

Special Education Advising Philosophy

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[Note: Some of the text pertaining to graduate students was taken from Dr. Scott Lanyon's advising statement, which has been broadly circulated at UMN and from the Psychological Foundations of Education advising statement (authored by Dr. Sashank Varma), and shared as a resource with colleagues within the Department of Educational Psychology.]

Our program faculty members span a wide range of research approaches. Nevertheless, we are all psychological and/or educational scientists committed to training the next generation of leaders in the field. We do so by adopting an apprenticeship model, with an end goal to produce independent thinkers capable of pushing science forward as a theoretical and empirical enterprise, and also as a force for improving educational outcomes for all students.

“Defining the relationship explicitly.” Advisors provide guidance to advisees about what the relation can and should be, and provide support in building a successful working relationship.

The advisor will

- Make his/her expectations of the advisee clear at the beginning of the advisee's program
- Be available to meet with the advisee on a regular basis (frequency may vary based on the year in program, specific activities, and advisee's individual needs)
- Provide timely consultation, guidance and feedback regarding coursework
- Provide timely consultation and guidance and feedback regarding completion of program milestones and individual student goals
- Establish and use a consistent check-in process or document that both advisor and advisee can refer to

The student will

- Communicate his/her specific goals for the program and intended career path
- Follow through on invitations to meet with the advisor on a regular basis
- Maintain ongoing communication about progress in coursework
- Maintain ongoing communication about progress toward milestones and individual goals
- Share responsibility for keeping check-in document updated

Admissions. We seek to attract graduate students from diverse backgrounds who have a record of academic success as evidenced by their prior academic performance and standardized test scores. Equally important is their demonstrated experience and research interests. The best candidates have experience working in school-based or clinical settings and/or have engaged in psychological or educational research, and have been successful as evidenced by their CVs and letters of recommendation.

Research. Special education faculty work with graduate students to conceptualize, execute, and write up projects tailored to *mutual* research interests. We strongly guide students early in their careers, and fade this guidance as they grow as independent researchers. By their later years in the program, students should be able to identify and design their own research within the discipline of educational psychology/special education. The research should align with the advisor's expertise and interests to the extent needed for the advisor to be able to provide substantive support to the student.

Publication. Publishing is essential for most career paths. Science is not a solitary effort, and scientists have a responsibility to communicate their results to their peers. In this way, knowledge advances and scientists can build on the work of others. We therefore expect graduate students to write up the results of their research projects and submit these works to conferences. Successful projects should ultimately be written up for submission to high-impact journals (note that 'success' is not necessarily determined by significant positive results, but by well-designed, rigorous research that contributes to knowledge in the field). By the time students graduate, they should have multiple publications in the publication pipeline (published, in press, in revision, under review, in preparation).

Authorship. Authorship marks not just an individual's contributions to a research project or manuscript, but also their responsibility for the soundness and reproducibility of study results. To earn authorship on a paper, the student must contribute substantial effort to "the work" of the research and to the writing of the resulting manuscript. There is no set of rules for determining the order of authorship on a manuscript. In some subfields, authors are listed in descending order of contribution. In other subfields, the primary student author is listed first, the senior author (i.e., mentor) is listed last, and other contributors are listed in between these poles. In general, students will increasingly appear in the first-author position as the independence of their contributions increases over their time in graduate school. Advisors will continue to have significant involvement (i.e., in developing the original idea, collecting data, analyzing data, and/or writing a portion of the manuscript), and will generally be listed as an author. The roles and authorship should be determined at the first sign that an activity will result in a publication. This decision can be altered by mutual agreement at a later date if roles have changed.

Professional Networks. Developing a professional network is essential, regardless of career path. Advisors will help each student develop a rich and individually useful professional network of senior and earlier-career colleagues as well as other graduate students who share academic, intellectual, or practical interests, and will encourage and help the student engage this network in ongoing professional development.

Conferences. Faculty members expect graduate students to attend national (and possibly international) meetings and to report on their research at those meetings. The faculty will do their best to help find funding to make this possible but obtaining support for meeting attendance should be a joint effort. There are multiple mechanisms to pay for conference travel, lodging, and registration costs, including funds written into grants, funds made available by the program and department to each student each year, and grants from university organizations such as the Council of Graduate Students (COGS).

Research meetings. Students are expected to attend a number of regular meetings. These meetings are dictated in part by the mentoring styles of faculty members, which vary. All faculty members schedule regular meetings with their individual students—the frequency of which is determined by the student’s stage in the program and individual needs. These meetings are essential for ensuring that students make progress on their research projects. Many faculty also schedule a regular lab meeting which all of their students attend. Lab meetings are particularly useful for ensuring that larger projects continue to move forward. They are also supportive environments where students learn to present the incremental results of their research and receive feedback from others. Finally, some faculty schedule regular reading groups or writing groups. More generally, faculty must communicate to students their meeting expectations.

Other meetings. Students are expected to participate in the intellectual life of the university. Such opportunities include colloquia or other talks/presentations within the program, department, college, and across the university.

Stipends and tuition. In collaboration with the graduate program, the program generally guarantees funding for four years for all doctoral students who make timely progress. The nature of that funding (TA, RA, Fellowship) is often unpredictable but there will be funding. Nevertheless, we expect students to write and submit fellowship proposals where possible. Writing such proposals is excellent experience and receiving such fellowships increases a student’s competitiveness on the job market. All students are encouraged to apply for a Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship to fund their fourth or fifth year in the program, when they should be working on their dissertations.

Research funding. Funding student research projects is a joint responsibility. Faculty will work with students to find the necessary funding.

Coursework. Students are expected to complete the coursework of the program in a timely fashion. The expectation is that students will get nearly all As in their courses. If a student’s GPA falls below 3.75, then this will be cause for concern. Students are expected to take courses inside and outside the program and department, to broaden their knowledge base and bring new ideas and methods to their research.

Reviewing. An important part of being a scientist is peer review. Students should gain experience as reviewers through the available opportunities. This includes reviewing for conferences in their field. As their research is published, they may be invited to review for journals. These opportunities should be vetted by their advisors, who will support them in learning the demands of the genre.

Reading the literature. Regardless of career path, a current knowledge of the literature is essential. We expect students to spend significant hours each week reading papers in their field. This expectation is on top of the reading students do for their classes. A good rule of thumb is to read one paper each day. Faculty members will direct students to the most important and relevant papers, and teach them to use electronic tools to find other, related papers.

Teaching. Teaching is a tremendous way to learn to communicate complex concepts to a non-specialist audience. It is also an essential component of CVs that are strong enough to land faculty positions down the road. Most students will be involved in teaching at some point during their graduate training. TAing is demanding of students' time but this diversity of experiences is excellent training for the heavier and more diverse course loads of faculty at primarily teaching colleges.

Professionalism. This document makes it clear that a lot is expected of students. The less time efficient a person is, the more hours/week it will take to meet those expectations. We therefore expect students to learn and to practice good time management.

Good time management also means keeping one's commitments. There are times when research demands peak and meetings must be canceled and other work deferred. But they are rare. Students must honor their commitments. When they cannot, they must pre-emptively explain why, and must formulate a revised schedule. If a student needs input to move forward, it is their responsibility to seek out their advisor or schedule a meeting. By the time they leave the university, students are expected to be able to function as independent scientists.

Advocacy. Successful advisee-advisor relations rest on honest and direct communication, and on a culture that encourages and supports that communication. For instance, students are responsible to request interpreters or other accommodations when needed for all advising and lab meetings. Advisor and student should come to a mutual understanding of the purpose, definition, and scope of the accommodations, and revisit as needed. If students have any concerns about the quality of accommodations provided in their coursework or meetings, they should communicate this with both their advisor and their access consultant at the DRC.

Cohort Collaboration or Collegiality. Students learn the most from other students and/or postdocs. Students are expected to develop great professional relationships with other people in their lab and in the graduate program more generally. These relationships should be supportive, not competitive.

Career paths. Many of our graduate students aim to secure post-doctoral fellowships – and ultimately tenure-track faculty positions – at research universities; some aim for positions at teaching-focused institutions, and others for clinical- or school-based positions. We realize that students might have other career paths in mind. Students should inform their advisors of the range of career paths in which they are interested at the earliest possible date. Advisors will in turn help students obtain the experiences and skills needed to succeed in those various careers.

Social Support. While academic and professional development is the primary focus and content of this relationship, this will at times warrant attention to other issues or features that affect either or both the student and advisor. We prefer that students and advisors negotiate these issues in ways that are appropriate to each, including attention to issues or mental health, stress, time management, family, work-life balance.

Problem solving. In the vast majority of instances, from start to finish, student-advisor relationships will be strong, positive, and supportive. At times, however, challenges might arise – changes in the circumstances affecting behavior of either student or advisor or differences of style or opinion that create some friction in interactions and relationship. When this occurs, *both* the advisor and student should assume responsibility for constructive problem solving, first with one another and, if that is not successful, by asking for additional support. Students and advisors can turn to the SpEd Coordinator, EPsy department chair, senior leaders in the CEHD Dean’s Office, or other resources on campus – the [Student Counseling Service](#), the [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#), or the [University Police](#) – when more formal or immediate assistance is needed.