

# Merging of Professional and Faculty Advisors

Strzelecki, A.

Professional graduate advising continues to be an uncommon practice at many universities. The advising responsibility is often given to faculty members in addition to their teaching and research requirements.

As universities put more emphasis on retention, persistence and time-to-degree hiring graduate advisors to help meet these metrics is beneficial. However, removing the faculty would leave a gap in student's expectations and needs during graduate school. At USF COPH we have shared responsibility between the faculty mentor, professional advisor and the student.

## Graduate Advisor Responsibility

- Orient and onboard students to the college and graduate concentration
- Advise students of course sequences and plan of study
- Advocate for students
- Connect students to campus resources
- Clarify and provide guidance for policies for students and faculty
- Receive and processing university forms
- Lead retention and probation outreach

## Faculty Mentor Responsibility

- Discuss students' academic goals
- Engage in career and professional development planning and discussion
- Advise students on electives to take in order to tailor their academics to their goals
- Support student in their career goals and help connect them to career focused opportunities
- Supervise their culminating field experience and special projects

## Student Responsibility

- Create a plan of study in collaboration with advisor
- Learn academic program requirements and track progress towards graduation
- Seek out Faculty in concentration to speak to regarding their career field
- Utilize resources and opportunities available to them through the college and university
- Communicate academic goals and issues with advisor and/or faculty mentor

## Benefits

- Allows faculty and staff to be specialized. They are able to focus in on their strengths in their specialized subject matter
- Graduate Advisor providing policies to students and faculty it allows for the time students spend with faculty to focus on academic and career goals
- Support and monitor students in their progression towards a timely graduation
- Policies are more widely supported and applied in the college
- Graduate Advisors are focused on helping students overcome roadblocks and advocate to support student progression
- Increased accessibility to advisors and support for our online student population
- Reduced exceptions to meet graduation requirements due to advisors sharing universities and processes



## Challenges

- Some faculty missed the interaction and control of students schedules
- Faculty were not able to advise students without access to their transcripts or keeping notes on their plans of study
- Students miscommunicating or a lack of communication between Graduate Advisor and Faculty Mentor

## Modifications

- Transitioned from all Graduate Advisors cross trained to specialized concentration advising to foster better relationships and greater depth of knowledge with concentrations
- Enhanced clarity and communication of roles between College Registrar team and Graduate Advisors
- Leveraged technology better to enhance transparency between Faculty Mentors and Graduate Advisors
- Advisors attend Education Council meeting to understand and know upcoming changes in curriculum and policies
- Created a consistent schedule and plan of study for required classes with faculty

As referenced by Bloom, et al. (2007), an outstanding graduate advisor advocates for students, proactively integrates students into their profession, cares for students and their successes and is accessible.

### Phase 1

Meet with stakeholders to discuss the transition and break down of responsibilities including Faculty Advisors, Academic Deans, Students and Academic and Student Affairs

### Phase 2

Graduate Advisors and Assistant Director of Academic Advising met with faculty in each concentration to discuss course sequencing, common issues in the concentration, and upcoming changes to courses or program. These meetings continued each following Fall and Spring term.

### Phase 3

Students were assigned advisors as they begin that Fall term. Students currently seeking their degree with already established faculty advisors continued to meet with them. The advisor transitioned over the next 2 years to advising all masters level students.

