

Dealing with the Anti-Mentor

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Dealing with the Anti-Mentor: Session Outline

Karen Colley

Anti-Mentors: Who are they and what can Graduate Deans do to lessen/stop their behavior?

Sherri Irvin

Policies and Practices to Address Anti-Mentoring

Anti-Mentor Case Studies For Discussion and Report-Out

Junior Faculty STEM
Humanities Neglect
Senior Faculty STEM

Questions/Comments

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The UIC Profile

- UIC is a Highest Research Doctoral University and a Minority Serving Institution (HSI and ANNAPISI).
- UIC enrolls 7500 graduate students and offers 100 Master's, 60 Doctoral and 13 Certificate Programs.
- At UIC, faculty must hold graduate faculty status to teach and train graduate students. The Graduate College grants graduate faculty status.
- The UIC Graduate College is currently formulating both mentor training and policies and processes to address graduate student mentor misbehavior.



The Anti-Mentors-Who are They?

- The hostile-aggressive bully who is abusive, isolating, destabilizing, and creates an environment of undue pressure and overwork.
- The indecisive advisor who is inconsistent and constantly changing their mind on what the student should pursue in their research.
- The neglectful advisor who hinders the student's progress by being non-responsive, extremely hands off, or who is very busy and not around.
- The micromanaging advisor who is excessively hands on, sometimes to the point of harassment.
- The super-agreeable advisor who fails to give the student key advice and important critical feedback, hindering their progress and growth.



A Culture of Overwork and Abuse

To fundamentally change the current academic culture that tolerates overwork and abuse of graduate students, we need to change the way that all stakeholders perceive the graduate school experience and what is acceptable faculty behavior.



Graduate School: A Culture of Overwork and Abuse

How to Change This Culture?

- Clear expectations and codes of conduct for faculty mentors
- Mentor training
- Training graduate students how to be self-advocates and how to
 - (1) avoid toxic mentors and
 - (2) deal with different anti-mentoring behaviors
- Clear policies and procedures to address anti-mentoring
- Buy-in by all constituents (faculty, staff, students, upper administration, faculty governance, faculty union, faculty affairs, access and equity, legal counsel)



Changing the Culture to Encourage Good Mentoring

The Graduate College/School and each department should articulate and disseminate detailed expectations of mentor responsibilities and behavior.

Mentors should be held accountable to a senior graduate coordinator empowered by the department head.

Annual faculty review process will include an assessment of how an individual meets the mentoring expectations of the department and university.

Include effective mentoring as part of the promotion and tenure process.



Graduate Mentor Training: The CIMER Programs

CIMER (Center for Improvement of the Mentored Experience)-related mentor training programs (e.g. *Entering Mentoring*)

- Based on a facilitated discussion/activities model
- Several programs that are designed for mentoring of trainees at different stages and in different disciplines
- Comprised of a series of 8 sessions of approximately 2 hours each
- Facilitator training available



Graduate Mentor Training: UIC Mentor Training Pilot

Goals

- To create a mentor training that can be adapted for faculty in a variety of disciplines who are mentoring trainees at different levels.
- To create a mentor training of manageable length that will be required of all new faculty and especially those seeking graduate faculty status.



Graduate Mentor Training: UIC Mentor Training Pilot

Structure (A shortened version of CIMER Mentor Training)

- One 3-hour session or two 1.5-hour sessions.
- Mix didactic informative sections with facilitated discussion in smaller groups and tailor case studies and activities to specific mentor groups.

Topics

- Mentoring best practices and what makes a good mentor
- Building a relationship with your mentee and maintaining effective communication
- Aligning mentor-mentee expectations and the mentoring contract
- Assessing understanding and performance and building mentee confidence
- Addressing equity and inclusion



Policies and Procedures for Non-Renewal of Graduate Faculty Status

- Change graduate faculty status from a life-time right to time-limited privilege and renewed based on satisfactory fulfillment of graduate faculty responsibilities.
- Make it easy for good graduate student mentors and teachers to renew status.
- Establish a detailed process for non-renewal of status and granting of limited status that is led by the graduate college/school with departmental and academic college involvement and support, and that includes provisions for
 - Protected reporting of anti-mentoring behavior
 - Investigation
 - Sufficient due process for the faculty member

**IT IS ESSENTIAL TO GET SUPPORT FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS FOR
THE POLICY AND PROCESS!**

A toxic culture of overwork: Inside the graduate student mental health crisis.

By Allison Harman in the Stanford Daily

<https://www.stanforddaily.com/2019/03/13/a-toxic-culture-of-overwork-inside-the-graduate-student-mental-health-crisis/>

Toxic Academic Mentors August 12, 2013

By DRMellivora in the blog *Tenure, She Wrote*

<https://tenureshewrote.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/toxic-academic-mentors/>

Of monsters and mentors: PhD disasters and how to avoid them

By Contributors Times Higher Education June 1, 2017

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/monsters-and-mentors-phd-disasters-and-how-to-avoid-them>

9 Types of Difficult PhD Supervisor (And How to Domesticate Them)

By Dora Farkas in the Next Scientist

<https://www.nextscientist.com/domesticate-difficult-phd-supervisor/> she references

Top 5 Traits of the Worst Advisors

By Karen Kelsky in the blog *The Professor Is In*

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2014/02/23/the-5-top-traits-of-the-worst-advisors/>

Burn it Down: Emails of Adviser & Professor Abuse Expose Systemic Crisis in Academia

By Allison Harbin in her Post-PhD Blog August 13, 2017 in Graduate Student Rights

<https://www.allisonharbin.com/post-phd/2017/8/11/burn-it-down-emails-of-advisor-professor-abuse-expose-a-crisis-in-academia>

Toxic Mentors or Toxic Proteges: A Critical Re-examination of Dysfunctional Mentoring

By Daniel C. Feldman In Human Resource Management Review 9 (3), 247-278 (1999)


When the relationship with your PhD advisor turns toxic

In The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jan/22/when-the-relationship-with-your-phd-supervisor-turns-toxic>

Policies and Practices to Address Anti-Mentoring

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Programs Offered

- 127 master's
- 68 doctoral
- 44 graduate certificates

Degrees Conferred (2017-2018)

- 1,880 master's
- 239 doctoral
- 169 graduate certificates

DEGREES AWARDED BY LEVEL 2017-18



Level	Percentage
Bachelor's	65%
Master's	28%
Doctoral	4%
Graduate Certificate	3%

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Organizational structure

- Dean Randy Hewes is cross-appointed as Senior Associate Vice President for Research and Partnerships
- One associate dean (will add a second in July 2020)
- 22 professional staff who handle admissions, degrees/credentials, English training and certification, professional development, student and postdoc support, data and reporting

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Policy/Guidelines




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Graduate faculty status rescission and appeals process

- Time-limited appointment
- Academic units articulate standards related to mentorship
- Typically, academic unit initiates change in status
- Gets the unit thinking: what are the standards?

Discipline processes

- Provost involvement
- Letter in personnel file
- Annual evaluation




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Graduate assistant and postdoc appointment policies

- Vacation and leave
- Hours of work
- Participation in departmental events

Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Graduate Student and Postdoc Bill of Rights



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Community Building



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Aims

- Shift the culture and expectations surrounding mentorship
- Give faculty access to skills, consultation, resources: Mentors often need support
- Eliminate the tendency to sweep problems under the rug or regard them as unsolvable
- Connect every grad student to the broader community
- Give graduate students resources and options to get support or switch labs



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Initiatives

- Academic unit climate surveys for both graduate students and faculty
- Work with academic unit on climate interventions
- Workshops on recognizing and navigating academic bullying (Virginia Tech)
- Individual consultations with graduate students, faculty, department chairs; collaboration with provost's office, HR, counseling center
- Academic life coaching
- Mentoring training and guidelines: even if only the willing attend, training helps to spread competencies and shift culture



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Thanks!

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Dealing with the Anti-Mentor

Case Study #1 Junior Faculty STEM

A graduate student finds that his faculty mentor gives feedback in a way that is harsh and demoralizing. Frequently, she sends messages in the middle of the night suggesting that the student is not working hard enough. The graduate student and mentor agree on expectations for upcoming work; but the graduate student perceives that the expectations are constantly shifting, and his work never seems to be good enough no matter how hard he tries. When the student attempts to express his concerns, the mentor suggests that his work is weak, he is not cut out for graduate school, and he should leave with a master's degree.

As the graduate student's anxiety mounts, he contacts another faculty member about changing labs. The new faculty member is amenable; but now his original mentor states that she was just trying to bring out the best in him, since he seemed to respond well to pressure. She strongly urges him to stay in her lab and suggests that if he leaves, it will demonstrate his inability to persist through challenging circumstances, and he may therefore experience adverse professional consequences.

Questions to consider:

- a. As a graduate dean, how would you advise this student? Would you do this alone or bring in others? Who would those others be?
- b. As for the faculty member, this behavior is not acceptable. What would you do about it? Who would you inform?

Dealing with the Anti-Mentor

Case Study #2 Humanities Neglect

A graduate student submits dissertation chapters to her faculty mentor. The mentor takes months to give feedback on some chapters; on other chapters, no specific feedback is offered. When the graduate student attempts to schedule meetings with her mentor, the mentor frequently doesn't reply. At other times, the mentor schedules meetings but does not show up for them.

The student does her best to revise in response to the mentor's feedback. The mentor submits paperwork to the Graduate College indicating that the student's dissertation is ready to defend; however, shortly before the scheduled defense date, having actually read the latest version of the dissertation, the mentor unilaterally decides that the work is not ready to defend and the student needs another year of development prior to completion of the degree.

Questions to consider:

- a. As graduate dean, what would be your first action?
- b. Would you bring in other parties to help you advise the student? If so, who would they be and why?
- c. As for the faculty member, this behavior is not acceptable. What would you do about it? Who would you inform?

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Case Study #3 Senior Faculty STEM

A chair and director of graduate studies from a department meet with you (graduate dean) to report that a well-funded senior faculty member is bullying and abusing his graduate students—insisting on unreasonable work schedules, forcing them to work on projects that are not part of their dissertation work (including those for his company), and even going so far as to have them mow his lawn. A quick look at the case and a scan back through graduate college complaint and grievance files demonstrates that these charges are not new—this individual has a track record of bad behavior that goes back several years. An earlier attempt to correct the situation by the former graduate dean and the academic dean of the faculty member’s college, worked for a while, but the bad behavior has returned. Surprisingly, while the department chair, director of graduate studies and current academic dean believe that this individual should not be training graduate students, they are hesitant to “bring charges” against this individual for fear of retribution and ask that you (graduate dean) find a way to stop his bad behavior.

Questions to consider:

1. What would be your first priority in this situation?
2. At your institution, what policies/processes would the graduate school/college need to have in place to address this individual’s bad behavior? Does your institution have these policies and processes in place? Who at your institution would have to support (or does support) these policies/processes for effective implementation?
3. At your institution, could you take steps against this faculty member without the explicit support of the chair, director of graduate studies, and academic dean?