

# GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISING STATEMENT

Bodong Chen, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota

## I. Guiding Philosophy

As a graduate<sup>1</sup> advisor, I approach every advising relationship as opportunity for me to learn *about, with, and from* my advisees. I strive to be *respectful, accessible, responsive, constructively critical, and reflective*. I commit to the following with each of my advisees.

**Embrace diversity.** As someone who grew up in rural China, studied in Beijing, received PhD training in the most multicultural city Toronto, and now works in the midwestern U.S., I believe in the power of education and recognize many realities of the “educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Every one of us is unique and has a special trajectory of growth. As an advisor, I attempt to listen to my advisees, understand their experiences, learn about their goals, and support their success. Being different makes us collectively stronger.

**Develop expertise.** Pursuing an advanced degree (PhD, Master’s) means developing expertise in a specialized area. I challenge my advisees to surpass themselves, to recognize the frontiers of relevant fields, and to contribute to the knowledge base. I also strive to encourage my advisees to cross disciplinary boundaries, develop appreciation of different scholarly paradigms, and hone skills in collaboration and communication. Being an expert nowadays is not only about knowing a lot, but also knowing where to look, how to connect dots, and how to work with people.

**Nurture responsibility.** I stress the importance of autonomy and responsibility of my advisees as they pursue their academic goals. I won’t choose the thesis topic for them. I won’t require them to align their research interests with mine. I won’t chase them just to keep them on track. Rather, I expect my advisee to be proactive, diligent in planning, and sometimes strategically adventurous. I see my role as an advisor is to help them navigate the academic system. In return, I learn from them about their discoveries.

**Invest in relations.** I value “strong ties” and believe in the power of “weak ties”. I invite students to reading groups, research meetings, happy hours, etc. I also try my best to connect advisees with people I know at conferences or on social media. For someone in academia, having one advisor is not enough. Having ten sounds about right. My goal is to help my advisees find them.

**Respect boundaries.** While I do care about each advisee as a “whole person”, I respect boundaries and do not offer unsolicited advice about their personal lives.

**Have fun.** As an academic, I find research, teaching, and advising stimulating and fun. I often share the littlest fun things with colleagues, ranging from interesting papers, PhD Comics, to geeky academic workflows. I learn about all sorts of fun things from my advisees as well. Research may not be your hobby, but I do hope you find elements of your research journey enjoyable.

---

<sup>1</sup>I advise undergraduate students as well and the same principles apply.

## II. The Advising Contract <sup>2</sup>

This part of the statement attempts to articulate specific elements of the advising relationship. This “contract” is a living document. I expect my advisees to help me improve and enrich it.

### Conduct

**University Code of Conduct.** My advisees should familiarize themselves with, and abide by, the University of Minnesota’s [Code of Conduct](#).

**Time management.** My goal is to help my advisees achieve their professional goals. For anyone, time is the most constrained resource. Therefore, I expect my advisees to learn and to practice good time management. I am happy to discuss strategies for time management including methods for prioritizing tasks.

**Relationships with other advisees.** My advisees learn the most from other students and/or colleagues. The absolutely worst advice a new graduate student gets is “they need to compete with peers.” Therefore, I expect my advisees to develop a strong professional relationship with people in our group and in the graduate program generally. This relationship should be mutually supportive, not competitive.

**Resolving conflicts.** Communication is key to minimizing conflicts. For example, this document is an effort to clearly communicate my expectations to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings between my advisees and me. If you have concerns about your interaction with me or with anyone else, please don’t hesitate to come talk with me. If you are uncomfortable speaking with me, you can reach out to the department’s Director of Graduate Studies, the Department Chair, the College HR Lead, or [the Office for Conflict Resolution](#). If you wish a conversation to remain anonymous, be sure to indicate that at the start of the conversation.

**Research transparency and reproducibility.** The importance of research transparency is increasingly recognized by the education community (e.g., [AERA](#)). No matter whether you do qualitative or quantitative research, there are ways to enhance the research transparency, which include spending time creating proper data files, making data open for other researchers unless doing so is not feasible (e.g., sensitive data), conducting all analyses using syntax (e.g., R notebooks, SPSS syntax) that is saved to the project folder on the shared drive, and explicitly rejecting questionable research practices (e.g., *p*-hacking, cherry-picking reporting). All students are expected to conduct their research according to these principles.

### Meetings and Consultation

**Group advising meetings.** I expect my advisees to attend bi-weekly group advising meetings that we jointly schedule (unless there are travels or other unavoidable conflict). Group advising meetings are paused in the summer; I generally see summer as a time of independence.

**Reading groups, “dojo” workshops, etc.** In addition to the group advising meetings, all advisees are encouraged to attend other community events I help organize. There is a *Learning Sciences reading group* I co-organize with EdPsy faculty members. There is an “LT Dojo” workshop series I

---

<sup>2</sup>Note: Content in this section was adapted from a statement shared by Prof. Moin Syed (see [link](#)) from the Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota.

launched with our own PhD students. The general purpose of these events is to a) provide a venue for students to “geek out” and socialize, b) learn how to communicate research ideas and receive constructive feedback on their work, and c) learn how to provide constructive feedback.

**Individual meetings.** When necessary, my advisees can schedule ad-hoc individual 30-minute meetings with me. To better use our time, the advisee is usually responsible for setting the agenda in advance. If advisees want to discuss specific materials (e.g., drafts of papers, applications for funding) then they should send them to me at least 24 hours prior to the meeting so that I have time for review.

**Communication.** I am available by email or face-to-face in my office. The phone is not a reliable way to reach me. I strive to keep my email response time within 48 hours, but I may sometimes not be able to do so because of competing demands on my time. For emergent matters that need my attention, I can be reached via my mobile number, WhatsApp, or other social media we use. Text messages and alike are to be used sparingly and only in matters of urgency or in other cases where immediate communication is necessary.

When an advisee needs a reference letter from me, the advisee should inform me at least one week prior to the deadline as a reminder. I will typically notify you by email when the task is completed.

## **Independence**

Although we will have several points of contact during the week, I expect my advisees to work without daily input or guidance from me. My general approach is for you to “figure it out” on your own, but contact me for support if you are stuck. Indeed, I am available for consultation, but you are expected to use your own good judgment. If an advisee needs input from me in order to move forward, it is their responsibility to seek me out or schedule a meeting. I am happy to initially provide more regular guidance to advisees who are not accustomed to working independently but by the time they reach the dissertation phase or leave the university I expect them to be able to function as independent scholars.

## **Switching Advisors and Working in Other Groups**

To me, changing advisors is totally normal and is a decision that should be led by the advisee. For our program area, each student is typically assigned an advisor upon admission. It is understandable a student may shift research interests, making it more desirable to work with a different advisor. However, to ensure a smooth transition, such a change must be mutually agreeable to all parties: student, original advisor, and new advisor. The student can also consider discussing with the DGS and Graduate Program Coordinator to get an informed opinion. But again, if a current advisee of mine wishes to switch advisor, I am (99% likely to be) fully supportive.

Every advisee is certainly welcome to work in other research groups as well. In fact, I encourage it, as working in other groups helps you diversify your research experience, exposes you to different mentoring styles and lab cultures, and allows you to build relationships with other faculty who might serve on your committees and write you letters of recommendation. Sometimes faculty will have assistantships available that they may advertise, but generally the best way to get involved in another lab is to contact the PI directly to express your interest. Be clear upfront whether you are only looking for a paid position or are just interested in “sitting in” on lab meetings. Finally,

although you are encouraged to work in other labs, if you are funded to work on a specific project (by me or someone else) that work must be your priority.

## **Publications and Authorship**

Publishing is essential for most career paths followed by my advisees. I expect my advisees to work on manuscripts for publication continuously throughout their graduate school career. By the time they graduate I expect my advisees to have multiple publications in the pipeline (published, in press, in review, in preparation). But the expectation should be set by each advisee instead of me, because each advisee would have unique career pathways and professional aspirations.

I am constantly involved in writing several manuscripts at a time, many of which involve colleagues at other universities or in other countries. Many of these papers will not involve student advisees. My general approach is to invite students to work on such papers when it is clearly related to their expressed interests and I have a sense that they can contribute to the paper. In this regard, it is very important that you communicate your interests to me, those that are both ongoing and emerging. It is difficult for me to direct papers your way when I don't know your interests!

I am also often involved by students to contribute to their research projects. I typically would agree to such collaboration if the research project is aligned with my interests and my contribution can be clearly defined.

**Authorship.** Determining authorship early is essential if we are to maintain positive relationships with our colleagues. See the *APA Style* to learn more about what can count towards authorship. Typically, if I have had significant involvement in a research project (developing the original idea, collecting data, analyzing data, and/or writing a portion of the manuscript or editing the manuscript), then I expect to be listed as an author. Usually, the first author has played the lead role in the project execution and will take the lead in writing the manuscript and overseeing the revision process. I expect the first author to retain primary responsibility for the publication process. The same general procedure applies to authorship for conference presentations as well. *A manuscript can only be submitted with approval from ALL of its co-authors.*

**Professional meetings.** Developing a professional network is essential, regardless of career path. Therefore, I expect all my advisees to attend national and international meetings and to report on their research at those meetings. Ideally, you would attend 1-2 conferences per year, pending available funds. I am happy to chat with you about how to strategize your conference attendance.

## **Funding**

**Graduate Assistantships.** The LT program area makes funding decisions *as a collective* and we are committed to funding our PhD students for minimally four years. The nature of that funding (Teaching, RA, Fellowship) is often unpredictable but there will be funding. Nevertheless, I encourage my advisees to write and submit fellowship proposals when possible. Writing such proposals is excellent experience and receiving such fellowships increases a student's competitiveness for future fellowships and jobs.

**Summer Funding.** Our program area has summer GA positions (Teaching or RA) available for students but any summer funding should be treated as extra support. If interested, students are expected to take the initiative to apply for opportunities from sources within and beyond the university.

## **Dissertation**

The dissertation is your final project prior to receiving the Ph.D. Rather than conceiving of it as a discrete and monumental experience, you should think of it as the next stage of your developing program of research. That is, from entry to the program you will be working towards developing a coherent program of research of your own. You are not expected to know what this is or what it will look like right from the beginning of graduate school! Rather, it is an evolving process that takes shape over time. Generally speaking, I expect students to be reasonably clear about their research focus by the end of the second year in the program. A student may take more or less time to finish. The key is to seek a promising path towards finishing a promising research project.

The dissertation itself should be a well-designed study or set of studies that clearly addresses gaps in the existing research base. The topic of the dissertation will be determined by the student, in consultation with me (as advisor) and the dissertation committee.