

The MEES Graduate Program Mentoring Guidelines for Faculty

The Marine Estuarine & Environmental Science (MEES) Graduate Program's mission is to educate students to become the scientific leaders and environmental problem-solvers of the future. Using an interdisciplinary approach, MEES students are trained to engage in scientific discovery, integration, and application to generate new knowledge and to solve environmental problems. MEES is a University System of Maryland (USM) wide, multi-institutional graduate program spanning five partner campuses, offering both Master's (M.S.) and Doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees. This unique program affords both its students and faculty an unparalleled opportunity to engage in *mutually collaborative* academic and professional conversations. However, the disbursed and complex nature of the program poses a challenge in developing highly personalized guidance strategies in an equitable and inclusive mentoring relationship. The following program specific guidelines provide a general framework regarding the various MEES faculty roles and expectations, *supplemental to the rules and regulations of their various affiliated departments, and universities*, in the advising, mentoring, and engagement of students pursuing the Master's (M.S.) and Doctoral (Ph.D.) degree in MEES. For further guidance regarding degree objective specific graduate student roles and expectations, please refer to the MEES website (<https://www.mees.umd.edu/>) and the appropriate Graduate School Student Handbook, supplemental to the rules and regulations of their various affiliated departments and universities.

Program Advising Overview

Mentoring at the MEES Graduate Program is, by design, a highly collaborative effort between the student and the student's primary academic advisor. While students choose their area of study and research interest, faculty advisors provide specialized mentorship and training, help guide and assess the student's degree objective progress through the program, and foster a cooperative environment that supports their overall academic development. To be effective and impactful, mentoring requires clear lines of communication regarding program benchmark expectations as well as agreed upon personal and professional goals for both the student and the advisor. Mentors must model ethical behavior and be sensitive to the power imbalance in the advisor-student relationship. Students rightly see advisors as crucial gatekeepers to their careers and it is essential not to abuse that position of power and influence.

The Marine Estuarine & Environmental Science Graduate Program (MEES) is committed to recruiting, cultivating, engaging, and encouraging a diverse and vibrant community of faculty, staff, and graduate students. We believe that diversity includes the presence of differences in all its forms and is the foundation for a living set of practices and goals; shared among the brilliant community of people who make up this unique program.

We believe that a diverse and inclusive educational and work environment provides an atmosphere that allows all individuals to attain their greatest potential which in turn allows the greatest benefits for MEES. MEES is dedicated to fostering a safe, civil, and welcoming environment for all students, faculty & staff. We are committed to improving representational diversity, fostering inclusive cultures and communities, and striving towards equity in the program and in our communities.

The following “best practices” are broad guidelines for the various mentoring roles in the MEES program and are not intended to cover all mentoring circumstances.

Faculty Mentorship General Guidelines

In a multi-institutional program like MEES, there is an increased risk of some disruption in the effective communication of program policies & requirements, benchmarks and, most importantly, academic resources that are available to students and advisors at each institution.

For further guidance on graduate student responsibilities and expectations, please refer to the MEES Graduate Student Handbook, as well as the Student Expectations section of [Table A](#) listed below.

MEES faculty advisors should:

1. Understand the Program

Take time to become familiar with the *program specific requirements*, as well as the appropriate MEES Foundation points of contact for curriculum questions.

Explore the *degree granting institution's academic and registration policies, degree clearance requirements for each student as well as* the appropriate university administrative contacts. The MEES Program Office staff is always available to answer any program administrative inquiries and can also direct students and faculty to the appropriate institutional contact for *campus specific questions*. Students need to know this information but might require additional assistance and periodic reminders.

Familiarize themselves with the institution specific resources for health & wellness, academic & career development initiatives, as well as opportunities to connect to the broader local community on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

2. Understand the Graduate Student

Understand their graduate student's educational background and experiences, preferred learning style and goals to help foster a positive mentoring experience. Most graduate students' experiences stem from undergraduate study which has limited opportunities for independent development. Some effective ways to promote intentional and meaningful dialogue are to:

Encourage students' curiosity and discovery by allowing them to ask any and all questions while mutually setting professional boundaries with respect. Keep on hand department and university resource contact information. Understand that professional and personal goals may and do differ between students and advisors, but open discussion can synergistically create an intentional and fulfilling experience.

Share past barriers or challenges - Graduate students are eager to hear about career trajectory and research projects, as well as academic and professional experiences outside of teaching & advising. This openness can not only aid the student in the understanding of the advisor's other duties and responsibilities (i.e. grant writing) but also creates an environment that encourages students to share their experiences & perspectives.

Emulate the mentoring activities that were most useful in helping the advisor earn their own degree as well as in reaching professional career goals. Maintain an ongoing

dialogue regarding academic & professional roles and responsibilities as these will inevitably evolve over time.

Require regular and consistent engagement plans with graduate students as well as timely response expectations. The first meeting with a new student should occur when the student first joins the research group, **prior to registration**, to discuss expectations and determine a regular meeting schedule. Initial expectations and meeting schedules may be different for a student taking a full class load versus a student who has completed most of their course work. In practice, many faculty/students find weekly meetings quite useful even if it is to just provide a progress update. More frequent meetings may be needed as important deadlines approach (conferences, research grant submissions, etc.). When several graduate students are working on related projects, a group meeting provides opportunities for engagement and participation in sharing valuable experiences & unique perspectives.

MEES Statement of Expectations Guidelines

The following guidelines are mutually expected of the students and advisors which may be included in, and supplemental to the relevant statement of expectations section of the appropriate assistantship, fellowship, grant or other graduate school funding contract. The contract’s specific terms may be revisited and reviewed by either party prior to the expiration of its designated term, according to the policies and procedures of the appropriate Graduate School, as well as the cumulative results of the annual academic & research progress reports and learning assessment evaluations required by the MEES program and which must be collaboratively discussed between the student and advisor.

TABLE A - Faculty & Student Expectations

Faculty Expectations	Student Expectations
Guide students in the selection and planning of program committees including: M.S. - Advising, Comprehensive, Thesis Ph.D. - Advising, Comprehensive, Prospectus, Dissertation	Initiate contact and actively work with the advisor to select program committees: M.S. - Advising, Comprehensive, Thesis Ph.D. - Advising, Comprehensive, Prospectus, Dissertation

Advise the student by recommending program required courses, elective recommendations, and directed research sections and requirements.	Contact the advisor about course requirements, elective recommendations and directed research sections and requirements.
Be accessible, approachable and accountable to the student.	Be responsible, responsive, and available to meet with the advisor.
Hold regular meetings with the student as discussed and alert students when unavailable. Discuss attendance expectations and the importance of balancing academic, research and personal time.	Attend regular meetings with the advisor as agreed upon. Communicate personal or research travel plans and any scheduling conflicts or constraints that may prevent attending classes, conducting research or meeting with the advisor.
Clearly communicate to ensure that students understand the content relevant to the research project.	Request clarification relevant content and requirements of the research project are not understood.
Explain the importance of protecting intellectual property and data.	Be aware of the importance of intellectual property and data.
Encourage students to participate in public presentations, seminars and research travel.	Actively participate in public presentations and seminars and inquire with the advisor about research travel opportunities.
Consult with the Program Director regarding serious concerns about a student.	Consult with the Program Director if there are serious concerns regarding an advisor.
Be aware of the mental and physical resources available to students and refer them to the appropriate personnel if needed.	Familiarize themselves with the available health resources and seek the appropriate personnel when necessary and reach out to the advisor if accommodations are needed.
Discuss career path and job placement recommendations.	Discuss career options and post-graduation employment interests.
Provide letters of recommendation or referrals as appropriate.	Request recommendations or referrals by clearly communicating deadlines.
Be the student's advocate.	Advocate for yourself.

3. Form An Exit Strategy

The moment the graduate student enters the program, the immediate mutual objective is to have them successfully exit the program. True mentorship helps direct & guide students to the most optimal track for their professional growth & development. Recognize that students graduating with a master's degree may have different career goals and qualifications than a student earning their PhD. As students near completion, help them build their professional network, identify individuals who could potentially write letters of recommendation, and help prepare them for the expectations of the next stage of their career.

CONCLUSION

The strength of the MEES Graduate Program is in its people – faculty, staff, and students – who are passionate about research, teaching, and learning. Mentoring graduate students can be very rewarding both for the advisor and for the student. The MEES Graduate Program is committed to educating tomorrow's leaders in equitable and inclusive mentoring relationships.