

Dear reader,

The Bredesen Center student advisory council formed a committee to prepare a draft document suggesting a set of best practices for graduate students and their advisors. The committee was composed of representatives of (i) Bredesen Center students pursuing the Energy Science & Engineering PhD and the Data Science & Engineering PhD, (ii) staff scientists at Oak Ridge National Laboratory who serve as graduate student advisors to Bredesen Center students and (iii) tenured faculty members at the University of Tennessee who sit on the doctoral committees of Bredesen Center students. This document is to be delivered to the Bredesen Center program administration for final processing and approval.

As part of the preparatory work, the committee examined comparable documents taken from other institutions. In full disclosure, some of the best practices outlined below were taken verbatim or paraphrased from these student/advisor agreements. In particular, [an example from the University of Pennsylvania](#) is recognized as a model which greatly influenced the content here.

This document is intended to lay out best practices. It is to be used in the context with a set of policies that address procedures to be invoked if a student/advisor pair is unable to come to an agreement over acceptable progress. This document explicitly does not outline the details of these procedures, though members of the committee agreed that this best practices document should be accompanied by a policy & procedures companion document.

Below, best practices are provided first for the graduate student and second for the advisor. These best practices are organized around three aspects: advocacy, professionalism, and communication.

Thank you,  
Student-Advisor Responsibility Committee

## **Graduate Student Responsibilities**

By entering a doctoral program, a graduate student agrees to commit significant time and energy to complete novel research leading to a dissertation and graduation in a timely manner. The student must conform to all university and departmental policies as well as a number of explicit student responsibilities that are listed below, grouped into major themes:

### Self-advocacy:

- Be a student; graduate students have an obligation to develop intellectual breadth and depth through research, course work and the pursuit of professional development opportunities. Graduate students are not solely researchers, lab assistants, or technicians but are early-career professionals actively engaged in learning.
- Graduate students must work with their advisors to select and plan an original research topic that can be successfully completed within an expected time frame for the elected degree program. The graduate student must also establish, with their advisors, a realistic timetable for completion of various phases of their degree.
- Graduate students must think critically about their career trajectory and mindfully pursue opportunities that support their career goals including, for example, opportunities for teaching, publishing, presenting, externships, funding, etc.
- The primary measure of graduate student success is completion of the PhD degree. Dissertation research by the graduate student should not be marginalized by tangential work that may provide a peripheral benefit. The graduate student has the responsibility to communicate to the advisor the need to stay on target toward their degree.

### Professionalism and academic integrity:

- Graduate students are expected to abide by the university code of conduct.
- A graduate student must contribute to maintaining a research environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment.

### Communication:

- A graduate student must communicate regularly with their research advisor and provide updates on the progress and results of ongoing research.
- Graduate students have a responsibility to keep advisors informed on how they can be contacted and inform them of any significant changes that may affect the progress of the research.

## **Advisor Responsibilities**

By agreeing to advise a graduate student, the advisor has a responsibility to support the continued educational and professional growth of the student. In addition, the advisor agrees to advocate for the graduate student's success, professional development, and timely completion of all required milestones for the student's graduation. The advisor must conform to all university and departmental policies as well as a number of explicit responsibilities are listed below grouped into major themes:

### **Student advocacy:**

- Advisors are not strictly research managers. Their primary responsibility in their advising role is to guide graduate students to ensure that students successfully complete their degree in a timely manner.
- Graduate advisors guide the student in the selection and planning of an original research topic that can be successfully completed within the expected time frame for the degree program and establish, with the student, a realistic timetable for completion of various phases of their degree.
- The graduate advisor has a responsibility to ensure that the student has sufficient resources available to complete the agreed upon dissertation research.
- Graduate advisors have a responsibility to prepare students for success after graduation. This may include encouraging publication of results in professional journals, presentation of results at professional conferences, and exposure to other professional development opportunities.

### **Professionalism:**

- Graduate student advisors must think critically about the career trajectory of their students and mindfully pursue opportunities to support their career goals. Advisors have a responsibility to align a graduate students' effort with the agreed upon research plan.
- Graduate student advisors must be sensitive to the academic needs and concerns of their students.
- Graduate student advisors must contribute to maintaining a research environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment.

### **Communication:**

- Graduate student advisors should meet regularly with their students and provide feedback on the progress and results of ongoing research.
- In addition to research feedback, the graduate advisor has a responsibility to provide regular communication with the graduate student about project updates, the availability of resources, and general expectations.

- The graduate advisor has a responsibility to communicate in a timely manner if the student's academic or research performance is not meeting expectations. This may include providing an outline of what actions needed to return to good standing, and a timeline for doing so. While dealing with inadequate performance can be difficult, it is in no one's best interests to prolong a program of study if success is unlikely.

**Process for Resolution:**

- BC staff is notified of conflict (progress report, ad hoc discussions, survey, etc.)
- Staff work with student and/or faculty to understand the situation and propose potential next steps. Options may include, but are not limited to:
  - Discussion to develop communication and academic plan among student, faculty, with BC facilitation
  - Collaborative mentoring with involvement from doctoral committee
  - Individual or Group discussion with University Ombudsperson (confidential resource)
- Regular follow up discussion is encouraged

**University Policy:**

For more information about the policies which inform these guidelines, please see the following:

**UT Graduate School:** <https://catalog.utk.edu/index.php?catoid=33>

**UT HR:** <https://policy.tennessee.edu/policytech-policies/pt-sw-hr/>

**Bredesen Center Handbook:** <https://bredesencenter.utk.edu/policies/>