

Expectations for Faculty Who Mentor Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Trainees at UT Southwestern

According to the mission statement of our institution, "Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences provides well qualified individuals seeking an M.A., M.S., or Ph.D. degree with the opportunity and the encouragement to investigate rigorously and be creative in solving significant problems in the biological, physical, and behavioral sciences". A goal of the institution is to "educate a diverse group of high-quality biomedical researchers to adequately serve the needs of the international science community". It is the responsibility of faculty training graduate students and postdoctoral trainees to strive to achieve these goals by mentoring. This document explains the minimum expectations of the Graduate School for faculty mentoring of trainees.

1. Faculty mentors have the responsibility to help students and postdoctoral trainees select significant and realistic research goals that can be expected to be accomplished within the time customary to obtain a graduate degree or for postdoctoral training. Reasonable expectations are based upon what is known at the time that a project is initiated.
2. Faculty mentors have the responsibility to foster professional confidence in their trainees. Research, particularly creative exploratory research, is difficult and success is often slow and protracted. Faculty mentors, having learned to survive in this environment, should encourage trainees and impart coping skills.
3. Faculty mentors are responsible for encouraging strategic thinking and creativity. Asking students to propose and discuss research strategies with their mentor or other interested faculty is an excellent way to accomplish this.
4. Faculty mentors are expected to impart research skills to their trainees. These skills include:
 - Teaching critical evaluation of the literature relevant to a student's research.
 - Teaching quantitative analysis and the technical skills appropriate for a student's research program.
 - Teaching the presentation skills necessary for the student or postdoctoral trainee to clearly communicate what they have done, why they did it and how.
 - Teaching manuscript writing skills so that by the time a student obtains a degree they can write a scholarly manuscript suitable for publication and know how to write fellowship and grant applications.
 - Teaching scientific ethics and professional skills to both students and postdoctoral trainees. Professional skills include strategies for obtaining the next professional position for the trainee.

Traditionally faculty organize themselves into graduate programs to teach many of these skills. However, the existence of these activities does not absolve the faculty mentor of the responsibility for teaching them.

5. Faculty mentors have the responsibility to set specific research goals and to measure the accomplishments of their trainees. It is expected that if a student's accomplishments are judged to be inadequate, the mentor will devise strategies to remedy this, usually with help from the student's other research committee members or graduate program.
6. Faculty mentors have the responsibility to discuss the accomplishments of their trainees in an open and objective manner and to give advice on realistic professional goals based upon these discussions.