Graduate Program Advisors

Overview

When faculty advisors take a role in a graduate student's academic development, it creates a culture of support and a built-in mentorship network for students. Students often rely on their major professor to be their main academic resource, but graduate programs can provide a supportive role as well. The Council of Graduate Schools encourages graduate programs to create a sense of "collective responsibility" for a graduate student's success in the program (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). The 2020 report from the MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education included **networked advising** as one of their nine recommendations. Networked advising can "increase the range of professional possibilities for graduate students, reduce stress caused by reliance on single mentors and provide a check on faculty abuses of power"(Modern Language Association, 2020, p. 2). Rather than a mentoring model of a "comprehensive 'guru' mentor" who advises a graduate student on every aspect of their academic, personal, or professional development, graduate programs should consider offering more comprehensive mentoring from multiple faculty advisors (Montgomery, 2017). At UC Davis, Faculty Graduate Advisors can be a crucial hub for networked advising.

Graduate Program Advising

Faculty advisors were paired with first-year students and faculty consulted with students on the mechanics of the program, such as choosing courses and preparing for major milestones. The program also asked faculty advisors to recommend to first-year graduate students a second faculty mentor to consult with on research plans during the first quarter.

Student Feedback

After one quarter, Graduate Studies surveyed the first-year graduate students about the new advising structure. Some first-year graduate students had met with an advisor once during the quarter, but several had not yet met with their advisor yet. Of those that had met, the students did not consistently indicate they discussed program requirements or coursework. A majority did indicate that they identified an additional faculty advisor to mentor to advise them in the program. Students mentioned they would like more clarity on how often to meet and expectations for the roles. When asked if they would like to see this advising structure to continue in future years, students indicated they would recommend the program to offer this resource again:

> *"I would recommend it because it is nice to have someone to talk to who is unrelated to your field of study, especially in the case there is an issue with your primary advisor you would like to discuss privately."*

Students liked having an additional advisor beyond the primary mentor, access to mentoring outside of their chosen field, and additional mentorship for students in need of more support.

Summary

This new resource provided an opportunity for first-year graduate students to build their mentorship networks early and to find mentors who could potentially advise students as members of their future exam or dissertation committees. This access can set up new students for success by getting them

information, guidance, and support as part of their extended orientation within the graduate program. This approach to first-year advising could improve with more structure and communicated expectations. Programs should set guidelines for both faculty advisors and students on how often to meet and what topics to discuss. These guidelines can serve to ensure more equity and consistency in the frequency and quality of the advising offered to students. The graduate program could offer their faculty advisors an initial meeting to ensure faculty all understand their role within the program, degree requirements, and advising resources. Graduate programs could increase accountability for advisors by having faculty and students document their meetings, such as to report frequency or general topics of discussion to the graduate program.