

## Ethical Treatment of Graduate Students

Most of the time, we are capable of deciding to do what is right without difficulty. However, there are times when making the right decision can be difficult. For example, we may face pressure from a supervisor to do something we know we should not do. We may have an opportunity to claim credit for something to enhance our own careers at a critical career junction when the credit should really go to someone else. We may need assistance with a personal matter and not have someone who can help, so we choose a subordinate who can't really say no.

Students rely on us as graduate faculty to have their best interests at the forefront and to do whatever we can in our power to promote our graduate students' careers. A clear and consistent set of ethical standards can help us to avoid the pressures and temptations of our profession and strengthen the trust and respect our graduate students have for the graduate faculty, the university, and our respective professions.

Frequently, you will see the words "...in an ethical manner...", or something similar. But what does this mean? In brief, it means to use the basic moral principles of nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, veracity, integrity, autonomy and confidentiality as you make your decisions about how to act in a given situation. Each of these can be defined briefly.

- Nonmaleficence – do no harm
- Beneficence – do good
- Justice – be fair, follow the rules
- Veracity – be honest and truthful
- Integrity – keep your promises, words and actions are in agreement
- Autonomy – respect the rights of others to make decisions for themselves
- Confidentiality – respect the rights of others to determine what you can and cannot share about them

In alignment with these basic moral principles, the following ethical guidelines have been selected from the [American Association of University Professors 2009 Statement of professional ethics](#) and The Ohio State University's 2020 Graduate School Handbook ([Graduate Advisor Responsibilities, Section H.4](#)). When in doubt about the appropriateness of a decision, these standards can help you make the right one. They can also be used when you observe a situation between a graduate student and a colleague or staff member you think might be inappropriate. Because of the inherent power differential between graduate students and faculty, graduate students depend upon faculty to speak up in their defense. Faculty have a moral obligation to speak out and protect graduate students from abusive actions by other faculty or staff. The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff publishes its code of ethical conduct in the [Faculty/Staff Handbook](#).

### Ethical treatment

- Conduct advising in an ethical manner, including when recruiting advisees.
- Be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful.
- Demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to faculty's proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors.

- Respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student.
- Be sensitive to the power differential between faculty and student
- Interact with graduate students in a professional manner.
- Protect students' academic freedom.
- Give students appropriate credit for their work (e.g., as reflected in authorship order in journal articles or books).
- Do not require that a student continue to provide a service (e.g., teaching, laboratory management, mentoring of other students, etc.) under terms that can hinder a student's degree completion.
- Avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students.
- Make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct.
- Allow reasonable time for students to prepare requested materials.
- Ensure that faculty evaluations of students reflect each student's true merit.
- Respect students' academic and non-academic commitments and responsibilities.

### Communication

- Maintain open lines of communication with graduate students, including those enrolled in distance programs.
- Communicate clear intentions, expectations, and requirements to potential and current students, including:
  - how long the advisor expects to stay in his or her current position
  - the amount of funding support available to graduate students
  - time to degree completion and publication expectations
- Initiate conversations about problems immediately so both parties can remedy issues expediently. Students may not initiate conversations because of the power differential in the relationship.
- Initiate conversations about academic progress.
- Initiate conversations with students about career goals.
- Support traditional and non-traditional career goals.
- Provide periodic and regular evaluations of progress toward degree.
- Provide prompt and honest feedback on students' work.
- Provide timely written feedback on students' professional writing (article drafts, dissertation chapter drafts, etc.).

- Communicate with the co-advisor (if there is more than one thesis or dissertation chair), the student's thesis or dissertation committee and the Graduate Coordinator regarding the student's program of study.

### Professional development of graduate students

- Provide every graduate student an environment that is intellectually stimulating.
- Help graduate students develop professional skills that will make them competitive for employment in their given field.
  - Encourage students to take part in activities that will enrich their academic development, e.g., by participating in professional conferences and other networking activities. Make an effort to help students secure funding for such activities.
  - Facilitate the training of graduate students in complementary skills needed to be a successful researcher; these may include oral and written communication skills, grant writing, lab management, animal and human research policies, the ethical conduct of research, and scientific professionalism
  - Encourage students to seek additional opportunities in career development training
  - Be committed to mentoring graduate students and to their education and training in an effort to prepare them as future members of the scholarly community
  - Foster the graduate students' professional confidence and encourage critical thinking, skepticism and creativity
- Be committed to helping plan and direct the research project of the graduate student, set reasonable and attainable goals, and establish a timeline for completion
- Be committed to meeting with graduate students on a regular basis and provide resources as appropriate for them to conduct thesis/dissertation research
- Provide career advice and assist in finding a position for graduate students following graduation, while providing honest letters of recommendation for the next phase of their professional development, and being accessible to give advice and feedback on career goals

### Administrative

- Be knowledgeable about, and guide graduate students through, the requirements and deadlines of their graduate program as well as those of the university
- Make sure students have appropriate administrative trainings, e.g., Institutional Animal Care and Use, Institutional Review Board (human subjects), lab safety, Title IX training, research misconduct, academic misconduct and intellectual property.
- Help the graduate student select a thesis/dissertation committee and ensure that this committee meets at least annually, or more frequently according to program guidelines, to review the graduate student's progress.

- Discuss authorship policies regarding papers with the graduate student and acknowledge the graduate student's contributions to projects beyond his or her own, and work with the graduate student to publish his/her work in a timely manner.
- Discuss intellectual policy issues with the student in regard to disclosure, patent rights and publishing research discoveries, when they are appropriate.

## Additional Resources

Löfström, E. 2019. Ethics in doctoral supervision – what is it and how does it matter? Ethz doctoral supervision symposium January 24-25, 2019, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland.

<https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/doctorate/files-EN/doctoral-symposium/presentation-erika-loefstroem.pdf> Accessed 1/20/2021

Graduate Medical Sciences at Boston University School of Medicine. Appropriate treatment in graduate education. <https://www.bumc.bu.edu/gms/students/atge/> Accessed 1/20/2021

Repak, N. 2018. The professor/grad relationship. <https://gradresources.org/profgrad-relationships/> Accessed 1/20/2021

Modern Language Association. 2019. Report of the MLA task force on ethical conduct in graduate education. <https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Executive-Council/Executive-Council-Actions/2020/Report-of-the-MLA-Task-Force-on-Ethical-Conduct-in-Graduate-Education> Accessed 1/19/2021