fixed by the E&R program. The structure of these exams is specified by the student's advisor and dissertation committee.
- * **Lay out, with your advisor, a plan and a schedule for your progress through the program,** to be revised as appropriate. This is always important, but it becomes crucial as you approach the final stages of your program. One reason is that the final stages require coordination with your committee. Make sure you have realistic self-imposed deadlines, and your advisor and committee members agree to your proposed schedule for reviews of and feedback on your thesis/dissertation. Recognize the fact that faculty have many responsibilities, so please provide adequate time for their responses. You may benefit from using the Graduate School's process for developing an Individual Development Plan (<http://grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp>). If you are funded through a grant from the National Institutes of Health, you are required to develop an IDP.
- * **YOU are responsible for keeping your committee members informed as to your progress.**

* **Ask questions**, and consider the work relationship early in the research and grad school process. Recognize that **advisors will have different expectations for your working relationship**. Different academic cultures have different norms about graduate student independence, authorship of work, and financial support for graduate students. Some advisors may provide written agreements about aspects of the advising relationship. Make sure you understand all the tenets, whether expressed in written or oral form. Ask your advisor about research and teaching opportunities if you want to acquire/practice those skills. Sometimes they have data on which you can hone your statistical, analytical, and written skill sets.

* **Talk with advisors about the expectations for funding**, both prior to enrolling, and throughout the graduate process. Students should understand the connections between funding and the nature of their work. In general, the more independent you wish to be with your research the less likely it will be that an advisor will be able to provide funding for you. Some fellowships provide support for independent research, but even in these cases your success will require the mentorship and engagement of your advisor. Some advisors expect that a student will work on a project of the student's own choosing, whereas other advisors expect that a student will work on a research activity that is already underway, or on a research project designed and managed by the advisor.

* **Some advisors may expect research contributions or professional activities beyond your thesis or formal coursework**. For example, you may be expected to attend the advisor's lab meetings, to assist in organizing visits by visiting scholars, or to write parts of papers for publication. If you feel these expectations are unreasonable, or that they interfere with your education, discuss your concerns first with your advisor. If you are unable to do this, or if the outcome is not satisfactory to you, you may consult with your committee members, graduate student peers/representatives, or program staff in the Nelson Institute Academic Programs Office.

* All students have **the right to work in a safe environment**. If you feel uncomfortable with your work environment, the University and Graduate School provide information online <https://grad.wisc.edu/current-students/>, and for your particular case talk with your advisor, committee members, advising staff, graduate student peers/representatives, leadership in the Nelson Institute including the Welcoming and Inclusive Nelson (WIN) committee, or UW-Madison deans (contacts below).

* Talking with someone is the first step if you feel your academic or personal rights have been violated, or you have been sexually harassed. Even if you simply feel uncomfortable, our staff and trained faculty can help you think about next steps.

* **If you feel your professional relationship with your advisor has been compromised**, regardless of the type of disagreement or negative interaction, **the Nelson Institute will work with you to find an alternate advisor**.

Contact points for students:

Nelson Institute

Anna Gade, Associate Dean for Research and Education

Contact information: 608-263-5839; amgade@wisc.edu

Jim Miller, Senior Student Services Coordinator

Contact information: 608-263-4373; jemiller@wisc.edu

Asli Gocmen, Co-Chair of the Welcoming and Inclusive Nelson (WIN) committee

Contact information: 608-265-0789; gocmen@wisc.edu

Kelly Rupp, Co-Chair of the Welcoming and Inclusive Nelson (WIN) committee

Contact information: 608-890-0330; kelly.rupp@wisc.edu

Colleen Godfriaux, Assistant Dean for Administration

Contact information: 608-262-6435; clgodfriaux@wisc.edu

Chris Uhler, Payroll and Benefits Specialist

Contact information: 608-263-1796; uhler@wisc.edu

UW-Madison Dean of Students Office

Kathy Kruse, Assistant Dean

Contact information: 608-263-5700; kathy.kruse@wisc.edu

Elaine Goetz, Graduate Student Assistance Specialist

Contact information: 608-263-5700; egoetz2@wisc.edu

<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/student-assistance/>

UW-Madison Graduate School

Parmesh Ramanathan, Associate Dean

Contact information: 608-263-0557; parmesh.ramanathan@wisc.edu

Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment/Stalking/Dating and Domestic Violence

If you feel you or someone you know is a victim of one of these, or you just have questions, contact the following resources.

Lauren Hasselbacher, Title IX Coordinator

Contact information: 608-890-3788; lauren.hasselbacher@wisc.edu

<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/student-information/>

<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/report-an-issue/sexual-assault-dating-and-domestic-violence/>

<https://compliance.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/102/2018/11/Campus-Resource-Guide.pdf>

<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/survivor-services/campus-community-resources-for-victims/>

You may also talk to any trusted staff or faculty member on campus if you feel they can help you deal with these issues.

Discrimination/Harassment/Retaliation

If you feel you are a victim of this, or you just have questions, contact the following resources.

Letissa Reid, Equal Opportunity Investigations Administrator

Contact information: 608-262-3254; letissa.reid@wisc.edu

<https://compliance.wisc.edu/eo-complaint/>

Bias/Hate

If you feel you are a victim of this, or you just have questions, contact the following resources.

UW-Madison Dean of Students Office

Contact information: 608-263-5700; dean@studentlife.wisc.edu

<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/report-an-issue/bias-or-hate-reporting/>

Hostile and Intimidating Behavior/Bullying

If you feel you are a victim of this, or you just have questions, contact the following resources.

UW-Madison Dean of Students Office

Contact information: 608-263-5700; dean@studentlife.wisc.edu

<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>

Counseling/Psychological Health

If you seek personal counseling, contact University Health Services Counseling and Consultation.

Contact information: 608-265-5600; <https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/>

If it is an urgent mental health issue, contact their 24-hour crisis line.

Contact information: 608-265-5600 (option 9).

If it is an emergency, then dial 911.

Research Misconduct/Ethics

For concerns about research misconduct, contact the following resources.

Brian Fox, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education

Contact information: 608-262-1044; RIO@research.wisc.edu

<https://research.wisc.edu/kb-article/?id=34484>

Grade Issues

Contact the instructor if there are grade discrepancies. If there are more issues, contact the E&R program chairperson.

Sara Hotchkiss, E&R Program Chairperson

Contact information: 608-265-6751 or 608-263-4076; shotchkiss@wisc.edu

Funding/Financial Aid

Talk to your advisor first about possible funding they may have available. If funding is not available through your advisor and you are still searching, go to <https://grad.wisc.edu/funding/> to learn about other possible ways you might obtain it.

GradConnections Weekly is also a great resource. It is a weekly newsletter emailed out to all graduate students which often times provides available funding opportunities.

For Advisors

* Prior to accepting the responsibility of advising a Nelson Institute graduate student, **clarify your expectations and standard advising processes with the prospective student.** Written guidelines, informal emails, and/or candid discussions can all work to ensure that a prospect understands your expectations before joining your research group or student cohort.

* **Talk with prospective graduate students about funding opportunities**, both prior to accepting a prospect, and throughout the graduate process. Although **advisors are not responsible for providing students with funded assistantships**, you should be aware of your advisee's funding status and share information on funding opportunities. Provide timely notification of changes, particularly unexpected funding losses that will affect your ability to possibly support a student.

* **Act in the best interest of your advisee. Be transparent and proactive** about your expectations.

- **Meet and communicate with them on a regular basis** to discuss courses, research, timelines, deadlines, professional development, and employment.
- **You are expected to provide timely and substantive feedback** on research design, methods, literature reviews, and thesis/dissertation drafts along with a reasonable timeline for each.
- **Talk and be clear about policies regarding authorship** with your student.
- **Discuss your expectations** for meetings, communication, feedback, timelines, deadlines, and authorship early in the advisor-advisee arrangement.
- **Expect to help your student with their job search** by talking about their options. **Be prepared to write them letters of recommendation and to advocate for them** in their quest for employment.

* **If you expect advisees to attend events or contribute work products beyond the graduate thesis** or specifically paid activities (like a TA or PA), **these should be clearly discussed and explained.** The student should know how their contribution will be recognized, and how this activity supports their broader educational or research goals.

* **For PhD students, advisors are responsible for administering the qualifying exam, the preliminary exam, and the final dissertation defense.** The format and implementation of the qualifying exam and preliminary exam are at the advisor's discretion, and Jim Miller in the Nelson Institute's Academic Programs Office can provide norms and guidelines to support your leadership of the PhD committee.

<https://nelson.wisc.edu/graduate/environment-and-resources/requirements-and-forms-phd.php>

<https://nelson.wisc.edu/graduate/environment-and-resources/defense-guidelines.php>

*** For MS students, advisors are responsible for administering a final thesis defense.**

Advisors are strongly encouraged to conduct an initial review of the thesis topic or proposal review with the student and entire thesis committee. This could simply be performed at the time of the student's required program certification meeting.

https://nelson.wisc.edu/docs/er_ms_cert.doc

<https://nelson.wisc.edu/graduate/environment-and-resources/defense-guidelines.php>

*** You are responsible for creating a safe work environment for your student advisees.**

The advisor should keep in mind professional ethics and responsibility in both work and informal engagement. Avoid any actions or discourse of a personal nature that are inappropriate to a professional relationship. As the overseer of a group of students, you should be mindful of interactions within your group as well.

*** All advisors should be aware of UW-Madison sexual harassment policies and definitions, and keep in mind that even consensual romantic or sexual relationships present a conflict of interest when a student-advisor power differential is involved³.**

Advisors are expected to read <https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/consensual-relationships/>.

The following section is from the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents web site under Regent Policies: Consensual Relationships.

It is the policy of the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents that consensual relationships that might be appropriate in other circumstances are not appropriate when they occur between (1) an employee of the university and a student over whom the employee has or potentially will have supervisory, advisory, evaluative, or other authority or influence, or (2) an employee of the university and another employee over whom the employee has or potentially will have supervisory, advisory, evaluative, or other authority or influence. Even where negative consequences to the participants do not result, such relationships create an environment charged with potential or perceived conflicts of interest and possible use of academic or supervisory leverage to maintain or promote the relationship. Romantic or sexual relationships that the parties may view as consensual may still raise questions of favoritism, as well as of an exploitative abuse of trust and power.

*** You should expect intellectual engagement and professional respect from your student, and you should provide intellectual support, academic mentorship, and a professional work environment.** Resources within the Nelson Institute and across campus (contacts below) can help you deal with problems that arise in graduate advising. In conforming to the above principles, do not sacrifice professionally appropriate insistence on rigor and high academic standards. While each advisor-advisee arrangement is unique, the practice of frequent, clear, and open communication is crucial.

³ <http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/governance/legislation/Pages300-399.htm#303>

Contact points for faculty:

Nelson Institute

Anna Gade, Associate Dean for Research and Education

Contact information: 608-263-5839; amgade@wisc.edu

Jim Miller, Senior Student Services Coordinator

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Chris Uhler, Payroll and Benefits Specialist

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Kathy Kruse, Assistant Dean

Contact information: 608-263-5700; kathy.kruse@wisc.edu

Elaine Goetz, Graduate Student Assistance Specialist

Contact information: 608-263-5700; egoetz2@wisc.edu

<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/facultystaff-resources/>

UW-Madison Graduate School

Parmesh Ramanathan, Associate Dean

Contact information: 608-263-0557; parmesh.ramanathan@wisc.edu

Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment/Stalking/Dating and Domestic Violence

If you know a student is a victim of one of these, or you just have questions, contact the following resources.

Lauren Hasselbacher, Title IX Coordinator

Contact information: 608-890-3788; lauren.hasselbacher@wisc.edu

<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/student-information/>

<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/report-an-issue/sexual-assault-dating-and-domestic-violence/>

<https://compliance.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/102/2018/11/Campus-Resource-Guide.pdf>

<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/survivor-services/campus-community-resources-for-victims/>

Counseling/Psychological Health

If there is a student of concern, contact the Dean of Students Office.

Contact information: 608-263-5700; dean@studentlife.wisc.edu
<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/facultystaff-resources/>

If you sense there is an urgent mental health issue with a student, contact the University Health Services' 24-hour crisis line.

Contact information: 608-265-5600 (option 9).

If it is an emergency, then dial 911.

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<https://research.wisc.edu/kb-article/?id=34484>