



Performance Feedback to Graduate Students

Guidelines and Recommendations


College of Science, Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA

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Dean, College of Science

1. Introduction

This document contains guidelines and recommendations for providing performance feedback to graduate students. These guidelines apply to all graduate students in the College of Science engaged in research expected to lead to a thesis, and who have been assigned a faculty advisor. Graduate students not engaged in research, such as students completing a course-based master's degree, are not the focus of the guidelines herein.

The guidelines herein are intended for use by the individual departments in the College of Science.

Each department in the College of Science provides performance feedback to its graduate students in some form. A written feedback is important in that it allows both the advisor and the student to summarize, in unambiguous terms, progress made towards a thesis during a given term (semester or summer session). Appropriately filed feedback also updates a student's record that could be used as an effective tool for resolving conflicts should any develop, such as between a student and her/his advisor, or a student and the departmental Graduate Committee.

All students engaged in research expected to lead to a master's or a doctoral thesis should be registered for a xxxx698, xxxx699, xxxx699A, or 699B course and the number of credits set according to the effort expected and the limits set by the university. At the beginning of each term, a student and the advisor (major professor) should agree on what the student is expected to accomplish during the term to the extent this is possible. It is best to spell out the expectations in writing (or email).

2. Need for written feedback

It is important that every graduate be provided a *written* feedback on her/his progress at least once during each academic year. The feedback provides the student an opportunity to assess his/her performance against the expectations of the advisor and the graduate committee.

An oral feedback, though useful, is inadequate as it is subject to several interpretations that could potentially change over time. A written feedback is fixed and committed; it provides ample opportunity to the student for browsing, self evaluation, and planning.

Written feedback, accumulated over the duration of a student's tenure at the university, serves as evidence in the event of an advisor-advisee conflict. Such evidence could be useful in many ways, such as to an independent committee evaluating a possible complaint by a student.

3. Performance Feedback: Process

The following 4-step Performance Feedback process is strongly recommended. In step 1 the student and the advisor agree on the goals and expectations for the

coming year. In step 2, the student prepares a summary of the progress made during the period and submits it to the advisor. In step 3, the advisor, and/or one or more co-advisors, and/or the Departmental Graduate Committee (hereafter referred to as Graduate Committee) examines the summary and might approve it, or a modified version, or not approve it. An approved report is made available to the advisor, any co-advisor(s), the student, the Graduate Office of the department, and the Graduate Committee. Step 4 is necessary only when the advisor does not approve the report thereby creating a possible conflict with the advisee. While a department might decide to tailor the above procedure to their needs, it must lead to a written feedback at least once in the academic year to every graduate student registered in xxxx698, xxxx699, xxxx699A, or 699B during any semester.

Step 1: Setting yearly goals and expectations

The student should arrange a special meeting with the advisor early after registration in xxxx698, xxxx699, xxxx699A, or 699B to discuss that semester/year's expectations. The student prepares a written summary of the goals and expectations, gets it approved by the advisor and files it with the grad office.

It is expected that the student and the advisor meet regularly during the semester using a mutually agreed upon time table. Such meetings help the student understand progress towards objectives and may or may not lead to a revision of the expectations set up at the beginning of the semester.

Though additional paperwork to document any change in expectations is not recommended, the advisor and the advisee might decide to do so via a revision of the original document or through email correspondence. In any case, it is important for both the advisor and the advisee to have a mutual understanding of the expectations against which the progress will be evaluated in Step 3.

Step 2: Preparation of the progress report

This step is initiated by the graduate student sometime towards the end of each semester, summer term, or academic year during which the student expects to receive a grade in xxxx698 or xxxx699. Each department will decide how frequently and when a written feedback is to be provided. In a standard format, created and approved by the home department, the student provides a summary of the progress made towards the goals set at the start of the term or academic year. The progress must be measured with respect to the goals and expectations set forth in step 1. This summary is submitted to the advisor by the student for approval.

As mentioned earlier, it is expected that the advisee and the advisor have met several times during the term and have discussed, and possibly revised, the goals set for the student. The nature of the summary provided depends on the advisor and the advisee. For example, a simple citation to a paper coauthored by the student might be acceptable to an advisor. Another advisor might want a 1-page summary of the student's accomplishments during the term. Each department is expected to provide guidelines for the progress report.

The student must submit a written progress report to the advisor by the deadline set by the home department. In the event the advisor is unavailable for any reason, the report may be submitted to a co-advisor, if there is one, or to the Graduate Committee. It is recommended that this deadline be at least seven working days prior to the last day for the submission of the grades during the term in which the report is to be filed.

While Step 2 anticipates that the student initiates the feedback process, it in no way impinges upon the rights and the responsibilities of the advisor and the graduate committee to provide continual guidance to the student in writing. The feedback form is a place for the advisor and the graduate committee to offer their written comments and suggestions to the student, if they choose to do so.

Step 3: Approval of the progress report

Upon receiving the progress report from the advisee, the advisor either approves it, possibly with modifications made in consultation with the student, or does not. In either case the advisor writes her/his evaluation and signs the report.

A copy of the progress report is returned to the Graduate Office by the advisor. The Graduate Office makes one copy of the report available to the student, one to the advisor, one to each co-advisor (if any), and files another in the student's record. A copy is also made available to members of the Graduate Committee for their information and any action, should one be necessary.

The student must have the option of turning the progress report directly to the Graduate Committee. The committee will make the report available to the advisor for comments.

A signed copy of the progress report form must be returned to the graduate office on or before the deadline set by the department.

Step 4: Conflict resolution

When the advisor and student disagree on the progress report, or if the graduate committee/chair/head make further comments or take other action, the student may request a meeting with the advisor and/or the graduate committee chair/head. At the request of either student or advisor, one or more members of the graduate committee may also be invited to this meeting.

The purpose of such a meeting is to ensure that both the student and the advisor understand why the progress report is not considered satisfactory. Minutes of the meeting are recorded by the Chair and made available to the student, the advisor, and the Graduate Office. This meeting could lead to a change in the progress report in which case a revised version, appropriately signed by the advisor, is also made available to the Graduate Office.

4. Defaulting student

Each department must set a clear policy to deal with students who fail to follow the procedure outlined in Section 3. As an example, one such policy may ask the advisor that the defaulting student be given an incomplete (I) or unsatisfactory (U) grade in the thesis course if the student has not completed the tasks specified in Steps 1 and 2 in Section 3. Students should be alerted to the fact that two sequential unsatisfactory grades will invoke the intervention of the graduate school. In situations where the graduate committee assesses a student's progress during the summer months, the committee might decide to disallow a defaulting student from registering in a thesis course in the following fall. *In any event, it is each department's responsibility to set up a policy to deal with defaulting students.*

Graduate School Ombudsperson

Each department must make its graduate students aware of the Graduate School Ombudsperson and the services provided. Graduate students must be made aware that they could always seek the services of the graduate school in the event they do not feel comfortable in raising an issue at the department or the college level. The relevant Graduate School Web site is found at the following link

<http://www.gradschool.purdue.edu/students/current/ombudsman.cfm>

5. Feedback form

Each department will decide on the format of the feedback form. A sample appears in the Appendix. It is important that the student's advisor, and any coadvisor(s), examine the progress statement filed by the student and explicitly indicate approval or disapproval. In cases where the advisor-advisee relationship is uncordial, the feedback form could be routed through the Graduate Committee that then seeks comments from the advisor. In all cases, written comments by the graduate committee and the advisor must be made available to the student.

It is expected that in a majority of the cases the Thesis grade (S, U, or I) will match with the advisor's approval or disapproval of the student initiated progress report. However, in cases when the grade awarded does not match with the advisor's evaluation of the written report, it is recommended that the department ask the advisor to offer a written explanation for the mismatch.

Appendix: Sample format for progress feedback

A sample format for progress feedback is shown here; the departments may choose to design their own format. The feedback process is initiated by the student by filling out this, or a department approved form, and submitting it to the advisor for approval. Departments may decide whether or not this form is to be signed by any co-advisor(s). It is recommended that a copy of the approved progress report be made available to any co-advisor(s)

Department of _____

Student: _____

Progress Summary

(To be prepared by the student; use additional sheets when necessary. This form must be accompanied by a written set of goals and expectations agreed upon by the advisor and the advisee at the beginning of the reporting period.)

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

Advisor: _____

Advisor: Anticipated course grade S U I

Advisor: Progress: Very Good Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Advisor: Anticipated date of degree: Dec/May/Aug 200...

Advisor's comments:

Advisor's signature: _____ Date: _____