Advising Philosophy
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The basic idea in advising is for the faculty member to help the student accomplish what the student wants. Sometimes the student wants things that aren’t feasible or rule-following, and then the advisor needs to try to steer the student to another path.

Some of the advisor’s responsibilities are to make sure the student knows what is expected of him/her, and at what points. Taking care of the coursework details and expected progress schedule are joint responsibilities, with the advisor mentioning rules from time to time and the student diligently carrying out the various elements of his/her program. It’s very desirable if the student knows the rules as well as the advisor. Scheduled meetings are a good idea if the student and advisor don’t happen to be sharing any classes or projects that semester.

Another key advisor responsibility is to keep an eye on the student’s career progress. Students aren’t expected to know as much as faculty about the academic profession. Advisors need to help students get properly credentialed so that they have the desired range of employability after graduation. This involves aiming the student at research projects that will result in convention papers and publications. It will also involve some mentoring about developing an attractive teaching record. I don’t know much about non-academic employment, so the student would have to be pretty proactive if that were the career aim.

By far the best advisor-student relationships occur when the advisor and student have a substantial overlap in their academic interests. That way, they can work together and learn from one another while doing research. A student beginning his/her career is just beginning to acquire professional mastery of various methodologies, and as graduate school continues those masteries mature. In the first year or so of graduate school, the student normally has a sort of apprentice status on research projects, doing various basic tasks but shadowing the whole project. The student’s research involvement and responsibility should increase during his/her graduate career, moving in a general progression from trail author to second author to first author to sole author. In the beginning the faculty member will probably initiate the research projects, but after a while the student should be able to do that as well. Particularly after a year or two, the student’s research should be more or less aimed at a specialty or dissertation area.

Students should also feel free to work with faculty other than their advisor and should seek out chances to work with fellow students as well. It is good to see how other people think about research and how they work.

Advisors and advisees should be nice to one another. This is a more important and involving connection than that between an undergraduate advisor and an undergraduate major. This relationship often develops into a friendship that lasts beyond graduate school, and that’s one of the things faculty really value about it.