

Faculty, Graduate Students Clarify Advising Expectations

Campus and Community

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Jennifer Hasler and Sahil



Shah discuss advisor/student expectations.

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had with advisors.

Inconsistent. That's one of the first words that comes to Ph.D. student Sahil Shah's mind when asked about the experience he and his friends have

“I think a lot of it has to do with how a faculty member was advised when he or she was a graduate student,” said Shah, a student in Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE). “Those who had an advisor who treated them with respect and mentored them tend to do the same with their students. And then there are the professors who weren't treated that way, and now do the same to their students.”

This is one of the reasons members of the Georgia Tech community have created a document of guidelines, known as the Mutual Expectations of Research Advisors and Advisees, to serve as a starting point in the Institute's efforts to improve advisor and advisee relationships.

In 2014, the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Faculty Development hosted two focus groups, which included both students and faculty members, to learn more about what each party thought it should expect from the other in these relationships.

The mutual expectations document was shaped based on these conversations and additional feedback, and was recently adopted by Georgia Tech's Faculty Governance and Graduate Student Government Association.

"Our graduate students want accountability for effective advising at Tech, and our faculty members expect communication and commitment from their advisees," said Susan Cozzens, vice provost of Graduate Education and Faculty Development. "We hope that both advisors and advisees will read through the document and consider whether the suggested expectations could be applied in their relationships going forward."

For example, some of the expectations mentioned for an advisor include helping students build professional networks and providing guidance on professional and ethical standards. Suggested expectations for students include understanding that mentoring is tailored for each student and adjusted for progress in the degree program. Students are also expected to take feedback seriously and revise work accordingly.

Jennifer Hasler, a professor in ECE and Shah's advisor, has

watched 12 of her students move on to faculty positions at various universities during her 19 years at Tech. She thinks that this document is a step in the right direction toward sparking conversations about how to improve these relationships.

“It’s important for us to be able to communicate our expectations to students and for them to know what’s acceptable,” Hasler said. “If we want to have a stronger, more collegial campus community, we need to take more steps like this to foster healthy advisor-advisee relationships.”