



**THE GRADUATE SCHOOL**  

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**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

**Doctoral Advising at Princeton**  
**A Graduate Student Guide**

# Advising Guide Overview

Working with a research adviser is an integral part of all doctoral training. While at some institutions independent research may account for a small portion of undergraduate work, the majority of undergraduate education is centered on coursework that allows students to gain knowledge from many different faculty. Graduate education is different. It does include coursework, but it is primarily centered on working under the direction of an adviser to create new knowledge in the chosen field. This relationship will be different than the academic relationships with which you are familiar from undergraduate studies.

This guide was developed to help you navigate the doctoral advising structure and advising relationship in order to get the most out of this unique academic experience. The guide focuses on some of the most common scenarios you will encounter as a graduate student. It covers the following topics:

- 1) Graduate Student Advising at Princeton University
- 2) Who Can Serve as an Adviser
- 3) How to Find the Right Adviser
- 4) How to Work with the Adviser You've Chosen
- 5) How to Get What You Need From Your Adviser
- 6) What to Do When Encountering Challenges
- 7) Student Academic Grievances

## Section 1: Graduate Student Advising at Princeton

Ph.D. students at the research stage of their programs at Princeton are required to have faculty advisers who can appropriately advise their research topics and who are willing to advise them. This is an essential requirement in order for a Ph.D. student to remain enrolled and successfully work towards completing the degree. The beginning of the research stage differs from program to program, depending on individual program requirements and funding models. In some departments, particularly those in the lab sciences and engineering, the expectation to have an adviser begins as early as the first year. In other fields, students are not required to have an adviser until after they have completed the general examination and moved to the dissertation phase of the Ph.D.

In doctoral programs, it is not possible to complete all degree requirements without having an adviser of record and a defined research topic. It is a requirement for all post-grads students to have an adviser of record. No post-grads student can be enrolled for a significant length of time without an adviser.

Princeton's departments and programs have broad academic expertise, and Ph.D. students have the opportunity to work with faculty who are experts in many fields and subfields of academic research. While departments may have a broad range of research expertise, advisers and topics go together. Students may need to adjust their research topics in order to align them with faculty expertise if they wish to complete the degree. This is particularly true if a student needs to switch an adviser for any reason.

## Section 2: Who Can Be an Adviser?

Each student is responsible for identifying a research topic and securing an adviser. This means students will need to meet with faculty and discuss topics in order to find an appropriate adviser. Faculty within

departments, including and especially Directors of Graduate Studies, make every effort to assist students with securing an adviser, provided students are otherwise making satisfactory degree progress. Departments also help facilitate this process through various activities that allow students to explore research topics, including lab rotations, faculty meetings, and proseminars.

Nearly all faculty conducting active research may serve as advisers. In some departments, other career researchers have been approved by the Office of the Dean of the Faculty to serve as advisers, provided the department also allows this. Below are the various roles approved centrally to serve in an advisory capacity for graduate students. Speak with your Director of Graduate Studies or Academic Affairs in the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School to make sure your potential adviser is approved to serve in this official role, especially if you are interested in an adviser whose rank does not appear on this list.

Rank	Master's Thesis Adviser or Examination Committee	Ph.D. General Examination Committee	Ph.D. Dissertation Adviser	Ph.D. Dissertation Committee	Ph.D. Dissertation Reader	Ph.D. FPO Dissertation Defense Examiner
Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emeritus Faculty Members (1)	N(but see footnote 1)	N(but see footnote 1)	N(but see footnote 1)	N(but see footnote 1)	N(but see footnote 1)	N(but see footnote 1)
Lecturer with rank of Professor	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lecturer PPL and AOS	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lecturer ARC	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Visiting Appt (2)	Case by case	Case by case	Case by case	Case by case	Case by case	Case by case
Senior Research Scholar (3)	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Research Scholar	Case by Case	N	Case by Case	Case by Case	Case by Case	Case by Case
Associate Research Scholar	N	N	N	N	N	N
Senior Scholar (4)	N	N	N	N	Case by Case	Case by Case
Senior Professional Specialist	N	Case by Case	N	Case by Case	Case by Case	Case by Case
Professional or Assoc. Prof. Specialist (5)	N	N	N	N	N	N
Senior Lecturer	N(6)	N	N	N	N	N
Lecturer	N(6)	N	N	N	N	N
Instructor	N	N	N	N	N	N
Postdoctoral Researcher	N	N	N	N	N	N

- 1) Emeritus faculty members may serve in Ph.D. advising, thesis reading, and examining roles only if they were the student's adviser or committee member prior to retiring.
- 2) Decision is made case by case based on the visitors' credentials from their home institutions as well as their PU appointments.
- 3) Also includes the rank of Principal Research Physicist, PPL only
- 4) Senior Scholars are not eligible to serve in official advising or committee roles, except for emeritus faculty members appointed to this rank.
- 5) Professional specialists may not serve on generals or Ph.D. committees, except for Art Museum curators, who are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 6) Senior Lecturers and Lecturers in the Department of Computer Science may be approved on a case-by-case basis to supervise the work of master's degree students.

### Section 3: How to Find the Right Adviser

To help you get the most out of your graduate experience, it is important to find an adviser that not only shares your research interests, but also has similar expectations about graduate education, time commitments, priorities, and professional development. In nearly all productive adviser/advisee relationships, the adviser and the student have similar goals and aligned expectations. In order to determine whether your goals, priorities, and expectations are aligned, it is best to meet with potential advisers to find a match that works well for you.

The first step to identifying the right adviser is for you to explore your research interests and potential research topics. You will be working on a research topic for a few years, so it's important to pick a topic that you enjoy. Identifying a topic of interest will help you narrow down potential adviser choices.

Once you have identified a topic and a short list of potential advisers, you need to identify what you expect from the adviser/advisee relationship. Taking the time to ask yourself some of the following questions can help you identify what you're expecting from a potential adviser.

- What type of research do I want to do?
- What type of academic support structure will I need to be successful?
- Do I work best independently or collaboratively?
- How often do I expect to speak with my adviser?
- How do I handle both positive and negative feedback?
- How much emotional support will I need, and where can I get it?
- What support do I need from my adviser and what support would I be comfortable seeking from other mentors?

Once you've considered what you would like from your adviser and your graduate experience, it's important to speak with faculty members you have an interest in working with to determine what they expect from their students and to learn more about their type of advising style. Meeting with faculty members and discussing some of the following questions may help you understand their advising style, their expectations of their students, and how compatible you are.

- How often does the adviser meet with students – pre-generals and post-generals?
- How does the adviser help their students prepare for major program requirements, such as generals or the dissertation?
- How quickly and often does the adviser provide feedback to students?
- What is the typical time commitment the adviser expects from students?
- What role does the adviser prefer to play in their students' professional and personal development and job search?
- How does the adviser handle credit and authorship for work with multiple authors?
- How much independence does the adviser expect of students? Does this expectation change over time?

Do students start out working on their own projects, or do they work on pre-existing projects? It's also a good idea to speak with other graduate students, especially those advised by faculty members you are interested in working with. Other students will have the most relevant information from the student perspective on the adviser's advising style and the adviser's overall expectations of advisees. Discussing some of the following questions with current advisees will help you understand the type of training you would receive from your intended adviser.

- How closely do the students work with the adviser?
- How frequently is the adviser available?
- What is the adviser's preferred method of communication?
- What type of feedback is provided? How often?
- How are authorship and credit handled?
- Does the adviser help with career searches, or are students expected to do this on their own?
- What is the average time for a student to finish the Ph.D. with this adviser?
- Do students typically publish and attend conferences throughout their research, or only at the end of their research?
- Do students feel like the adviser advocates for them?
- What types of mentorship is provided? Is this an area of strength for the adviser?
- What other mentoring resources are helpful? What resources do students need to seek out?

#### **Section 4: How to Work with Your Adviser**

The relationship between adviser and advisee is central to the experience of students in research-based graduate study. However, all adviser/advisee relationships are different. There is an entire spectrum of what your relationship can look like. Some advisers and advisees are in constant contact and collaborate on many ideas, while others have a relationship where the advisee works more independently. All of these variations are fine, provided both parties are contributing and feel they are getting what they need out of the advising relationship. Try not to worry if your relationship looks different from others.

While advising graduate students is an important part of the role faculty play at the University, it is not the only hat they wear. Whoever eventually serves as your adviser has other commitments, both personal and professional. They will be teaching classes, serving on University committees, advising undergraduate students, and conducting their own research. In short they too are busy people.

In order to get the most out of your time together, keep the following information in mind:

- Be prepared. Have an agenda or discussion points for meetings, and submit the most finished drafts well in advance of submission deadlines.
- Take the initiative. Schedule meetings, develop a work plan, and identify goals with your adviser.
- Take feedback well. Make sure to incorporate your adviser's feedback and comments in manuscript and chapter drafts, and learn from that feedback so that you draw on it in future work.

- Plan ahead. When asking for revisions or feedback, provide adequate time for your adviser to respond. When requesting letters of recommendation or support for fellowships or grants, provide an updated CV and adequate time to prepare the materials.
- Do your research. If you are interested in professional or academic opportunities, seek out the information to discuss with your adviser. Complete background reading and gather materials on new projects that are of interest to you.

### **Section 5: How to Get What You Need From Advising**

Advisers often have multiple skill sets and can support advisees equally well in several areas, including research, writing, teaching, presentations, and grant-writing. Most advisers are better in some areas than others. It is impossible for one person to be an expert in every area in which you may feel you need guidance. It is helpful to define for yourself areas in which you require support from your adviser and other areas where you would like guidance but feel comfortable seeking support from other resources.

While we know that most advisers provide much more than the minimum levels of advising we expect, at minimum all students should receive the following components of advising:

- An introduction to accepted practices in the field regarding publishing, conferences, and professional connections.
- Training in responsible research practices to ensure all research is done according to field and federal guidelines.
- A healthy and respectful research environment.
- Regular feedback on work.
- Adequate time to incorporate feedback.
- Assistance fulfilling department requirements.
- Continued advising during leaves and sabbaticals and a point of contact in the department during those periods.

You may also develop your own additional requirements you feel you need to be successful. If there is something in particular that you feel is important to your success, it is helpful to discuss this directly with your current adviser or any potential advisers. Clearly stated expectations are always helpful in avoiding miscommunications or misaligned expectations.

While an adviser can be many things to a student, they do not give all the guidance, feedback, and support a student might want. Provided you have all the support from your adviser that you need to move your research forward, you do not have an advising problem. However, you may feel you might benefit from additional advising and mentoring. The first thing to keep in mind is that your adviser is not going to be the only faculty member with a vested interest in your graduate work and your long-term success. Each graduate student is required to have a general examination committee, a minimum of two dissertation readers to meet Graduate School requirements (some departments may require more), and a minimum of three examiners at the final public oral, which is a defense of the dissertation (again, some departments may require more than the minimum Graduate School requirements). Graduate School requirements ensure an educational structure that provides guidance and support from multiple faculty members. One person on your committee may have an interesting research

perspective, while another is an amazing teacher and mentor, and a third can provide great feedback on paper and chapter drafts. Differently faculty with whom you will work have different strengths, so learn from all of them!

Even after building a network of faculty support, you may still have a lengthy list of areas where you would like additional support. Princeton is a campus with many resources that exist to help you complete your degree and prepare you for your chosen career. Most graduate students will need to develop a network of mentors and support resources outside their departments to further assist them during their time in graduate school. Additional mentoring and support can come from a variety of areas, and you should explore what is available beyond your department or program.

The offices and centers listed below are here to support you in a variety of ways.

### University Academic and Support Resources

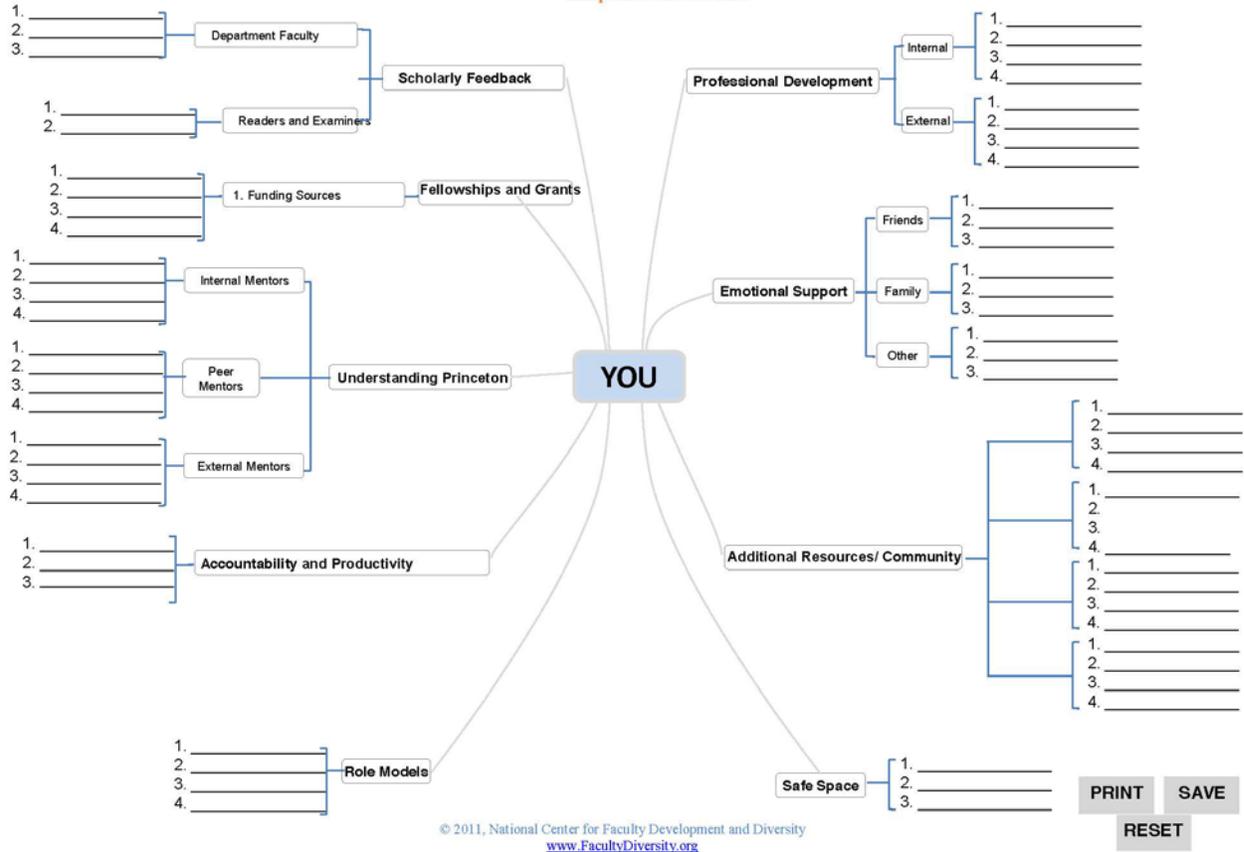
Support Needed	Resource	Website	Program Offerings
Professional Development Offerings	Office of the Dean of the Graduate School	<a href="https://gradschool.princeton.edu/professional-development">https://gradschool.princeton.edu/professional-development</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University Administrative Fellows</li> <li>Professional Development boot camps and workshops</li> <li>Funding opportunities</li> </ul>
Learning Support	McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning	<a href="https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduate-student-academic-consultations">https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduate-student-academic-consultations</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual learning consultations</li> <li>Workshops on time management, developing a writing plan, and effective study habits</li> </ul>
Teaching Resources	McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning	<a href="https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduate-students">https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduate-students</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AI Orientation for first time AIs</li> <li>Pedagogy workshops</li> <li>Teaching consultations</li> </ul>
Writing Support	Princeton Writing Program	<a href="https://writing.princeton.edu/">https://writing.princeton.edu/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one writing consultations</li> <li>Dissertation boot camps</li> <li>Courses on writing in Science and Engineering</li> </ul>
Fellowship Assistance	PIVOT	<a href="https://www.princeton.edu/orpa/funding-funding/pivot/">https://www.princeton.edu/orpa/funding-funding/pivot/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assistance identifying external fellowship and grant sources</li> </ul>
Career Guidance	Career Services	<a href="https://careerservices.princeton.edu/graduate-students">https://careerservices.princeton.edu/graduate-students</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one career advising</li> <li>Career exploration workshops, mini-courses, and learning labs</li> <li>Department-specific workshops and programs</li> </ul>
Acclimating to the culture of the U.S.	Davis International Center	<a href="https://davisic.princeton.edu/">https://davisic.princeton.edu/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tea and Talk</li> <li>International Advising</li> <li>CPT/OPT workshops</li> </ul>
English Language Support	The English Language Program	<a href="https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduates/english-language-program">https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/graduates/english-language-program</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English language instruction</li> <li>Conversation partners</li> </ul>
Educational Accommodations	Office of Disability Services	<a href="https://ods.princeton.edu/">https://ods.princeton.edu/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accommodations to support students with disabilities</li> </ul>

To help you identify where you might seek academic and professional support, the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity developed a mentoring map to help graduate students and other scholars identify their support people in various areas, including academic support, personal support,

writing, teaching, and funding. Use this worksheet to help you identify a wide network of support and guidance beyond your research adviser in order to create the advising structure that works best for you.

## Mentorship Map For Graduate Students

adapted from NCDFF



### Section 6: What to Do When Encountering Challenges

Most graduate students go through graduate school without encountering major conflicts. Occasionally a graduate student will encounter minor conflicts with their adviser or other issues that impact progress. Most of these issues can be sorted out and can often be solved by clear communication between the student and the adviser. If you find yourself in this situation, it is helpful to speak with other trusted faculty members, including and especially your Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). You may also take advantage of the advising resources at the Graduate School to help you navigate any small bumps in your relationship with your adviser.

In rare instances graduate students encounter major issues that may impact their status and enrollment at the University and may interrupt progress toward degree. If you encounter these issues, it is important to know the resources available to support you and the policies and procedures in place to help you resolve the issue.

If you encounter a concern with your adviser, the first point of contact would be your DGS. Every department and program has a DGS who is appointed by the department to assist graduate students in meeting degree milestones and completing the degree. The DGS is often a helpful resource for students who wish to understand options within the department to help address a concern. If the DGS is not able to resolve the issue, you may also speak with the department chair to help resolve the concern. Department chairs are responsible for the wellbeing of the department as a whole and can assist students in difficulty.

You are also able to meet with the academic affairs deans in the Graduate School, who can advise you on Graduate School policy and help you develop strategies to address a problem. The academic affairs deans can also assist you, your adviser, and the departments in resolving concerns.

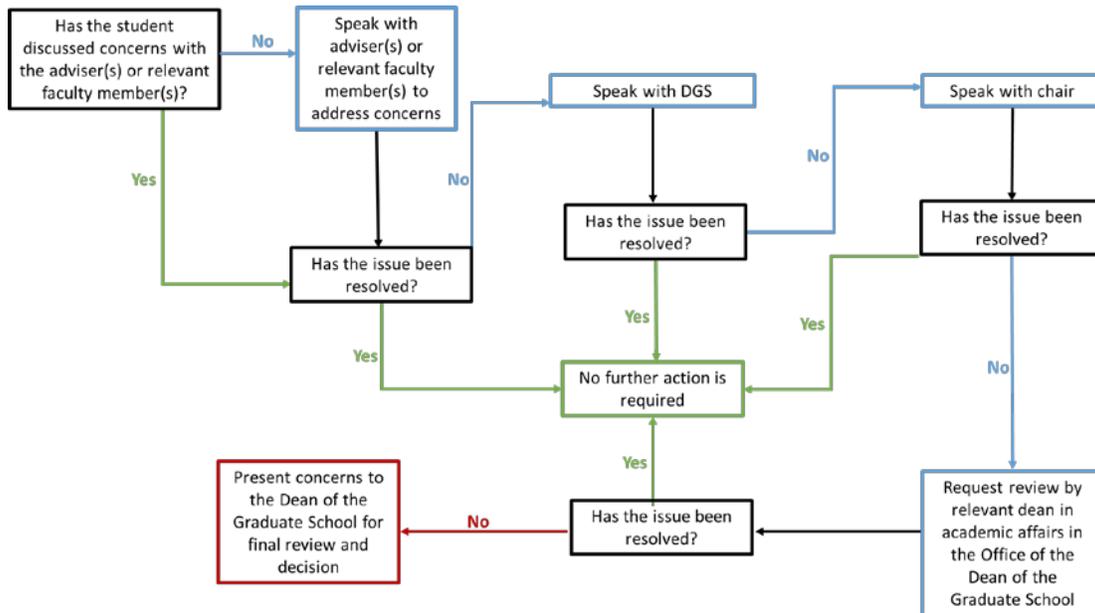
While meetings with the DGS, the department chair, and academic affairs dean are private when possible, these individuals are not confidential resources. Students may seek confidential guidance and support from the Ombud’s Office, Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS), the Office of Religious Life (ORL), and Sexual Harassment/Assault Advising, Resources and Education (SHARE). These offices offer a variety of support for graduate students experiencing concerns and can be a good first step for students wishing to explore options to address a concern before deciding to take action.

### Important Advising Contacts

Problem	Contact Name	Contact Phone	Contact Email
Academic requirements; Issues within the department; Concerns with adviser/department; Assistance navigating graduate education	Cole Crittenden;	(609) 258 – 3168	<a href="mailto:ccritt@princeton.edu">ccritt@princeton.edu</a>
	Geoffrey Hill (Hum/Soc. Sci.);	(609) 258 – 2066	<a href="mailto:gbhill@princeton.edu">gbhill@princeton.edu</a>
	Christine Murphy (Nat. Sci./Egr)	(609) 258 – 4959	<a href="mailto:cm15@princeton.edu">cm15@princeton.edu</a>
Student support; Student personal advising; Referrals to support resources	Lisa Schreyer;	(609) 258 – 3028	<a href="mailto:schreyer@princeton.edu">schreyer@princeton.edu</a>
	Nicole Barkley;	(609) 258 – 3643	<a href="mailto:nbarkley@princeton.edu">nbarkley@princeton.edu</a>
	Lily Secora;	(609) 258 – 3029	<a href="mailto:lsecora@princeton.edu">lsecora@princeton.edu</a>
	Kevin Fleming	(609) 258 – 6686	<a href="mailto:kevinaf@princeton.edu">kevinaf@princeton.edu</a>
Department climate; Diversity-related concerns; Mentoring support for diverse students	Renita Miller	(609)258-9637	<a href="mailto:renitam@princeton.edu">renitam@princeton.edu</a>
	Vanessa Gonzalez Perez	(609)258-9523	<a href="mailto:vanessagp@princeton.edu">vanessagp@princeton.edu</a>
Mental health concerns and support (including anxiety and stress)	Counseling and Psychological Services	(609) 258 - 3141	<a href="https://uhs.princeton.edu/counseling-psychological-services">https://uhs.princeton.edu/counseling-psychological-services</a>
Conflict resolution and mediation	Ombud’s Office	(609) 258 – 1775	<a href="mailto:ombuds@princeton.edu">ombuds@princeton.edu</a>
Concerns about bias and discrimination	Michele Minter	(609) 258 - 6110	<a href="mailto:mminter@princeton.edu">mminter@princeton.edu</a>
	Cheri Burgess	(609) 258 – 8555	<a href="mailto:clawson@princeton.edu">clawson@princeton.edu</a>
	Renita Miller	(609)258-9637	<a href="mailto:renitam@princeton.edu">renitam@princeton.edu</a>
	Vanessa Gonzalez-Perez	(609)258-9523	<a href="mailto:vanessagp@princeton.edu">vanessagp@princeton.edu</a>
Concerns about gender discrimination and sexual misconduct	Regan Crotty	(609) 258 – 7411	<a href="mailto:rehunt@princeton.edu">rehunt@princeton.edu</a>

## Section 7: Student Academic Grievances

On rare occasions a graduate student will feel their concern has not been properly addressed by the adviser even after communicating directly about it, or may feel treated unfairly in a matter related to their academic record. If this happens during your academic career, you may wish to initiate the academic grievance process. This process is outlined in the chart below and begins with a conversation with your DGS and/or chair of the department. Grievances that are not properly resolved on the department level are turned over to a dean in academic affairs for review. If you are not satisfied with the resolution to the grievance proposed by academic affairs, you may request a final review and decision by the dean of the Graduate School. Grievance resolutions issued by the dean of the Graduate School are final.



Some material and organizational structure of this guide was adapted from *How to Get the Mentoring You Want: A Guide for Graduate Students*, 2015 Rackham Graduate School, the University of Michigan. Material in section 5 was adapted from *Effective Practices and Expectations for Faculty Mentors and Ph.D. Advisees*, Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University <https://gsas.columbia.edu/effective-practices-and-expectations-faculty-mentors-and-phd-advisees>