Negotiating the Faculty/Student Relationship

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• check with your program!
• here are some generic guidelines
  – MS
    • with thesis – you’ll need a faculty supervisor
      – 8 “normal” classes plus research
    • with report – you’ll need a faculty supervisor
      – 9 classes plus an extended literature review
    • no thesis / no report – you won’t need a faculty supervisor
      – 10 classes
  – PhD
    • major emphasis is new “scholarly” contribution, i.e., research!
    • and obviously (I hope), you’ll need a faculty supervisor
  • student “time to degree”
    – we’d like you to finish your degree as expeditiously as possible
    – BUT that’s different for everyone
Finding an advisor/supervisor

• “academic adviser”
  – helps you determine what “formal” classes to take
  – usually any faculty member can do this, but check with your program

• “research supervisor”
  – this is MUCH more than “just” coursework
  – this is a highly individualized working relationship
  – requires significant commitment from both student and faculty member
  – once you have this relationship, the same person will usually be your “academic advisor”
    • even if they are not, you will want to coordinate your classes with your research
The delicate “balance” of power in the graduate student / faculty supervisor relationship:

Who is “responsible” for what?

- who sets the final goal, who picks the path?
  - the destination versus the route
- what should you expect?
  - what you should expect your advisor to do:
    - (probably) set the destination
    - (perhaps) recommend a path, or maybe just a general direction!
    - don’t expect them to (definitively) answer your questions!
  - what you should expect to do:
    - take responsibility for, and charge of, the path!
    - ask questions!
    - and try to answer those questions yourself!
To avoid problems…

• ask, discuss, ask, discuss, repeat!
  – DON’T GO MIA!!!!

• make proposals, including timelines
  – don’t be afraid to put these in writing
    • in fact, put them in writing…
  – ask for feedback, and ask about when you can expect that feedback
    • be flexible, and ask WAY in advance of any potential deadline, but definitely ask!

• expect things to change
  – regularly consult and update your supervisor about any changes
  – document change, its part of the process
If there are problems…

• what to do:
  – start with your advisor and try to find a way to “reconcile”
  – if necessary, consult your program’s graduate advisor
  – there is also a graduate student ombuds office that can provide advice
  – a formal university grievance procedure exists through the Graduate School

• formal “Leave of Absence”
  – if you need a break, this is the “official” place to look
    • two semesters max
    • allows for easier re-admission
  – don’t go MIA!!!!