

Introduction to the student-advisor relations questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help provide structure to the portion of the student committee meeting where the advisor leaves the room. This allows you to raise concerns with your committee that you don't feel comfortable voicing in the presence of your advisor for whatever reason. The majority of these questions were written to be food for thought, and your committee will only ask you the broad questions pertaining to each theme (*shown in italics*). Bring this sheet along with you or keep it private, it's up to you. It might even be worthwhile to file it away until next year to see how well any issues have been resolved.

While completing this questionnaire, it is worthwhile to consider the following:

- How often does this happen?
- How many of these issues can you solve on your own?
- Do you feel that any of these issues can be resolved by talking with your advisor instead of your committee?
- How can your committee help? Do you want advice or action?
- Do you want each issue you raise to be on the record or off the record? (Make it clear!)
- Do you want/need to have a separate meeting?

Theme 1: Relationship with your advisor (and other faculty members)

This theme is about how you interact with your advisor on an interpersonal level. The focus is given to communication issues or personality differences in your relationship. If you collaborate with other professors or senior members in the lab, and feel like you cannot voice such issues with your advisor, or they are not being resolved by your advisor, you can also raise them here.

Have you experienced, or are you currently experiencing, any communication issues or conflict with your advisor (or other faculty member) that you would like to discuss?

Brainstorming Questions:

- Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
- Do you know where you stand with your advisor?
- Do you get positive feedback / reward / encouragement?
- Have they been negative or aggressive in any way towards you?
- Do you feel you can say no?
- Is your advisor giving you undue pressure?
- Do you work together to set goals for projects, significant milestones, graduating?
- Do you feel you can discuss academic problems (e.g. classwork) with your advisor?
- What is one thing that you think either you or your advisor can improve about communication?

Theme 2: Professional growth

This theme is about aspects that promote your professional growth, such as TA positions, funding, conferences, rotations, collaborating, and internships.

Are you getting the support you need from your advisor in your chosen career path?

Brainstorming Questions:

- Do you have summer funding next summer?
- Do you wish to TA this year? Is your advisor supportive of this?
- Do you wish to do an internship? Have you had any difficulties discussing this option with your advisor?
- Do you feel your funding source is clearly communicated and open for negotiation if you want to teach or do an internship?
- Do you feel supported applying for conferences/fellowships/summer-schools/etc?
- Are you given opportunities to present your research at conferences or other such forums?
- Do you feel pressured by your advisor to *not* focus on things that will help you professionally but are not directly related to your research?
- Do you see yourself working in science or industry in a few years? Does your advisor assist or prevent you from achieving your goal?
- Do you want to work collaboratively with another researcher or do a lab rotation? Does your advisor support you or not in this regard?
- Do you feel that your advisor promotes you as a scientist?

Theme 3: Expectations and Work/life balance

This theme is about managing expectations from your advisor, but also vice versa: how do you feel about your expectations and do you communicate this? A part of this theme will also be about work/life balance and how you and your advisor communicate about and respect this balance.

4. *Is your advisor generally available to meet within two weeks?*
5. *Do you feel your advisor is giving you guidance when you need it?*
6. *Do you feel your advisor is giving you space when you need it?*

Brainstorming Questions:

- Are the expectations of when/how much to work reciprocal?
- Do they let you know if they won't be available (and why not) so that you can manage your own expectations?
- Are their expectations reasonable? Are you comfortable raising concerns about how quickly you could get something done?
- Do you want your advisor to ask you to do more or less?
 - Suggesting that you read more papers
 - Analyses
- Do they set reasonable deadlines? Do they *even set* deadlines?
- Is your advisor currently the bottleneck in any of your projects?
- Does your advisor have realistic expectations? Does she behave in a way that helps you meet these expectations?
- Does your advisor's interest match with yours? Are you doing the type of research you expect? If not, is it better or worse than what you expected and why?
- Is the distribution of tasks on your projects fair and reasonable, and are you acknowledged accordingly for your contribution on published and presented materials? (Are you put on some other students project?)
- Does your advisor respect your work-life balance?
 - This question raises a similar phrasing issue: Ask if there are any issues or ask specific, leading questions, such as:
 - How often do you get emails nights/weekends?
 - How often are you working nights/weekends?
 - Do you feel there is an implicit assumption to do any of the above?
 - Do you ask/have to ask for time off?
 - Do you get reprimanded for wanting time off, not responding quickly enough?
 - Are the expectations of when/how much to work reciprocal?

Theme 4: Management qualities (the lab/you as a PhD student)

This theme is about the qualities of your advisor as a manager. It could be about managing the lab and its culture or about you specifically as a PhD student. The broad questions are:

What kind of managing style does your advisor have? How does advisor organize the lab? And how do you feel about that?

Brainstorming Questions:

Managing you as a student

- How responsive is your advisor? Is that too much, good as it is, or not enough?
- How often do you meet your advisor in person or video chat? Is that too much, good as it is, or not enough?
- Does your advisor give you independence?
For example:
 - Does your advisor tell you to go get something done on your own? Does that happen often, just the right amount, or not enough?
- Does your advisor work directly with you?
For example:
 - Does your advisor make you work under the jurisdiction of a postdoc or someone else?
- Does your advisor personally follow your progress?
For example:
 - Does your advisor rely on the report of a postdoc or someone else?
- Does your advisor micromanage your technical work? Is that for better or for worse?
- Does your advisor give you helpful, instructive feedback and improve your skills as assessment as a researcher?
For example:
 - Would you like to change a particular thing about the feedback you get?
 - Would you like to do more of a particular thing (e.g. read more papers)?
 - Do you get constructive feedback/guidance within a reasonable time-frame?
- Does your advisor clearly communicate about authorships on projects? Do you think this is fair?
- Does your advisor give you deadlines? Does that happen often, just the right amount, or not enough? Is this within a reasonable time frame?
For example:
 - Do they make you edit their grants that are due very soon?
- Do you think a comparable (more formal/committee) meeting within half year with your supervisor would help, instead of just once a year? Note: You can organize an extra committee meeting in the middle of the year.

Managing the lab

- Is there anything you don't like about the lab or lab culture?
If so, how do you think your advisor can help you / influence the culture in the lab?
For example:
 - Do they promote, attend, or organize lab events (inside/outside the lab)?
 - When a particular person talks too much/very loud, do you feel comfortable telling your advisor and know (s)he will act on it?
- Does your advisor promote competition within the lab? Is that for better or for worse?
- Does your advisor let you manage undergraduates/high schoolers? Does that happen often, just the right amount, or not enough?
For example:
 - Do you feel the responsibility is clearly communicated / well distributed?
 - Do you feel pressure to take this managing position while you would rather not?
- Does your advisor treat you differently than other students?
For example:
 - Do you think they play favorites or behave unfairly to some?
- Does your advisor manage time/expectations in a reasonable way (in your opinion) when on sabbatical or when they have multiple positions between institutions?
- Does your advisor supply you with the materials and resources you need to complete your projects?

Theme 5: Thought exercises

Even if you feel happy with your relationship based on the previous questions, we'd still like you to have a chance to talk about a specific instance or aspect with your committee. Note that it needn't be an issue for which you are actively seeking advice or action. This section will give your committee an insight into your conflict management style so they can better advise you now or in the future.

2. *Give an example of a time where you were unhappy with a situation between you and your supervisor and describe if/how it was resolved.*

AND/OR:

2. *If there was one thing you could change about your advisor what would it be?*