

## **Guidelines for graduate student advising and mentoring**

### **Department of Fire Protection Engineering**

The Department of Fire Protection Engineering (FPE) offers a Master of Science (MS) program that includes a MS Thesis research project and therefore requires advising by one (or several) member(s) of the FPE Faculty. Advising and mentoring of graduate students is an integral part of the research experience provided by the FPE MS degree program and it is understood that the general goal of excellence in research requires excellence in mentoring.

The present document establishes the general expectations for advisors and advisees during the mentoring relationship.

- Each student in the FPE MS degree program is required to identify a Thesis advisor and a Thesis project. The Thesis advisor is a member of the FPE Faculty.
- The process of identifying a Thesis advisor and a Thesis project should be completed by the end of the student's first term in the MS degree program. Before this process is completed, the Director of Graduate Studies acts as the student's mentor. After this process is completed, the Thesis advisor is the student's mentor. The following assumes that the Thesis advisor has been identified and that the mentoring relationship has therefore been established.
- Advisors are expected to present each advisee with an interaction plan that includes regular project meetings (with a typical frequency of one project meeting per week). These interactions can be one-on-one meetings or group meetings, and the format may be in-person meetings or virtual meetings using a remote communication system. These meetings must provide an opportunity for the advisor and advisee to:
  - Define the objectives and expected outcomes of the research project;
  - Define a roadmap to reach the stated objectives;
  - Review progress in the research project;
  - Review progress in the communication assignments associated with the research project (*e.g.*, preparing an oral presentation of the results of the research project, writing a progress report, writing the MS Thesis, preparing a communication for a meeting or a conference, preparing a publication to be submitted to a scientific journal, *etc*)
  - Provide feedback and constructive criticism;
  - Discuss possible difficulties within the project;
  - Discuss possible difficulties outside of the project (*e.g.*, course load, impact of extra-curriculum activities, other factors, *etc*);
  - Review and update as needed the long-term objectives and expected outcomes of the project;
  - Articulate short-term objectives and expected outcomes of the project (*e.g.*, until the

next meeting);

- Hold regular conversations about mutual expectations, including both short- and long-term expectations.
- Wherever and whenever possible, advisors are expected to integrate the advisee into a welcoming teamwork environment in which the advisee can interact with other students, researchers and Faculty members who can provide in turn frequent social exchanges and additional opportunities for technical support of the research project.
- Advisors and advisees are expected to communicate regularly not only during their scheduled project meetings but also through other appropriate media (*e.g.*, email, messaging apps, phone, *etc.*). Advisors and advisees are expected to be responsive during these communications (*e.g.*, no more than two business days under normal circumstances, no more than one week in times of special circumstances).
- Advisors and advisees are expected to interact with transparency, respect, and trust, and always in a professional manner.
- Advisors and advisees are expected to communicate their scheduled periods of absence with advance notice. Note that graduate students who have an assistantship are allowed some “Time Away from Duty” with reasonable advance notice and prior approval from their Advisor (see <https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships/#text>).
- Advisors are invited to pay particular attention to inclusion and equity for all students as well as to create a diverse and welcoming environment in their research group (see <https://fpe.umd.edu/diversity-commitment>).
- In case of dissatisfaction and/or disagreement in a mentoring relationship, a first step is for the advisor and the advisee to hold a one-on-one meeting and try to resolve contentious issues in an amicable way. If this first step does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, then a second step is for the advisor or the advisee to notify the Director of Graduate Studies of the FPE Department. This second step triggers what is referred to below as a conflict-resolution plan. In this second step, both the advisor and the advisee will be asked to describe the problem(s) in their mentoring relationship and if possible, to articulate option(s) for a resolution. At this point, and after consultation with the advisor and the advisee, the Director of Graduate Studies will propose a plan that aims at a successful completion of the student’s MS degree while minimizing disruption. This conflict-resolution plan may include a termination of the mentoring relationship and the identification of a new Thesis advisor and Thesis project.
- The conflict-resolution plan proposed by the Director of Graduate Studies will be documented in writing as a Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME, see Appendix A below) signed by both the advisor and the advisee. The SME will be evaluated jointly by the advisor, the advisee, and the Director of Graduate Studies at the end of each academic term until the successful completion of the student’s MS degree.
- UMD Graduate School Resources:
  - Advisor Policy (<https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/school->

[policies/](#)

- Working with Graduate Students: A Mentoring Guide  
(<https://gradschool.umd.edu/postdocs/mentoring>)
- Appendix A (see pages 4-7)

## Appendix A: Statement of Mutual Expectations For Graduate Students and their Research Advisors

The Department of Fire Protection Engineering (FPE) offers a Master of Science (MS) program that includes a MS Thesis research project and therefore requires advising by one (or several) member(s) of the FPE Faculty. Advising and mentoring of graduate students is an integral part of the research experience provided by the FPE MS degree program. A Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME) outlines in writing the nature of the mentoring relationship between the advisor and advisee. It is not a formal contract, but rather a structured conversation to ensure that the advisor and advisee share a clear understanding of what to expect from each other. In the Department of Fire Protection Engineering, the advisor and advisee are encouraged to use a SME to structure their meeting(s) and to record their mutual understanding. The advisor and advisee are required to establish a SME during the conflict-resolution phase of a mentoring relationship and as part of the conflict-resolution plan supervised by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Unit Name	
Student Name	
Student UMD ID Number	
Advisor Name	
Advisor Title	
Start Date	
End Date	

<p><b>Responsibilities of the Advisee:</b> Specify the responsibilities of the graduate student. Include their most important duties. Potential topics include specific responsibilities, goals, deliverables (if any), as well as presentation and publication of the results of the research project, and how they are to be submitted.</p>

**Responsibilities of the Advisor:** Specify the responsibilities of the research advisor. Potential topics include how the advisee will receive continuing guidance and support, times when the advisor will be available to meet, any training schedule, and resources to be made available.

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**Scheduling:** When the research duties are to be performed, including work hours, regularly scheduled meetings, degree of flexibility in work schedule, and personal and sick leave procedures.

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**Worksites:** Locations where the research duties are to be performed. If a significant portion of the responsibilities will be satisfied remotely, advisors should provide guidance on expectations and limitations.

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**Health & Safety:** Specify procedures that may be required to ensure the health and safety of the advisor and advisee during the assistantship (*e.g.*, safety procedures in research laboratory, special procedures during in-person meetings, special needs, *etc*)

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**Procedures and Best Practices:** Required training, standard methods, required record-keeping, security protocols, and/or procedures for management of research laboratory.

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**Organizational Culture:** Considerations such as office space, workspace, dress codes, appropriate titles and means of address, and/or team norms.

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<b>Other comments:</b>

Please note that all graduate assistantships are subject to University of Maryland policies and procedures as set forth in the Graduate Catalog: [academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships](http://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships). Nothing in the SME should contradict them, but if they do, the Graduate Catalog policies and procedures govern.

**The graduate student and research advisor have met in person or synchronously online to review and discuss this agreement on the date noted below. The graduate student was given an opportunity to ask and receive answers to any questions about the assistantship:**

Student Signature	
Date	

Advisor Signature	
Date	

**Both the advisor and advisee will keep a copy of this SME document. During the conflict-resolution phase of a mentoring relationship, a copy will also be provided to the FPE Director of Graduate Studies.**