



## **Proposed Revision to PhD Advising Structures**

Submitted by the Shared Governance Council's Subcommittee on  
Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs

In response to student surveys and reports from research by the Council for Graduate Schools and the JHU Provost's Office, the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences proposes the following structure for PhD mentoring. The changes are aimed at bolstering the advice and support students receive, alleviating stress on the primary advisor-advisee relationship, and resolving as early as possible problems students may encounter in their progress to the degree.

### **Rationale**

This proposal aims to provide doctoral students with a formal structure that gives them the benefit of advice from several faculty members engaged in the student's research, progress to degree, and professional development. The model takes the logic of the GBO committee and pulls it to an earlier, formative moment in the student's career. Though KSAS doctoral students tend to have satisfying and often sustaining relationships with the primary advisor, many regret the limitations of a 1:1 model when input from a variety of faculty could further enrich their work. In some programs, this team model is already in place (Biology, Biophysics, Earth & Planetary Sciences); in others, it is available though less formalized; while in some, the student does not engage meaningfully with other faculty until the moment of the dissertation defense. This proposal helps build relationships between students and faculty over a period of several years, relationships that will strengthen professional development, letters of reference, and a student's sense of belonging. The possibility of including faculty from other fields on the mentoring team encourages students to broaden their thinking beyond their disciplinary home and confer with those in related fields about their research.

The mentoring team gives support to the primary advisor as well, helping with recommendations and solutions when students face difficulties. Some of the pressure of the 1:1 advisor-advisee structure, too often a site of disappointment or friction, is alleviated by the team.

Data gathered by the Council of Graduate Schools and the JHU Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education illustrate the value of such multi-faculty mentoring models for PhD students in all disciplines. Greater satisfaction and retention on the part of students, and a lower time to degree are all strong outcomes of granting students a group of faculty mentors at least mid-way through their degree programs.

### **Description of the proposed structure**

The essential features of the recommended model are described below.

By the fall semester of their third year in the PhD program, doctoral students will, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), name a 3-person mentoring team to oversee their progress until they finish the degree.

- The three mentors are drawn primarily from the tenured and tenure-track faculty but can include one member of the teaching or research faculty. The three mentors need not be from

the same program or department, but the student should have some rationale for including members outside their home department.

- The team is led by the primary advisor or co-advisors, at least one of whom will be a member of the student's home program. If the student elects to have two co-advisors, they are encouraged to designate one as primary for the mentoring team.
- At least one member of the mentoring team will be a tenured member of the faculty or an affiliate with substantial experience supervising doctoral students.
- Each program establishes a procedure for students who wish or need to change a member of the committee. That procedure will be detailed in the Graduate Handbook.
- In exceptional cases, a student may petition the program and the Dean's Office to have one member from outside of Johns Hopkins serve on the committee.
- According to the ["JHU Mentorship Commitments of Faculty Advisors and PhD Students,"](#) the PhD advisor (or co-advisors) takes primary responsibility for guiding and assessing the student's research. In addition, the primary advisor has "the responsibility to mentor the PhD student. This responsibility includes committing to the training of the PhD student, building on the PhD student's individual professional background and in support of their individual professional aspirations." The other members of the team contribute where appropriate to the research but focus especially on supporting the student's progress to degree, academic and professional development and professional aspirations.
- Once formed, the mentoring team meets together with the student to review the student's progress, professional development and plans for the coming semester or year. These meetings take place at least once a year, though individual programs may require more frequent meetings.
- An annual meeting of the mentoring team serves as the occasion to discuss the student's Individualized Development Plan (IDP). The PhD program will designate the deadline for these meetings each year.
- Along with the IDP, the committee will send to the director of the graduate program a report noting the date of the meeting and the content of the conversation.
- Copies of the report and the IDP will be shared with the committee members and student and kept by the program with each student's records.
- Any member of the team may ask for an additional meeting during the course of the year to address matters of urgency.

### **Recommended options**

In particularly large PhD programs, logistics may make meetings of the whole team difficult; in those cases, the team could meet together once a year and the student meet individually with team members in the other semester.

Departments currently using this mentoring model have found benefit in allowing some time for the primary advisor to leave the room so that the student may confer with the other faculty about the advisor-advisee relationship. (The student may of course consult with team members individually at other times). Similarly, the student may be asked to leave the room so the faculty mentors can confer.