YALE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Genetics Department Advising Guidelines

2025 - 2026

Introduction

A productive, healthy relationship between faculty advisors and graduate students is critical for the completion of quality research, the professional development of graduate students, and the overall well-being of the university community. In order to promote best practices in advising, the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS), in collaboration with the Office of Graduate Student Development and Diversity (OGSDD) and the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA), has released the *Guide to Advising Processes for Faculty and Students*. The document outlines the general principles for establishing a successful, positive relationship between advisors and students and is a valuable resource for all programs. That said, there is a need for program-specific guidelines. Although some departments have a section of their graduate student handbooks devoted to advising, all programs would benefit from a more consistent and thorough elaboration of the GSAS general principles within the context of their specific programs. Additionally, codification of such advising guidelines promotes equity and inclusion within each department by providing each student—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds and first-generation graduate students—with an equal foundation for how best to navigate advising relationships during their time in graduate school.

The following Advising Guidelines for the Genetics Department will highlight important topics including responsibilities of students, faculty advisors, dissertation committee members, and directors of graduate studies. Detailed information regarding the graduate program can be found at the Genetics Graduate Program webpage, as well as in the Graduate Student Handbook and the Genetics PhD Milestones & Deadlines.

Responsibilities

In this section of the advising guidelines, the responsibilities of the student, the advisor, dissertation committee members, and DGSs are described. This section outlines for students and advisors how to approach their advising relationship and helps students understand what they can expect from various advisors. Additional information is available in the Graduate Student Handbook.

Responsibilities of the Student

1. Complete academic requirements as indicated in the Graduate Student Handbook and the Milestones and Deadlines.
2. Consider career goals and discuss them with the advisor and DGS by the beginning of admission to candidacy.
3. Maintain clear communication with the advisor and help establish good practices for scheduling meetings. Be clear about limitations to your schedule, including religious observance, family obligations, and mental or physical health considerations.

4. Discuss research expectations with the advisor upon joining your thesis lab. This discussion should include topics such as authorship order, time spent on outside collaboration, career goals and time spent on professional development.
5. Keep the advisor aware of upcoming deadlines, meetings, and other responsibilities. Be proactive in the advising relationship. For example, take the initiative to arrange meetings, keep the advisor informed of any circumstances that might affect academic progress, come prepared to advising meetings, consult with the advisor about presenting or publishing work.
6. Remain open to feedback and be willing to discuss difficult academic ideas and differences of scientific opinion.
7. Commit to regular attendance at departmental talks and events, including weekly Research in Progress (RIP), Genetics Department Seminar Series events, annual retreats and symposia, and faculty-trainee lunches, according to departmental and advisor expectations.
8. Welcome prospective students and help them understand departmental or research group practices and culture.
9. Finalize membership of the qualifying exam and dissertation committees with the help of the primary advisor, as described in the Graduate Student Handbook.
10. Talk with your advisor and/or the DGS about fellowships and other sources of funding that will help advance your science and career.
11. As you advance to candidacy, establish your expected timeline towards degree, and come to a consensus about these expectations with your advisor and dissertation committee.
12. Be aware of mental health and wellness resources offered by the university. For additional information on these resources, see the Graduate Student Handbook.
13. Meet with the DGS and/or dissertation committee members to intercede if issues arise related to the advisor's responsibilities.
14. Starting in their 3rd year, students are expected to present at RIP. Students will have the opportunity to practice communicating their work to a diverse group of scientists during their second year at the GSS class.
15. Review and respond to emails from the registrar and DGS in a timely manner.

Responsibilities of the Advisor

1. Help the student develop an individualized timeline for completing academic requirements and meeting professional goals.
2. Discuss career goals and opportunities with the student early in their graduate career and continue these discussions every 6 months. The frequency of these discussions will increase as the student approaches their graduation date.

3. Discuss research expectations with the student early in their graduate career. This should include topics such as authorship order, time spent on outside collaboration, and time spent on professional development.

4. Give clear, constructive, and timely feedback on the student's work. In particular, give feedback and approve the prospectus and the dissertation, complete Dissertation Progress Reports, and review all related written work by the appropriate deadlines.

5. Advise the student on the composition of the qualifying exam and dissertation committees as described in the Graduate Student Handbook.

6. Establish expectations with each student for how often you will meet to discuss the student's work.

7. Be cognizant of limitations to the student's schedule, including religious observance, family obligations and physical/mental health considerations.

8. Understand the required department and GSAS milestones for students. Recognize when completion of these requirements may require an adjustment to research responsibilities, such as when a student must reduce time devoted to research to prepare for a qualifying exam.

9. Consider establishing a set of "core values" for your lab that explain your expectations about work produced, interactions with others in the lab, wellness, etc.

10. Be familiar with mental health resources offered by the university so that you can suggest them if your student approaches you for help.

11. Discuss with the DGS and dissertation committee members if issues arise related to your student's responsibilities.

12. Remain open to feedback and be willing to discuss difficult academic ideas and differences of scientific opinion in order to facilitate all students' success.

Responsibilities of the Dissertation Committee

1. Meet as a committee with the student at regular intervals, as described in the timeline above.

2. Be available and offer to meet with the student outside of committee meetings as needed to discuss specific research questions/approaches and provide guidance on career goals.

3. Come to committee meetings having reviewed all relevant materials.

4. Review the prospectus and dissertation.

5. Provide feedback if there are differences of opinion between the advisor and the student.

6. Establish a timeline to graduation with the student and work with the student and primary advisor to ensure this timeline is followed.

7. The Committee Chair should contact the student's DGS to discuss any concerns about student mentoring, or any differences of opinion among the committee, advisor and student that may hinder the student's progress towards their PhD.

Responsibilities of the Directors of Graduate Studies (DGS): Jim Noonan and Janghoo Lim

1. Hold an informational meeting in late Spring for rising second-year students entering the genetics program to outline requirements and timelines. Ensure that all students know how to access policies and procedures and are informed of any updates. Distribute information to individual student cohorts regarding relevant milestones and opportunities. Ensure student cohorts and their advisors understand expectations and processes for completing these milestones.
2. Review and approve report forms for qualifying exams and advancement to candidacy. Review and approve outside readers for the thesis. Review outside reader reports.
3. Meet with individual students after their thesis committee meeting during DGS office hours. Review the reports with the students to provide feedback.
4. Run a town hall for all graduate students once or twice a year.
5. Meet with the Genetics Student Executive Council (GSEC) regularly to gather feedback and support student initiatives.
6. In collaboration with the thesis committee and the advisor, advise on the job market and career paths, including participation in conferences and professional meetings.
7. Offer guidance to students about the possibility and process of identifying a new advisor if this becomes necessary (e.g., if the advisor leaves Yale).
8. Identify whom students can turn to (DGS, Chair, GSAS deans, etc.) if challenges arise in working with their advisor and be familiar with other University resources for student support (Dean's Designees, Title IX office, Office of Institutional Equity and Access, etc.).
9. Explain the procedures regarding the qualifying exam, including if the student does not pass the exam.
10. If a student is not making sufficient progress toward the degree, make sure that this information is communicated in writing to the student, along with necessary steps to remain or return to good academic standing, including deadlines and consequences for failure to meet these requirements.

Communication Expectations

Ensuring clear communication of responsibilities and expectations between the student and the advisor is crucial for establishing a successful, nurturing mentoring relationship. Mentoring relationships should be tailored to the particular needs and expectations of the graduate student and advisor. It is important that together the student and advisor determine what are the best practices for providing timely, regular, and constructive feedback on the students' progress. **Appendix A** provides a list of questions for students to ask potential advisors prior to joining the lab and once a mentoring relationship has been established.

Work-Life Balance Expectations

Work-life balance is essential to ensure graduate students have a positive and rewarding experience during graduate school. Some important aspects that could impact this experience include establishing clear expectations with your advisor, setting appropriate boundaries, and employing effective time management strategies. Building these skills early on is essential for the continued success of graduate students. While pondering which laboratory to join, it is crucial for students to discuss reasonable expectations for working hours and vacation time with potential advisors. Similarly, completion of some degree requirements, such as preparing for the qualifying exam, can supersede research responsibilities and might require time out of the lab which can be discussed with your advisor. Resources for guiding questions to navigate these conversations are available through Científico Latino: Questions for Potential Advisors.

Resources for Student Support

In addition, Yale has devoted numerous resources to support the well-being of students. These resources and contact information for the relevant Yale faculty and staff who can help are described in detail in Section 6 of the Genetics Graduate Student Handbook. Additional resources are summarized below. Yale offers free, confidential mental health treatment to students at Yale Health. Clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, and psychiatrists are matched to meet the student's needs based upon an initial evaluation to determine the best course of action. Additionally, Yale has recently created the Good Life Center to promote wellness by providing mental, physical, social, and emotional well-being. This center provides spaces for student meetups, peer-to-peer support, and study breaks where students are taught about healthy habits, coping mechanisms, and resilience training. The Good Life Center and Yale Well also share tips via email to help students manage stress, cope, and live a healthy life at home. The McDougal Center for Graduate Student Life is another avenue for graduate students to find a community at Yale. Briefly, student fellows organize programs in various topics such as Health & Wellness, giving a forum for students to get to know each other outside of their research. Yale supports a variety of student-led organizations that foster community. These organizations provide a much-needed support network and community to help students from underrepresented backgrounds such as women, Hispanic, Asian, black, LGBTQA+, and disabled, among others excel at Yale. In the BBS program specifically, the Yale BBS Development and Involvement Community (YBDIC) is a student-run organization dedicated to the intellectual and personal growth of underrepresented students. Additional information is available in the Graduate Student Handbook.

Additional Departmental Student-Facing Roles

Within the Genetics Department, there are various student-facing departmental roles comprising faculty and staff that can assist students. Some relevant positions include:

Registrar, *Jim Long*

- Monitors and notates student progress towards fulfilling degree requirements, making sure that all critical deadlines and submissions are being met. Advises students of their academic requirements and provides the information and tools needed for them to complete them.
- Tracks and enters all student funding, relaying fellowship and other funding information gathered from student Notices of Award, the BBS, PIs, and dept. financial analysts to Graduate Financial Aid. Enters, audits and resolves student funding issues in Workday.
- Keeps students informed regarding requirements such as committee meetings, qualifying exam, dissertation prospectus, thesis committee meetings, teaching requirements, thesis seminar, and thesis deadlines.
- Meets with students to discuss academic issues.
- Coordinates and supervises the teaching fellow program for the Genetics department, allotting teaching assistants to departmental courses and securing teaching assignments for students in other departments.
- Contacts 4th, 5th, and 6th year students in the Fall and Spring semesters to find out their graduation timeline. Discusses guidelines and deadlines for submitting the thesis, providing students with appropriate forms and information for graduating.
- Completes departmental recommendation forms for graduation and return to the University Registrar's office.
- Reviews and responds to emails regarding departmental policies and procedures in a timely manner.

Genetics Pre-Award Associate Administrator, *Lisa Stadolnik.*

Students who plan on submitting a grant or fellowship application and require assistance with the submission process or need an institutional support / nomination letter from the Chairs should contact Lisa at least 4 weeks before the application deadline.

Professional Development and Job Market Advising

An important form of advising is preparing graduate students for entry into the (academic *or* non-academic) job market. Some programs designate a Job Placement Officer (JPO) to fulfill this responsibility primarily for academic jobs. While the Genetics Department does not have a JPO, it does offer other programs aimed at helping students with their professional and career development. The following section will introduce the opportunities available to Genetics students.

- As a part of their first Thesis Committee Meeting, all students will complete an Individual Development Plan (IDP). This will help guide students to set academic and career goals and make actionable measures of success. These IDPs will be shared with the student's advisor and committee members. Each subsequent Thesis Committee Meeting, the student will update the IDP to cover any goal completions or changes in trajectories.
- In addition to their advisor and committee members, students will have the opportunity to meet with other faculty members through the Faculty-Trainee lunches. These lunches are organized and hosted by Genetics students & postdocs, and include a discussion centered around specific topics (academic vs. non-academic careers, how to apply for a postdoctoral position, etc.) with one but more often two Genetics faculty members with relevant experience.
- Genetics students also have the opportunity to have lunches or one-on-one meetings with invited speakers from outside of Yale. These lunches are a great way for students to expand their network and receive additional mentorship and are regularly announced during the academic year via the department mailing lists.
- The Office of Career Strategy (OCS) is a Yale University office that works with students, alumni, and postdoctoral scholars on career advising, employment and internship opportunities, and professional development.

Appendix A

Suggested Questions for Advisors and Students

The following is a list of questions that may be used by students and advisors to establish productive channels of communication and work processes. We recommend students and advisors review this list together at the beginning of the advising relationship to facilitate conversations about how to work together most effectively.

1. What is each party's preferred mode of communication (e.g. email, phone call, video chat, in person, text, etc.)?
2. What is each party's expectation for the student's weekly work schedule (days, times of day, etc.)?
3. What are the expectations for message responses?
4. Does the advisor want/expect the student to be a teaching fellow for them? If so, when during the student's time at Yale?
5. What is each party's expectation of the student's time to degree?
6. What is each party's expectation regarding the student's conference attendance and funding?
7. Is the student expected to seek a secondary advisor or other mentorship within the department? Outside of the department?
8. When the student collaborates on work with others, what is the advisor's expectation regarding the advisor's role in that work and subsequent authorship?
9. What is the advisor's approach to authorship?
10. What are the student's expectations for authorship?
11. How many publications does the advisor/department expect from the student before graduation?
12. What is the advisor's expectation for the student's research in semesters that the student has to fulfill other requirements (classes, teaching, qualifying exams, etc.)?
13. What are the advisor's or program's expectations regarding the student's mentoring of more junior graduate students or undergraduates recruited by the advisor?
14. What are the student's expectations for opportunities to mentor more junior graduate students and/or undergraduates?
15. What training (IRB, lab safety, etc.) is the student required to take before beginning to work with their advisor or embarking on their own research?
16. What professional development programs (writing, teaching, outreach, etc.) is the student interested in participating in?
17. About which career paths can the student approach the advisor for support and when should the student seek career support elsewhere?