How to Get the Mentoring You Want

A Guide for Graduate Students at a Diverse University

A web version of this handbook can be obtained at:
http://www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/Publications/
For further information about the handbook or other mentoring
initiatives, contact Jayne London at jplondon@umich.edu or 734-647-6341.

Dear Reader:

You may be a graduate student in search of mentors or a faculty member who wants to take advantage of what we in Rackham have learned about graduate students and mentoring. Or you may be a staff member who mentors students as part of your job, or someone who is interested in mentoring for any variety of reasons. Whatever the case, I am confident this handbook will prove to be a useful resource.

An important part of the mission of the Graduate School is to improve the quality of the graduate student experience. To that end, we spend a considerable amount of time talking with students about their concerns and soliciting their suggestions for how to improve their experience. In our conversations with graduate students over the past several years, a common theme emerged—graduate students' desire for more mentoring. Of course, there are multiple reasons why many graduate students don't receive as much mentoring as they would like to receive, not the least of which is that most of us face many, varied, and competing demands.

Given these challenges, we believe both students and their mentors must take responsibility for taking steps to increase the amount and quality of such support. We understand that there is no substitute for a healthy relationship between mentor and mentee; this is the key to successful mentoring. This handbook has been written with a primary focus on graduate students and will be followed by a handbook that is written primarily for faculty members. It is our hope that these will prove to be helpful resources for students, faculty and staff.

The information on which the recommendations and suggestions in this handbook are based comes from interviews and conversations with a select number of students, faculty, and staff. As with all such efforts, it is impossible to know the degree to which this information reflects the thoughts and opinions of the broader populations. Nonetheless, we have taken the liberty of presenting this information as representative. We have taken this risk because we believe it is important to start somewhere, and we invite you to add your voices to those reflected in this handbook by sharing your thoughts with us. To that end, please contact Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, Jayne London, at 647-6341 or jplondon@umich.edu. Join us as we continue to discuss and address the role of mentoring in graduate education.

Earl Lewis
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs - Graduate Studies and
Dean of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies

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INTRODUCTION

This guidebook for graduate students, along with a companion handbook for faculty (*How to Mentor Graduate Students at a Diverse University),* reflects Rackham's acknowledgment of the important role mentoring plays within graduate education. We developed these handbooks to assist faculty and graduate students in forming mentoring relationships that are based on realistic goals, expectations and understandings of one another.

The idea for this guide arose from forums and discussions we held over the past two years with our graduate students. At these meetings, we asked students to identify their concerns about their graduate education. We were struck by the frequency with which students remarked that their biggest desire was for more mentoring. We heard this from students regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality, social class, disciplinary interest or departmental affiliation.

What exactly did students mean when they said they lacked a mentor? Students repeated a consistent theme - they were disappointed at not having someone who is concerned about them and how they fit into their wider discipline. They made such statements as: "I want to have a professor to talk to about issues in my field that lie beyond my research topic." "I want to have someone who is willing to teach me about what it means to be a professional in my field." "I want someone who cares enough about me that they are willing to help open doors leading to funding or future job opportunities."

The first section of this guide (*Developing Relationships with Mentors)* focuses on how graduate students can identify and interact with potential mentors. The information contained in these pages was distilled from numerous discussions with faculty and advanced graduate students as well as from some of the better mentoring handbooks developed by other universities and professional associations.

As we explored the topic of mentoring, it became clear to us that we also needed to acknowledge that graduate student mentoring does not take place within a social and political vacuum. Instead, the University of Michigan is comprised of a diverse graduate student body. At Rackham we have had the unique opportunity of hearing from groups of students who have been historically underrepresented or marginalized in higher education, and as a result we have come to learn about some of the unique sets of challenges they face in graduate school. We wrote the second section of this guidebook (*Mentorship Issues Within A Diverse Community*) in order to share the concerns that students expressed to us so that all of those who mentor graduate students (faculty, staff and the students themselves) can be aware of these issues.

During the course of this project, we also heard from our diverse faculty about some of the problems they face. Since this information is important for graduate students to understand, we include these in the third section (*Mentoring Issues Facing Underrepresented Faculty*).

We hope you find this guide useful. Just as importantly, we hope this project will stimulate helpful discussions about mentoring among those at the University who have strong interests in ensuring that graduate students receive good mentoring, namely students, faculty, heads of departments, schools and colleges, and our central administration.

PART ONE:

As you read through this section, bear in mind that each department and program has its own culture, requirements for a degree, career trajectories, and even terminology for mentorship. Because of the wide variability that exists, you will find that specific items we discuss in this section may or may not pertain to your particular situation. For instance, in some programs students choose an advisor when they decide to come to UM; in others they are assigned an advisor for their first year; while in still others it is possible that graduate students can progress through much of their graduate career without making links with faculty members.

I

What Is Mentoring?

A mentoring relationship is a close, individualized relationship that develops over time between a graduate student and a faculty member (or others) that includes both caring and guidance. Although there is a connection between mentors and advisors, not all mentors are advisors and not all advisors are mentors. Mentors, as defined by The Council of Graduate Schools, are:

> **Advisors**, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; **supporters,** people who give emotional and moral encouragement; **tutors**, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; **masters**, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; **sponsors**, sources of information about, and aid in obtaining opportunities; **models of identity**, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic (Zelditch, 1990).

Don't be discouraged if you cannot find all these qualities in one person. Rather than trying to find one person who can give you everything, seek out various faculty who can provide you with some of these components. As we discuss later, it is to your benefit to have multiple mentors anyway.

II

Why Is Mentoring Important?

As you may know by now, graduate school is vastly different from your undergraduate experience. One of the main differences is that as an undergraduate your

goal was to ***obtain*** knowledge, while in graduate school your goal is to also ***contribute*** to a field of knowledge. Graduate school is the professional training ground where you learn the skills you need to be successful in your field and gain an understanding of how your discipline works.

Mentoring is important to graduate students not only because of the knowledge and skills that are learned, but also because of the many other aspects of professional socialization and personal support that are needed to facilitate success in graduate school and beyond. Research shows that students who have mentoring relationships have higher productivity levels, a higher level of involvement with their departments, and greater satisfaction with their programs (Green & Bauer, 1995).

III

Why Is Mentoring Hard to Find?

Regardless of their fields, faculty need to balance the many demands that are made of them. A partial list of their responsibilities includes: teaching undergraduate and graduate courses; advising undergraduate and graduate students; serving on dissertation committees; researching or working on creative projects; writing grants; writing books and articles; reviewing the work of their students and colleagues; serving on departmental and university committees; and fulfilling duties for professional organizations.

The pace of these demands does not let up over time. Junior faculty face the pressure of preparing for their tenure review, which means they have to be engaged in an active research agenda. As faculty become more senior, and their national and international prominence increases, there is a concomitant rise in the requests for their time and energies (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994).

Although faculty have numerous demands and responsibilities, keep in mind that the majority of faculty want to mentor graduate students. In addition, the faculty we talked to for this project readily acknowledged the many ways they benefit from mentoring graduate students, including:

- gaining collaborators for current or future projects
- acquiring research assistants whose work is critical to the completion of a research grant
- gaining increased professional stature by shaping future scholars
- keeping abreast of new knowledge and new techniques
- reaping the personal joys and satisfactions inherent in the mentoring relationship

IV

The Importance of a Mentoring Team

Rather than trying to find one mentor, think of your task as building a mentoring team. Although we use the word "team," you may be the only person who sees them in this way. Members of your team probably won't see themselves as operating as part of a mentoring group.

Carefully selecting a team of mentors that fits your needs increases the likelihood that you will receive the experiences and support you desire. In addition, it is to your benefit to have at least three or four faculty members who are knowledgeable about your work and can speak to its quality. A team can also serve as your safety net in case any one of the professors you work with leaves the University, or if irreconcilable issues later develop between you and a faculty member.

Be creative about whom you include on your team. Although this guide focuses on faculty mentors, we also urge you to consider your peers, more advanced graduate students, departmental staff, retired faculty, faculty from other departments, faculty from other universities, and friends from outside the academy as potential mentors. All of these people can help fulfill your needs and serve as part of your professional network.

V

Considerations for Forming a Mentoring Team

At a large research university like Michigan, you need to understand that it is *__your__* responsibility to seek out interactions with faculty members. Except for perhaps engineering and science fields that are built around a heavy research agenda, it is unrealistic to expect that a professor will come along and take you under his or her wing.

As you get started in your search for faculty mentors, try to look for a balance of both junior and senior faculty since each can be of assistance to you, although possibly in different ways. For instance, while senior faculty may be more likely to help you with networking, junior faculty may be better in touch with the stresses and strains associated with being a graduate student. Also, seek out faculty outside your department who have an interest related to yours. (Remember, eventually you will need someone as a cognate member for your dissertation committee.)

It is not unusual for graduate students to feel hesitant about initiating contact with a faculty member. Especially in the early stages of graduate school, students often feel they need guidance on how to choose possible faculty mentors. Here is some advice we gathered over the course of this project:

Self-Appraisal

Start the selection process by first undertaking a critical self-appraisal. Figure out what will help you to thrive as a graduate student. Use this information later on to match yourself with faculty or others who can provide you with what you need. Examples of things you should be asking yourself include:

- What are my objectives in entering graduate school?
- What type of training do I desire?
- What are my strengths?
- What skills do I need to develop?
- What kinds of research or creative projects do I want to work on?
- How much independent versus hand-in-hand work do I want to do?
- What type of career do I want to pursue?

Identifying Potential Faculty Mentors

You can identify potential faculty mentors within or outside your department using a variety of formal and informal means. Some suggestions are:

- Familiarize yourself with professors' work to gain a sense of their past and current interests and methodologies.
- Immerse yourself in departmental academic and social activities. Observe how faculty interact with colleagues and graduate students.
- Enroll in classes being taught by faculty who most interest you. Attend their public presentations.
- Ask advanced graduate students about their advisors and mentors. Share your interests and ask them for suggestions about whom you should meet.

Avoid Limiting Your Options

Although such characteristics as race, gender, nationality and sexual orientation are significant aspects of your identity, they constitute only some of the qualities you should consider when selecting a mentor. Faculty members who are *different* from you can contribute valuable insights to you and your work. Research clearly shows that the keys to good mentoring are sharing mutual interests and having good rapport (Atkinson, Neville, & Casas, 1991; Faison, 1996; Ragins & Scandura, 1991; Struthers, 1995).

VI

How to Initiate Contact with a Potential Mentor

Arriving at the first meeting with a potential mentor can be daunting, and some graduate students are reluctant to take this step. Remember, you have a lot of insight to guide you if you have first examined your own academic and professional goals and familiarized yourself with the professor's past and current work.

The goals of your initial meeting are to make a positive impression and to establish a working rapport. You also want to assess whether a particular faculty member is a good fit for you.

Faculty interviewed for this handbook shared numerous insights about what they look for in graduate students. This list may give you a better understanding of how to present yourself and what topics to discuss with them. Do not follow this list verbatim; instead, use it to trigger ideas about what topics of conversation are most important to you. Keep in mind that the mentoring relationship is one that evolves over time and oftentimes begins because of a particular need. Don't approach these meetings as if you are asking someone to be your mentor – this initial conversation is simply the first step.

Mutual Interests: Faculty will want to know if you have interests similar to theirs. Share how your prior academic, professional, or personal experiences relate to their interests. Ask about their recent work and discuss with them ways in which these intersect with your interests.

Motivation and Direction: Faculty want motivated students who are eager to move onto the next level of their professional growth. State your goals as you see them right now. Ask about ways you can further explore these goals - what courses you should take and what projects you should link to.

Initiative: Be proactive. For instance, seek further conversations with faculty about issues discussed in class. Ask them for suggestions about other people and experiences that will help you develop your skills and knowledge.

Skills and Strengths: Show them why they should invest in you. Let them know what qualities you bring to this relationship — research or language skills, creativity, analytical techniques, computer skills, willingness to learn, enthusiasm, and commitment.

In addition to telling them about yourself, you need to seek further information about these faculty members. You are choosing to work with them, just as they are choosing to work with you. In order to assess the amount and type of support you can expect to receive from a particular faculty member you will need to familiarize yourself with the following:

Availability
- To understand how much time the professor will be able to give to you, inquire about his or her other commitments. Also find out how much time the faculty member normally gives his or her students. Will that amount of time be sufficient for you?
- Ask about the faculty member's plans at the University. Does the professor anticipate being at the University during the entire time in which you are a student here? Will s/he be away from the department for extended periods (on sabbatical or on a research project) and if so, what arrangements could be made to stay in communication?

Communication
- Are you able to clearly understand the professor?
- Do you feel you are able to effectively communicate your thoughts and ideas?
- Do you think you will be able to work closely with this person?
- Do you think you will be able to accommodate to his or her professional and personal style?

Expectations
- What does the professor consider to be a normal workload? How many hours does he or she think you should be spending on your research or creative project per week?
- How often does the professor like to meet one-on-one?
- Does the professor have funds to support you? Will these remain available until you complete your program?
- Especially for those in the sciences and engineering: Is there potential for developing a dissertation topic from the professor's research project that you would find interesting? Does the professor have appropriate space and laboratory equipment for your needs? What is the size of the professor's research group and is this optimal for you?

Publishing
- Does the professor co-author articles with graduate students? If so, be sure to ask about their philosophy on first authorship.
- Is the professor willing to help you prepare your own articles for publication?
- What publishing contacts do they have that might be of assistance to you?

Presentations for performing and visual arts
- Does the professor collaborate with students in public performances or exhibitions?
- Does the professor have time available to work with you to prepare your projects for public presentation?
- Does the professor use his or her professional contacts to assist students in presenting their own work to the public?

Reputation with Graduate Students and Departmental Staff
- Does the professor have a history of giving proper attention to his or her protégés?
- Can the professor provide such things as teaching and research opportunities, access to financial resources, guidance for completing your dissertation, access to professional networks, and assistance in career development?
- Have former graduate students completed their programs in a timely fashion?
- Who are the other scholars who have been mentored by the professor, and where do they stand within the field? Ask yourself if this is where you are interested in being.
- Is the professor comfortable talking about issues that are of a personal nature?
- If you are interested in nonacademic careers, what is the professor's attitude about training and funding someone who is not necessarily going into the academy?

Reputation within the Field
- Talk with others in your field both inside and outside the University. What is their opinion about the professor's work?
- Look at reviews of their work.

In any meeting with faculty mentors, keep the following in mind:

Respect their time. Be sure you know how much time they have available to give you and be aware of how quickly time is passing. If you need additional time, schedule another meeting to discuss the remaining topics.

If you want to develop a professional relationship with any of these faculty, contact the professors again once you have something substantive to discuss. For instance, you can send an e-mail to thank them for their time and let them know the progress you are making in pursuing suggestions they gave you.

VII

How to Increase Your Chances of Finding Good Mentoring

Have Realistic Expectations

As stated previously, in order for you to develop mentoring relationships, you must be proactive. It is your task to find and recruit the mentors who can help you achieve your goals.

You also need to have a realistic idea about what any single mentor can do for you. Faculty are more likely to respond to requests for specific types of assistance that they know they can provide. Analyze what you need from a specific faculty member and explicitly ask for those things.

Finally, remember that part of your task as a graduate student is to develop and demonstrate your abilities to be an independent scholar. If you ask for an **_excessive_** amount of help, you run the risk of having that faculty member feel they are doing your work. What is determined to be excessive will vary by professor and discipline. Discuss this with the professor if you have any concerns.

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

Problems in mentorship most often come about because of misunderstandings about the expectations the parties have of one another. Although you do not need to set up a formal contract, some people find it helpful to specify mutual agreements about their respective roles and responsibilities. Some of the expectations you will need to discuss, especially if this person is your advisor or dissertation chair, include:

Goals: Develop a work plan that includes both short-term and long-term goals as well as a timeframe for reaching those goals. At least once a semester, contact your mentor to discuss your progress, as well as any additional training and experiences you need in order to achieve your goals. If modifications are necessary, inform your mentor and agree upon a new work plan.

Meetings: Decide how often you will meet face-to-face, being sure that you request the amount of time you need in order to succeed. Discuss whether e-mail is okay for certain issues or questions that might arise between meetings. Find out under what circumstances, if any, the faculty member feels it is appropriate to be called at home, and let the faculty member know if you have any restrictions as well.

Feedback: Clarify how often the faculty member will give you feedback about your general work and your progress. For feedback on specific work, find out how long it typically takes them to return papers. However, in advance of actually handing them a paper or project to review, inquire about their current workload and whether they can still manage that timeframe. Find out if they tend to provide a lot of comments or very few, so that you won't be taken aback later on.

Reminders: What is the best way to remind them about getting your work back within an agreed upon timeframe? For instance, you can ask: "When you are very busy, how should I remind you about a paper you have of mine? Should I e-mail you, call you, or come by your office?" "How much in advance should I remind you - is one week enough or would you prefer two?"

VIII

How to Be a Good Protégé

Having thoughtfully established a mentoring team, you must then maintain these relationships in a professional manner. It is imperative to show by your attitude and actions that you are a responsible junior colleague. Faculty have offered the following tips on how to be a good protégé.

Be Efficient in Your Interactions with Faculty

Meetings
- Show up for scheduled meetings on time.
- Meetings will be most productive when you accept responsibility for "running" the meeting. Your role is to raise the issues and questions while the professor's role is to respond.
- For each meeting, be prepared with an agenda of topics that need to be discussed - and prioritize them so you are asking your most important questions first.
- At the conclusion of the meeting or through e-mail, summarize any agreements that have been reached. Also restate what you will be doing and what they committed themselves to doing for you. Ask them to respond if they disagree with anything you have stated.
- If your mentor is facing a work emergency at the time of your meeting, offer to reschedule the meeting, shorten it, or handle the matter over e-mail. Be flexible, but remain committed to getting what you need in a timely manner.

- If you need to cancel a meeting, make sure that your message is left in a manner that reaches the professor. Do not rely solely on e-mail, since many people do not check their e-mail every day.

Papers, Proposals or Creative Works
- Do not submit a draft to a faculty member in its roughest form (unless otherwise instructed by the professor.) Seek the professor's input once you are confident you have a presentable draft. Be sure to proofread the document carefully. If you have doubts about the quality of your work, ask a friend to read your paper first. Ideally, this person should be familiar with both the professor and the topic so s/he can make remarks about the content and style.
- Do not ask professors to re-read an entire paper if only certain sections have been revised. Instead, mark the new or edited sections by underlining them, putting them in boldface, or by using a different font.
- It may be useful to create or join a group in which students present their work to each other for feedback.

Recommendation Letters
- Provide updated copies of your *curriculum vitae.*
- Leave clear written instructions as to when the letters are due and to whom to send them. Attach a stamped and addressed envelope for each letter. If you have several letters, create a calendar for your mentor that lists application deadlines.
- Provide a short description about the fellowship, grant, or program for which you are applying.
- Provide details about how you are structuring your application and what points you would like your mentor to emphasize.
- Submit these materials with enough advance time for your mentor to write a letter.
- In case the professor misplaces the application materials, keep extra copies of all forms.

Take Yourself Seriously
Make the transition from thinking of yourself as a bright student to seeing yourself as a potential colleague.

- Attend departmental lectures and other activities.
- Join professional associations and societies.
- Attend conferences and use these opportunities to network with others.
- Seek out opportunities to present your work (in your department or through outside conferences, publications, performances).
- Attend teaching workshops and discipline-specific pedagogy classes.

Receive Criticism the Right Way

Accept critiques of your work in a professional manner. If you disagree with a particular criticism, demonstrate that you are willing to consider that point. If after thinking about it for some time you still disagree, demonstrate your ability to defend your ideas in a professional and well-thought-out manner.

Be Responsible

It is your responsibility to update your mentors about your progress and your struggles. As one faculty member said, "Take charge and own your education." Never give the impression that you are avoiding your mentors.

Demonstrate Your Commitment to the Profession

Professors talk about commitment in terms of "being involved in your work," "embracing the work as your own," or "deciding you want to be the world's expert in a particular area."

Follow Your Mentor's Advice

Read the books or articles your mentors suggest, and let them know what you thought about those suggestions. Faculty want to know that the time they spend with you goes to good use.

Respect Boundaries

Although friendship is not a necessary component for mentorship, friendships between faculty and graduate students can and do develop. This can be especially true with junior faculty who may feel they have more in common with graduate students than with their new faculty colleagues. Although such relationships can have lifetime benefits for both parties, some faculty have voiced concerns about potential problems that can arise. As several professors noted, sometimes it is more difficult for graduate students to accept criticism of their work from faculty they consider to be their friends.

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- Be mindful that although you may have a friendship with a particular faculty member, a hierarchical arrangement still exists. One can even say it exists for your benefit since your faculty mentors need to be critical in order to help you do you best work.

- Do not be tempted to drop in on professors for casual conversation without their approval each time. Periodically check to see whether you are over-staying your welcome.

IX

What to Do if Problems Arise

All the recommendations in this handbook have one purpose: to help you complete your graduate studies smoothly and efficiently. Occasionally situations arise which hinder timely completion of your work, such as the birth of a child, or an illness to you or to someone in your family. If this happens to you, be sure to take the initiative and contact your mentors. Discuss your situation with them and give them the information you feel they need to know. As soon as possible, get back to them with a new timeline for completing your degree. Be sure the final plan is realistic and that you can meet the new deadlines.

Be aware that situations occasionally arise for faculty members that can potentially impede your work and progress. For instance, other demands on your mentor may hinder his or her ability to meet with you or provide prompt feedback about your work. If something like this happens repeatedly, you should talk about this with:

The Professor: Your first step is to politely remind the professor of your needs. If you are not getting satisfactory results, we urge you to meet with the faculty member in person at the earliest possible moment. From our experience at Rackham, we see that face-to-face meetings can lead to more satisfactory results than e-mail, since one's tone and message can be easily misconstrued in electronic communication.

Peers: Other students who have contact with a particular faculty member can tell you if this behavior is typical, and may be able to suggest some possible resolutions. Your peers can also explain the norms in your department regarding frequency of meetings, turn-around time for feedback, and general availability of faculty.

Departmental Staff: Staff (e.g., graduate secretaries) can clarify departmental expectations and standards and possibly offer suggestions on how to resolve problems. Administrative staff also usually know about other people or offices on campus that can assist you.

Other Faculty: Other faculty can give you advice on how to deal with problematic issues that arise with one of your mentors. If you want someone to intercede on your behalf, senior faculty may be in a much better position to do so than junior faculty.

Graduate Chair or Department Chair: If you are not able to resolve issues with your mentor on your own, you may find it advisable to talk to the graduate chair or your department chair.

Rackham: At any point, you may find it helpful to talk things over with staff at the Rackham School of Graduate Studies. Please contact Glenda Haskell (647-7548) or Jayne London (647-6341) for ideas and strategies.

X

Changing Advisors

In their discussions of mentoring issues, students commonly ask for advice on how to change advisors. Changing advisors is a natural occurrence in some fields of study and less common in others. It is easier for students to change advisors in departments that encourage students to work with multiple faculty. The situation is much more difficult for those students who were brought into the University to work with a specific faculty member. In all cases, changing advisors is best accomplished if you enter the process with an attitude of respect for your advisor. Here are some basic guidelines:

- Be sure that you try to work out any differences with your advisor before you move on. (See the list of people who can help you in Section IX.)

- Seek the advice of a trusted faculty member or peer to determine whether it is in fact desirable to change your advisor in the first place. This is especially true if the relationship has a long history attached to it and/or if it occurs at the dissertation phase of your career.

- Remain professional at all times. Avoid doing or saying anything that could have ramifications for your future career.

- Think through the most diplomatic way to express to your advisor – and to others – why you are considering a change. And be sure to inform your advisor if and when you decide to make a change.

- Before you leave your current advisor, approach another faculty member about being an advisor for you. Avoid saying anything negative about your past advisor.

- If you owe your past advisor some work, be sure to discuss this and arrange a timeframe for completing it.

- Be sure to complete or update any formal paperwork that contains information about your advisor (e.g., the Dissertation Committee form if your new advisor will serve on your committee).

MENTORSHIP ISSUES WITHIN A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

PART TWO:

The Rackham School of Graduate Studies strongly believes that a diverse graduate student population greatly enriches the scholarly, cultural, and social activities at the University. The Graduate School is therefore committed to examining the issues which students from historically underrepresented or marginalized populations face, with the expectation that ultimately this will be of assistance to **_all_** of our graduate students. The purpose of this section is to present the experiences that a diverse array of graduate students have shared with us. Because faculty, students and staff are candidates to be mentors, we have included suggestions to help the entire community be aware of the unique concerns of various student groups.

We found that many common issues surfaced in each set of discussions we held with different populations of graduate students. Yet there were also issues unique to or of greater concern to one set of students than another. In addition, not all students from a particular group shared the concerns listed. Indeed, we found that a great deal of variability exists within each group in regard to their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, when we write such things as "women can find it difficult to speak up in class," we are making reference to the opinion of some of the people with whom we spoke.

If you recognize your experiences in what you read below, we want you to take comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Realize that the concerns you face are not due to any personal deficiency, but are issues that others face as well. On the other hand, if you do not share the experiences described, we hope the following material will provide you with insight into issues facing others who are different from you.

After detailing each issue, we offer a list of some actions you can take to help to improve the graduate experience for yourself and other students. We consider this to be just the start of possible recommendations. We would appreciate hearing from you about other ideas so that we can share these with the graduate community as well.

I

Common Themes Across Groups

Need for Role Models

Students from historically underrepresented or marginalized groups have a harder time finding faculty role models who might have had experiences similar to their own. As some students say, they want to find "someone who looks like me"; "someone who immediately understands my experiences and perspectives"; "someone whose very presence lets me know I, too, can make it in the academy."

SUGGESTIONS

For underrepresented students

• Work with your faculty mentors to get names of other people in your department, across the university, or at other universities who may have had experiences similar to yours.

• Don't lose sight of the fact that you can receive very good mentoring from faculty who are of a different gender, race or culture. After all, past generations of minority scholars did just that. As one professor of color pointed out: "It is important to develop ties and networks irrespective of race and gender but based on what people can offer."

• When job openings arise, work within your department or program to identify qualified job candidates who represent diverse backgrounds. Attend the job talks and meet these potential faculty mentors.

For all students and faculty

• If the faculty in your department are ostensibly homogenous, make a case for how diversity will enhance your program. Help your department identify and recruit new faculty who represent diverse backgrounds.

Questioning the Canons

Students from underrepresented or marginalized groups, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, sometimes find that their perspectives or experiences do not fit into the current academic canons. At the worst extreme, some students tell us that when they select research questions focusing on race, gender or sexual orientation, professors deem their work irrelevant. More commonly, underrepresented students find that their experiences are missing from current

theory and research. These students need safe environments where their thoughts can be shared and valued, as they explore, and possibly challenge, traditional inquiry.

SUGGESTIONS

For underrepresented students

- Be prepared to show a faculty member the value and relevance of new lines of inquiry. Formulate a strong argument about the importance of this question to the growth of your field. Introduce a scholarly article or essay as an example of the work you would like to do. Test your argument by talking with peers and others who could give you helpful feedback. Unfortunately, not all students meet with success in doing this. Some students are able to find other faculty who are receptive; others change the focus of their dissertations with plans to resume this interest after they complete their degrees; while still others change their departments or choose to go to other universities.
- There are many interdisciplinary programs and research centers across campus that may provide you with a community of scholars with interests similar to your own. For instance, check out the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies (CAAS), the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program (LACS), the Native American Studies Program, the Program in American Culture, and the Women's Studies Program.

For all students and faculty

- Be open to hearing other people's experiences, particularly those people from backgrounds different than yourself. Think about the ways that race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other characteristics help to expand the types of questions that are asked and the approaches used for answering them. Remember, the introduction of women's and minorities' perspectives have brought about the development of whole new disciplines, all of which have greatly enriched the University environment.

Fear of Being Categorized as a "Single-Issue" Scholar

Some students are concerned that by selecting dissertation topics that focus on such issues as gender, race, or sexual orientation, others will see them as being _only_ interested in these topics for the rest of their professional careers.

SUGGESTIONS

For underrepresented students

- Throughout your graduate school career, demonstrate the breadth of your intellectual curiosity through your contributions in classes, seminars, brown bags and lectures.
- As you develop your mentoring relationships, be clear with the faculty about the range of your research interests.
- When you go out on the job market, be sure to talk about your other research interests.

For all students and faculty

- Ask where a person's research interests lie rather than making assumptions about them based on their personal characteristics or past work.

Feelings of Isolation

Students from historically underrepresented groups can feel particularly isolated or alienated from other students in their departments, especially if the composition of a program is highly homogenous.

SUGGESTIONS

For underrepresented students

- Ask mentors or peers to introduce you to students and faculty with complementary interests.
- Investigate organizations within or outside the University that might provide you with a sense of belonging. Some examples are cultural and religious groups, as well as reading groups and professional associations.

For all students and faculty

- Be aware of students who seem to be finding it difficult to take active roles in academic or social settings and find ways to include them. Take the initiative to talk with them. Ask them about their research interests, hobbies and activities outside of school.

Burden of Being a Spokesperson

Students from underrepresented groups often expend a lot of time and energy speaking up when issues such as race, class, gender or sexual orientation arise or are being ignored. These students point out how most of their peers have an advantage in not carrying such a burden.

SUGGESTIONS

For underrepresented students

- Seek out support and strategies from others facing this same situation. Plug into other networks in your department or across campus. Perhaps one of the many student groups can help you.

For all students and faculty

- Don't assume your experiences are the norm. Question how race, gender, or other characteristics provide different perspectives from your own.
- When you see students taking on spokesperson roles, tell them and others what you have gained from their contributions to class discussion. These words of appreciation can lift someone's spirits.

Seeking Balance

Students observe that professors need to devote large parts of their lives to work in order to be successful in the academy. Students from all disciplines tell us that they feel faculty expect them to spend every waking minute of their days on their work. This perception of faculty expectations, accurate or not, is of grave concern to students who wish to have family lives, as well as for those who want to balance their lives with their interests and hobbies.

SUGGESTIONS

For students

- Every semester, workshops or panel discussions exploring the topic of balancing work and home are sponsored by such units as Rackham or the Center for the Education of Women. These workshops are geared for female and male students.
- Seek out role models whom you can talk to about how they balance the many sides of their lives.

- Demonstrate through your behavior and work that you are focused and productive during the times you are in your office or lab.

For faculty

- Students need to see faculty members demonstrate that they value their personal lives. Be open to bringing up your interests and hobbies. Consider sharing your thoughts about the importance of taking some time away from work.
- Be explicit with students about the number of hours you expect them to work for a given course, research assistantship or graduate student instructor position. This will enable them to make a decision as to whether this arrangement would be suitable for them.

II

Women Graduate Students

Assertiveness

While traditionally females have been raised to be polite and soft-spoken, it is clear that successful graduate students aggressively assert themselves in classroom discussions. Many women - and international students as well - told us of the difficulties they have in speaking up in class. Too often, they find that in order to say something in class, they have to interrupt another student. Women often see interjecting themselves in this manner as being rude and disrespectful. Some fear that their lack of participation in discussions will be wrongly interpreted as their not having any thoughts at all. On the other hand, other women tell us that when they assert themselves, they are subjected to criticism in a way that men are not- even though it is the same behavior.

Competitiveness

We have heard, and research has verified that many students, but especially women, can feel alienated by the competitive and critical atmosphere that pervades many graduate programs. Women are certainly capable of being critical of others' work when they think it is appropriate, but they think some students are being overly critical in order to appear intellectually superior. Women, and other students, too often see that the system does not reward one for praising the contributions of other scholars. Some women students suggest that graduate school would be less competitive if there were more opportunities to do collaborative work.

Importance of Positive Feedback

Both male and female students can find that they do not receive much clear positive feedback on their work in graduate school. Although this is problematic in its own right, it also appears that the lack of positive feedback leads women, more so than men, to end up doubting their capabilities (Nerad, 1992). In addition, women graduate students tend to think that any negative experiences they have in graduate school are due to personal deficiencies in themselves, while men tend to attribute negative experiences to insufficient guidance or to problems within the department (Nerad and Stewart, 1991). Moreover, men are more content than women with mentors who are impersonal but offer instrumental advice. Women tend to interpret a professor's distance as an indication that the professor has a negative opinion of them.

SUGGESTIONS

For women
- Consider talking to the professor about what is going on in his or her classroom that makes it difficult for you to participate. Suggest specific ways he or she could make it easier for you to participate in class discussion. For instance, you may find it helpful if the professor directs a question to you about what you think about a particular topic. In addition, think of ways to participate that do not require someone else's intervention. This will be of service to you throughout your academic career.
- If you find that a professor only engages in brief conversations with you about the task at hand, do not jump to the assumption that this person does not value you as a student. Understand this may just be the way this person is, or that s/he may not have time for more interaction, and this is not necessarily a reflection on you. Don't forego the types of assistance this person may be able to give you. Take his or her assistance and look elsewhere for more personal types of support. Remember that the task at hand is typically the first priority.

For all students and faculty
- Try to discourage interruptions by pointing out that a person has not yet finished talking.
- Try to change the tenor of discussions that become overly critical. For instance, you can remind people that it is always easier to criticize a work than to produce one. You can then follow up with: "What contributions does this particular piece make?"

For the teaching environment
- Experiment with different ways to minimize the possibility that a few students dominate your class while other students rarely, if ever, participate. One faculty member structures his class by telling students that they can participate once in discussion but then they have to wait until everyone else has had a chance to talk before they can contribute again.
- State positive feedback to a student's work in positive terms. Use phrases like "good job" rather than "not bad" or "I don't have any major problems with it."

Resources

For special programs and workshops focusing on women, contact the Center for the Education of Women (998-7080 or www.umich.edu/~cew), the Institute for Research on Women and Gender (764-9537 or www.umich.edu/~irwg), the Women's Studies Program (763-2047 or www.lsa.umich.edu/women) and Counseling and Psychological Services (764-8312 or www.umich.edu/~caps).

The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (764-0505 or www.crlt.umich.edu) offers workshops on ways to make the classroom more inclusive.

If you need to discuss issues of sexual harassment and/or a hostile working environment, contact the Sexual Harassment Policy Office at 647-4797.

Jayne London, Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns. Contact her at jplondon@umich.edu or 647-6341.

III

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) Graduate Students

Homophobia
Our LGBT students told us that it is not uncommon to encounter homophobia in the classroom - either as a student or as a graduate student instructor. Remarks can range from the blatantly offensive to the less obvious such as "that is so gay."

Heterosexism
LGBT students often hear professors and students in classes or in social settings discuss a given subject with the unconscious assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Even faculty and students who are aware of gender and racial issues may be unaware of their tendency to think about the world from an exclusively heterosexual perspective. As a result, LGBT students may find their experiences are not represented in research or in discussions.

Disclosing

Being out as an LGBT student (or faculty) is not a one-time event, but instead is a decision the person experiences each time s/he enters a new situation. LGBT students face a burden of having to assess the personal, social and political ramifications of disclosing their sexual orientation each time they do so. Since our heterosexual students do not have to disclose their sexuality, only LGBT students face these physically and emotionally draining experiences.

SUGGESTIONS

For LGBT students
• Only you can assess your environment and know when and where it is comfortable for you to be out. However, you may find it helpful to talk with other LGBT graduate students and/or faculty.

For all students and faculty
• Enter every classroom assuming there are LGBT students present who may not feel safe in being out.
• Be sensitive to whether anti-gay comments are being made, and discuss how they may be offensive to other students in the classroom.
• Be aware that examples you and others in the class are using may be based on heterosexual experiences. For example, when talking about families, don't talk as if every family is composed of a husband, wife, and children. Simply using a word like "spouse and partner" instead of just "spouse" can go a long way in making LGBT students (and unmarried students) feel they are represented in the discussion.

Resources
To learn about special programs and activities for LGBT graduate students, contact Lambdagrads (e-mail lambdagrad@umich.edu) and the Office of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Affairs (763-4186 or www.umich.edu/~inqueery).

To locate faculty to discuss LGBT issues, obtain a copy of the *LGBT Faculty Mentoring Directory for Graduate Students* at the Rackham School of Graduate Studies (647-6341), the Office of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Program Affairs, or Lambdagrads. A partial list can be found on the web at www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/lgbtdir.html.

Jayne London, Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns. Contact her at jplondon@umich.edu or 647-6341.

Racial and Ethnic Minority Graduate Students

Students of color spoke passionately to us about many issues, most of which are covered in the section entitled "*Common Themes Across Groups.*" Among these issues, the one most often cited was their lack of role models. They told us how the dearth of faculty of color at UM reduces their chances of finding someone in their fields who "looks like them." They told us how devastating it is when one of the few faculty of color leaves UM for another university, since commonly this means that they lose one of the main supporters of their work. They told us how the low numbers of faculty of color conveyed the message that the academy remains an unwelcoming environment for many who are not white. In addition, they spoke to us about:

Stereotyping

Many minority students, especially African American and Latino students on Rackham Merit Fellowships, sometimes feel other students and faculty assume they are less qualified to be in graduate school. On the other hand, Asian American students are burdened by the "model minority" myth, which assumes they are exemplary students particularly in math and science. Stereotyping in either direction has negative consequences for students of color.

Rackham Merit Fellows

Because departments sometimes assume that underrepresented students on Rackham Merit Fellowships have their funding taken care of, these students can be overlooked for Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) and Graduate Student Research Assistant (GSRA) appointments. As a result, these students have fewer opportunities to interact with faculty or to experience the formal and informal mentoring that occurs for student instructors or research assistants. They also miss the teaching and research experiences that strengthen their graduate work and their *curriculum vitaes.* In the past two years, the Rackham School of Graduate Studies has begun working with departments to address this issue.

SUGGESTIONS

For students of color
- Even though you may know you are competent, be aware that over time stereotyping can undermine your confidence in your own abilities. Should

you start to feel a dip in your self-confidence, discuss these feelings with a fellow student (or a group of students). You may also find help from a trusted professor or perhaps a counselor.

For all students and faculty

- Understand that different minority groups face different issues and experiences than your own. Yet do not assume that all students from one minority group will share the same thoughts and perspectives. Remember that social class and geographic origin play an important role in shaping people's behaviors and attitudes.
- You can help erase stereotypes by recognizing each student's unique strengths and scholarly promise.
- Think about the ways you have been socialized concerning ideas of race and make efforts to increase your awareness and knowledge about these issues.

V

International Graduate Students

Issues of Culture and Language in the Classroom

Choosing to study in the United States means that many of our international students now need to function in a second language and adjust to a new set of cultural and educational norms (Trice, 1999). For instance, many international students find American classes to be unnecessarily competitive. Students from East and Southeast Asia, who were trained in educational systems where the student's role is to be passive, are shocked to see American students speaking up without being called upon and challenging the remarks of professors and peers. They fear that if they do not exhibit these behaviors, the faculty will judge them to be less capable and/or less intelligent. Many international students also state they are unclear about academic rules and regulations. Lastly, some international students have expressed disappointment with the fact that their classes incorpo-

rate very little in the way of international perspectives and that American faculty and students undervalue the experiences they bring into the classroom.

Social Stresses

While many graduate students experience the stress of having moved away from families and friends, international students have an even greater sense of displacement. International students who bring their partners and children with them have worries about how well their families are adjusting to American life overall and to Ann Arbor in particular. In addition, a significant number of international graduate students cite the following as concerns: loneliness, not knowing how to socialize with Americans, and being unable to find people patient enough to speak with them (Trice, 1999). A further complication is that upon returning home, international graduate students find that because of their different dress, talk and behavior, they have become "foreigners" in their own countries. As one international student told us: "I become 10% more American every year I am here."

SUGGESTIONS

For international students
- Ask advanced international students for advice.
- Talk with faculty about your past training and point out the new demands you face from the American educational system. If it is hard for you to jump into classroom discussions, ask if they will help you acclimate by temporarily calling on you for specific responses, or suggest some other strategy.
- If you find it difficult to converse over e-mail, let faculty know that seeing facial and body expressions helps your understanding. Remember that most faculty will be willing to accommodate your needs, but first they must know what those needs are.
- Although you may be tempted to spend all your social time with peers from your home country, seek out as many opportunities as possible to interact with other students as well. If you are still learning English, these interactions will provide you with opportunities to practice and improve your language skills.

For all students and faculty
- If you have ever traveled to another country, recall how you had to rely on assistance from others as you became acclimated to the language and customs. Offer international students the same courtesies you found you needed.

- Demonstrate your interest in international students by reaching out to them at academic and social occasions. Ask about their research, hobbies and interests.
- When you have the opportunity to work with international students on group projects, take the time to learn about their experiences and perspectives. If you are so inclined, offer to meet with them so they can practice their English with you. Do not assume, however, that __all__ international students have difficulties with English, since a number were trained in English-speaking institutions.

Especially for faculty
- Be aware that international students have many rules that govern their studies and funding. Most commonly students have a single country visa which prohibits them from traveling freely. They also cannot work for pay, except for GSI or GSRA positions and they are excluded from most U.S.-based fellowships. If you have any questions, contact the International Center at 764-9310.

Resources

The International Center (764-9310 or www.umich.edu/~icenter) offers workshops that address a range of issues and can provide one-on-one assistance.

The International Families Outreach Program on North Campus offers assistance to spouses and families in adjusting to Ann Arbor. Call 647-5615 for further information.

John Godfrey, Rackham's Assistant Dean of International Education, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns or suggestions for improvements. Contact him at jgodfrey@umich.edu or 647-7548.

VI

Graduate Students with Family Responsibilities

While this section was written with students who have parenting responsibilities in mind, many of the same issues pertain to those who are responsible for the care of their parents.

Dual Commitments
Students with parenting responsibilities are committed to being successful graduate students and feel they can succeed by being highly organized and intensely focused during the blocks of time they carve out for their studies, lab work, etc. Unfortunately, they all too often feel that some professors perceive them as lacking in commitment to their fields because they have another priority in their lives. This situation is exacerbated when an emergency arises, such as an ill child,

and makes it impossible for them to attend classes or meetings. The intensity of child care demands does not stop once a child enters school, because then there are concerts, sports, and classroom activities that parents need to be involved with.

Isolation

Because of family demands, students may not be able to attend some social, academic, and professional functions. As a result, they can feel isolated from others in their cohort and from their departments as a whole.

Time Constraints

Students with family responsibilities typically need to be home in the evenings to tend to those in their care. Difficulties can emerge in a group project since commonly other students find the evenings the best time to meet. In addition, it is often difficult for students with parenting responsibilities to come back to campus for evening lectures or departmental meetings.

SUGGESTIONS

For students with family responsibilities

- Meet other graduate students who can share the strategies they employ for balancing academic and family demands. They can connect you to a network of other students and point you to helpful resources.
- Try to find faculty who have children and are highly involved in their children's lives – or who appear to be very understanding. Often departmental staff will know who these people are. In addition, when you are in a professor's office look for pictures of children. Listen for faculty members who incorporate stories about their children in their classes or discussions. Look to these faculty members as people who can provide advice and possible support to you.
- When working in a group project, suggest that the meetings take place at your house – if you find this would be easier for you.
- Consider bringing your children to some departmental social functions and/or into the office. Most likely you will find that your peers enjoy the opportunity to interact with children and that you then have the chance to engage in some adult conversations. Furthermore, until your classmates and professors see your children, they will not understand what your family life is like.
- If you use a cell phone or beeper as a means of being connected with your

child care provider or your teenage children in case of an emergency, discuss this with professors with whom you take classes.

For all students and faculty

- For group projects explore ways to use e-mail attachments to transmit documents and the Internet to facilitate group discussions. To learn about a number of different tools, look at the website maintained by the Information Technology Central Services (ITCS) at www.itd.umich.edu/services/email.guide.html.
- Plan some departmental social events where it would be appropriate for students, faculty and staff to bring their children along. For these events, make sure you pick a time of day when families can attend. Be sure the invitation specifically states that children are welcome.
- For those events that cannot accommodate children, continue to extend invitations to students with family responsibilities (unless they direct you to do otherwise). Do not take it upon yourself to stop inviting them just because they have declined events in the past.

Resources

The Financial Aid Office runs a child care subsidy program. To be eligible for funding, you need to demonstrate financial need and the fact that you use **_licensed_** child care. Contact the Financial Aid Office at 763-6600 or www.finaid.umich.edu/child.htm for further details.

The Work/Life Resources Center can help you find child care or elder care. Call them at 936-8677 or www.umich.edu/~hraa/worklife/.

The Kids Kare Program, run through the Work/Life Resources Center, provides in-home care for sick children. Pre-registration is required. For more information, contact, 936-8677 or www.umich.edu/~hraa/worklife/kidskare.htm.

When you look for housing, consider the University's Family Housing on North Campus (764-0507). The courtyard design provides safe play areas and opportunities to meet other students who share the same life experiences.

There are also a number of other resources for U-M student parents listed on the web at www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/parenting.html

Jayne London, Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns. Contact her at jplondon@umich.edu or 647-6341.

For the teaching environment

- Rather than assuming that students with family responsibilities are not committed to their programs, bear in mind that it takes a great deal of organization, commitment and passion for one's work to "do it all and to do it well."
- Allow students to demonstrate their professional commitment in different ways. Those with family responsibilities may not be in the classroom,

office or lab at any given moment, but they may be highly focused and productive when they are there.

- Permit cell phones or beepers in your classroom so that parents can be reached in the event of a child related emergency.
- Students with family responsibilities may need to miss some classes. Try to develop some accommodations for this.
- Give out assignments well in advance so that students with children can fit the assignments into their demanding schedules. Since many students with children try to set aside time for their families on weekends, you are not providing enough advance notice if you make an assignment just before a weekend and say it is due on Monday.
- For group projects, try to accommodate students' requests to work in a group that meets during the day.
- If you have children, discuss them openly and freely with your graduate students. Doing so will show students that it is possible to have a family and a successful academic career.

VII

Graduate Students from Working-Class Backgrounds

Economic Concerns

Students from working-class backgrounds often do not have family members they can turn to for monetary support through graduate school. In addition, some students have the responsibility of financially supporting parents, siblings or other relatives.

Access into Professional Networks

These graduate students are aware they may not have or know how to develop professional networks as effectively as their peers who come from more advantaged backgrounds (especially those who grew up within academic families). This disparity is most visible when they attend conferences or when they seek summer employment.

Summer Professional Opportunities

These graduate students also see a progressive disparity in what they and their more advantaged peers can do during the summer. The latter, because of their families' financial assistance and their enhanced access to professional networks, can more easily afford and secure internships which provide them with further professional development. In contrast, students from working-class backgrounds may need to work in better paying jobs which are far removed from their gradu-

ate studies. Thus, students from working-class backgrounds feel they are falling behind in their graduate careers by not having more relevant job experiences over the summer. In addition, they fear some professors may not understand their financial situations and mistakenly assume they are less seriously involved in their academic work than more advantaged students.

Difference in Background Experiences

Students from working-class backgrounds also told us how intimidating it can be to hear about the past travels and experiences of some of their fellow students. Students, especially those in the arts, humanities and social sciences, can feel vulnerable knowing that some of their peers have traveled to, or even lived in, the foreign countries they are studying.

Disjunction with Family and Friends

Once socialized into their disciplines, students can often find it more difficult to talk to their families and old friends about their work and for families and friends to understand their new endeavors. This communication gap can make students feel like they are no longer able to live within their old worlds, but they are not yet comfortable in their new worlds.

SUGGESTIONS

For students from working-class backgrounds
• You will need to be creative and resourceful in order to find a suitable summer position or combination of positions. Understand that you will need to initiate this strategizing. Plan far ahead and don't wait until spring to begin this conversation with mentors and others.

For all students and faculty
• Make an extra effort to introduce these students to the people you know who could be helpful to them. Assist them in expanding their networks.

For the teaching environment
• Be aware that not all students have the same academic networks to draw on.
• Be alert to funding opportunities, especially for the summer period. Be sure to pass this information on to your students, especially those you feel most need it.
• Put books or coursepacks on reserve so that students don't have to buy their own copies.

VIII

Graduate Students with Disabilities

Obviously students with disabilities have different needs and concerns depending upon the types of disability they have. For example, a student who is visually impaired has different needs than the student who uses a wheelchair or a student with a learning disability. Yet students' needs will also vary depending upon whether they have had their disabilities since birth or whether their disabilities developed later in their lives. In this section, we try to deal with issues confronting those students with physical disabilities, those with learning disabilities (such as attention deficit disorder and dyslexia) and those with psychological illnesses (such as depression and bipolar disorder).

Reluctance to Ask for Help

Students with disabilities often fear that they may appear to be too dependent - or become too dependent - if they ask for help. This is especially true for those who have experienced a fairly recent onset of a disability and are unaccustomed to asking for help, as well as for those who have disabilities that are invisible to others, such as individuals with learning disabilities or chronic psychological illnesses.

Effort Exerted Just to Keep Up

For those with physical and learning disabilities, meeting the basic requirements demands much more time and energy than it does for students without disabilities. Some students find they cannot participate in certain professional activities (such as submitting papers for conferences) as much as they would like because they need to devote all their time and energy to meeting the deadlines of their programs.

Problems that Arise from Last Minute Changes

Changes in reading assignments can be very difficult for students who are visually impaired. At the beginning of the semester, students who are blind or severely visually impaired have their readings converted into Braille. Any readings added on at a later date mean they need to make special emergency trips to have these

new materials translated in a short period of time. Changes in room locations are also a hardship for visually and physically challenged students.

SUGGESTIONS

For students with disabilities
- It is best if you communicate your needs to your professors and mentors, otherwise they will not know how to help you or that, in fact, you are in need of help. You should do this at the beginning of the semester so that the faculty member can make proper accommodations. If your situation changes, update those who need to know.
- Avoid taking a grade of "incomplete" if at all possible. If you have to take an incomplete, commit to finishing the work within a couple of weeks. Bear in mind that the incomplete stays on your transcript - even after you receive a letter grade.
- Use the summers to catch up on unfinished work if necessary and to get an early jump on your work for the fall.
- If you are having difficulty keeping up with the readings for a class, ask your professor to prioritize them for you. You can trust that all the other students in the class will benefit from this as well.
- Especially for those with psychological disabilities: Find a professional practitioner that you trust. Bear in mind that various types of social support will be crucial during your graduate student days, so strongly resist any urge to isolate yourself.
- Be very realistic about how much work you can take on. During your first semester, take the lightest load possible so that you can adapt to your new environment.
- As one student told us, "Demonstrate your abilities, not just your disabilities." For instance, if you have a physical disability, be sure to write on the board or use overhead projectors if you can do so (especially in job interviews).

For all students and faculty
- Don't hesitate to ask a student with a physical disability if she or he needs assistance.
- Assume that there are students with invisible disabilities (such as learning disabilities and psychological disabilities) in your classroom and among your cohort.

- Students with psychological disabilities may display their symptoms by isolating themselves or by behaving impulsively or inappropriately. Continue to provide support to these students during their difficult times.

For the teaching environment

A number of the suggestions below will be beneficial to **_all_** students in your classroom:

- Put your syllabus together as early as possible so students with learning disabilities can get ahead on the readings during the winter or summer break.
- Keep to your syllabus as much as possible. If you need to add materials, see if there are ways you or someone else can help a student with a physical disability obtain the new materials.
- It is helpful to students with disabilities (and others as well) if you note which of the assigned readings are of the highest priority.
- Write an outline on the board for each class so students with learning disabilities can follow the larger context of what will be occurring that day.
- State in class **_and_** on your syllabus that you would like students to contact you as soon as possible about any special accommodations they may need (either because of disabilities or religious practices). Since some students may be initially hesitant to contact you, you will need to also make them feel comfortable about approaching you at a later time.
- Be as flexible as possible with deadlines. Although students with disabilities do not want requirements lowered for them, they may need a longer period of time to complete the task at hand.
- If you have a physically disabled student, know if your office, lab, or classroom is accessible.
- When you are planning group exercises in class, think about whether these exercises could be done by students with various kinds of disabilities.
- Try to develop accommodations for missed classes and meetings, which can happen to those with a chronic disease or a psychological illness.

Resources

Contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (763-3000 or www. umich.edu/~sswd/ssd) for further information and advice. They have developed handbooks for both student and faculty about services and advice for possible accommodations.

The Adaptive Technology Computer Site has various computers, readers, speech dictation machines and scanners that can be of great assistance for those students who are visually impaired or blind, have mobility impairments (including repetitive stress syndrome) or are learning disabled. The office is located in B136 Shapiro Library. For more information contact Jim Knox at 647-6437 or e-mail jimbo@umich.edu.

Jayne London, Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns. Contact her at jplondon@umich.edu or 647-6341.

IX

Non-Traditional Graduate Students

It is common for non-traditional age students (i.e., "the chronologically advantaged") to be more focused and aware of what they want out of graduate school than their younger colleagues. Perhaps one of their biggest assets is they are not intimidated by the prospects of engaging in discussions with faculty. Yet older students often face their own types of problems:

Devaluation of Life Experiences

Many of our older students have returned to school after spending a considerable number of years either running a business, working in industry or the public sector, or raising a family. One of the most difficult issues these students face is sometimes finding that their relevant 'real life' knowledge is of little use or value in the classroom. This is particularly frustrating when their vast array of experiences contradict the research and theory they are studying.

Fear of Having "Rusty" Skills

Older students who have been out of school for a number of years can fear competing with their younger counterparts. They may see the younger students as being more up-to-date on the current issues within their disciplines and as having more computer experience.

Invisibility in the Classroom

Older students commonly describe how badly they feel when a professor refers to something from several decades back and then says, "And of course none of you would remember that." Although not intended in a harmful way, this remark makes older students feel as though their presence in the classroom is not being acknowledged.

Isolation from Fellow Students

Because of the age differences between them and their peers, many older students feel somewhat socially isolated. Although friendships can develop with their younger colleagues, older students are aware that some of their fellow students are the ages of their own children. Furthermore, many of the older students tell us they no longer want to be in the places where younger students go to relax and socialize.

Awkwardness with Faculty

Non-traditional age students can be close in age or even significantly older than their professors. These students tell us that some faculty are much more comfortable with the younger students than with them.

SUGGESTIONS

For older students
- Don't be afraid to ask younger students about suggestions for readings or other assistance as you develop new skills.
- Initiate social activities such as dinner parties. Begin and end them at hours which are reasonable for you.

For other students and faculty
- Show your interest in older students by finding out what they did before they entered their graduate programs and how their life experiences might be relevant to the classroom setting.
- Welcome and value the special contributions older students make in class discussions.
- Reach out to older students. As one student said, "A 'hello' shouted across the Diag by a younger student to an older one gladdens the heart. It's nice to be included."

For the teaching environment
- Make links between theory and practice so that all students can understand how information learned in the classroom is transferable to the outside world.

Resources

If you need to improve your computer skills, the Information Technology Central Services (ITCS) offers free on-line training on various topics. They also have a number of part-day classes that have a fee (starting at $35 and up). For further information, consult their website www.itd.umich.edu/education or call 763-3700.

For free help with statistics, contact the Center for Statistical Consultation and Research (CSCAR) at 764-7828 or www.umich.edu/~cscar.

Join in the fun with the "Chronologically Advantaged Graduate Students Group." E-mail jplondon@umich.edu to be notified of upcoming events.

Jayne London, Rackham's Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, is available to meet individually and confidentially with students to hear their concerns. Contact her at jplondon@umich.edu or 647-6341.

MENTORING ISSUES FACING UNDERREPRESENTED FACULTY

In the course of this project, we also heard from women and minority faculty about some of the special issues they face. Although this may not be an exhaustive list, we include this information so that you can be aware of some of the faculty issues as well.

I. Double Duty

Minority and women faculty often mentor a higher number of graduate students than their peers. Students seek them out not only because of their research and professional interests, but also because of their gender and/or race. As the number of women faculty and faculty of color remains low, these few faculty attract many students.

Suggestions for all students

Be sensitive to the heavy mentoring load of minority and female faculty by always being efficient with the time they give you. (See suggestions on pages 12-13.)

II. Problems Mentoring from a Marginalized Position

In contrast to the problem above, faculty of color, female faculty and LGBT faculty are aware that some graduate students do not select them as mentors because of their marginalized positions in the academy. Graduate students perceive that these faculty wield less power and influence inside and outside their departments. Historically marginalized faculty are therefore seen as being less effective in providing the types of instrumental assistance graduate students need.

Suggestions for all students

Remember, by having a team of mentors, you will not be harmed in any way if you work with someone who truly has limited access to the powerful networks of your discipline.

By working with faculty who have been historically marginalized in the academy, you can help to raise their status. Your current and future productivity will positively impact their reputation in your field.

Use opportunities both within and outside the University to highlight the academic work and mentoring skills of a faculty member who is undervalued in your department.

III. Double Standards

Women faculty can feel that some female and male students expect them to be more nurturing and emotionally supportive than their male counterparts. Junior faculty are in an especially difficult situation because excessive time spent in mentoring jeopardizes the amount of time they have to carry on the work needed for promotion.

Suggestions for all students
Ask yourself whether you are demanding more of women faculty than men faculty. If you feel disappointed with the way a woman faculty member interacts with you, ask yourself whether you would have the same reaction if the professor was a man. Respect the fact that not every female professor will be able to provide the amount of emotional support you want. Don't let this deter you from obtaining and appreciating what she is willing to offer you.

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IV. Needing to Prove Their Legitimacy

Some women professors and faculty of color feel that certain students question their legitimacy as professors because of their race or gender. These faculty state that students challenge their authority in the classroom, and generally do not accord them the same level of respect that they give to other faculty.

Suggestions for all students
Do you have higher esteem for certain categories of faculty than for others? If you are being critical of a faculty member, could it be that you are reacting to a style, an accent or a speech pattern that makes you consider them in a critical light?

WRAPPING IT UP

We have learned so much from the faculty and students who have spoken to us. We wish to continue the conversation about mentoring and diversity issues within the Graduate School, and we welcome your participation in that discussion. Feel free to contact Jayne London via e-mail (jplondon@umich.edu) or by phone (647-6341) with any comments and suggestions you have.

We also want you to know that every semester, Rackham invites students from various background and with various interests to come in, meet one another, and share their experiences and suggestions with one another. Call Jayne London at 764-9341 or look at the website at www.rackham.umich.edu/Events for further information.

We also compiled a list of resources, both web and text based, for those interested in reading more about mentoring. These can be viewed on-line at www.rackham.umich.edu/StudentInfo/Publications/StudentMentoring/contents.html.

APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING RESOURCES

Graduate school, and life as a whole, can at times be very stressful. Students and faculty need to be aware that there are various ways students can obtain professional assistance for issues that may arise.

GradCare

GradCare is a health insurance plan which is available only to those who hold the title of graduate student instructors (GSIs), graduate student research assistants (GSRAs), graduate student staff assistants (GSSA) or who have a fellowship that stipulates GradCare coverage. Under this plan, students are entitled to 20 mental health visits per year, with a $15 copay for each visit. For further information, and for the necessary pre-authorization, call MCDR (Michigan Central Diagnostic and Referral) at 998-7940.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

This office provides free short-term individual counseling (4-6 weeks) as well as workshops and support groups. For those students who need longer term counseling, CAPS can direct students to therapists and psychologists in the area, some of whom charge on a sliding scale basis. CAPS is located in 3100 Michigan Union. For more information, call 764-8312 or visit www.umich.edu/~caps.

The Center for the Education of Women (CEW)

Available to men and women, CEW has professional counselors who help individuals explore their educational and career goals. CEW also offers free or low fee workshops. For more information, call 998-7080 or visit www.umich.edu/~cew.

Rackham School of Graduate Studies

It may be possible for students to obtain funds for private professional counseling through the Rackham Discretionary Fund. Applications are available from the Fellowships Office or by visiting the website at www.rackham.umich.edu/Fellowships.

APPENDIX B: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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