GPB Policy on resolving conflicts between student and mentor (6/16/21)

Graduate Programs in Bioscience (GPB) recognizes that conflicts occasionally arise between a faculty mentor and a graduate student over the course of a PhD program. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and a process to attempt to resolve these conflicts as well as steps to take in case the conflict cannot be resolved. This guidance and process are described in the context of a mentoring relationship between the faculty mentor and graduate student. For conflicts involving other interactions, see the GPB Student Wellness & Reporting Resources page.

The mentoring relationship between thesis adviser and graduate student is at the core of graduate training in the biosciences. The mentoring relationship is an ongoing and dynamic process aimed at developing the technical, intellectual, and psychosocial skills needed for the student's success in a career in science. To strengthen the mentoring relationship, GPB strongly recommends that all faculty and trainees participate in evidence-based mentorship training offered through the Advancing Faculty Mentoring Practices workshop (for faculty) and Entering Mentoring Training (for students), or other analogous trainings. GPB also encourages regular mentor-mentee discussions of expectations as well as use of mentoring compacts and Individual Development Plans for consideration of short and long term trainee goals. A faculty member may not unilaterally decide to end student funding and evict a student from the research group but must follow the GPB Policy on Faculty Advisor Dismissing Student from Lab.

For any situation that involves sexual violence or harassment, or discrimination based on a protected category, it is mandatory to submit a report to Title IX or DPO (see reporting section at end). To report violations of the Student or Faculty Code of conduct, see Institutional Guidance and Reporting Resources section below.

In the case of conflict between a student and mentor that does not involve mandatory reporting to Title IX or DPO:

1. The mentor and mentee should openly and respectfully communicate, preferably in face-to-face dialogue to discuss the issue(s) and strive to align expectations.

2. As needed, the Home Area Director (HAD) should serve as a source of advice by meeting individually with the student and/or mentor. If either the student or mentor have reservations about contacting the HAD, the GPB Director and/or GPB Director for Recruitment and Inclusion can provide guidance.
   Additional sources for advice (in roughly increasing order of formality and seriousness):
     Student Affairs Officer
     Other dissertation committee member
     Graduate Division Academic Case Manager (who will escalate to the
      Graduate Division Associate Dean or Dean as needed)
     Office of Ombuds Services

Dean of Students Office of Student Conduct
School/Division Equity Diversity and Inclusion advisor
Department Chair or Vice-chair for Graduate Studies

3. If one-on-one discussion between student and mentor is not productive, the Home Area Director or GPB Director will meet individually with the student and mentor to learn more about the situation from each perspective. Throughout the following steps, the HAD and GPB Director should communicate with each other about the status of the situation, within constraints of requests for privacy from participants.

4. The HAD or GPB Director should then arrange a meeting between the student and mentor, with the HAD or GPB Director serving as mediator. The SAO may be helpful in this process and can be engaged at the discretion of the HAD or GPB Director. The goal of the meeting is to agree on a plan to address the issue(s) and ensure a positive training environment for the student that promotes their research training and professional development.
   These discussions should utilize standard conflict resolution steps, including:
   - identifying the point(s) of contention
   - discussing how to reach research and professional development goals
   - discussing obstacles to those goals
   - agreeing to and mutually acknowledging a solution
   - identifying the mentor's and student's respective roles in the resolution
   Based on this discussion, a mutually-agreed upon written plan for resolution should be developed by the mediator (HAD or GPB Director) and provided to mentor, student and HAD. The plan should include follow-up meetings at an agreed-upon frequency to assess resolution of the conflict.

5. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached in #4, the HAD or GPB Director should engage either the UCLA Office of Ombuds Services, or the appropriate Graduate Division Associate Dean for additional mediation.

6. If, in steps 2-5, deficiencies in faculty mentoring skills are identified that contribute to the conflict, the faculty mentor may be referred to the UCLA Advancing Faculty Mentor Training workshop and, as appropriate, Culturally Aware Mentor training (if available). Similarly, if the mediation process identifies communication, professional skills or other skill deficits of the student, the student may be referred to the appropriate training (e.g. Grad School Hacks).

7. In the event that the mentoring relationship conflict is deemed unresolvable, the HAD will work with the trainee and GPB to identify a new thesis adviser.

8. For situations where a faculty member has mentoring issues with multiple students or an especially egregious issue with a single student, GPB will consider proposals from a Ph.D. program to suspend faculty membership. For consideration of suspension:

a. A written proposal from the Ph.D. Program Director that includes, but is not limited to: a description of the circumstances leading to the recommendation, any available documentation, a recommendation for the duration of suspension, and a recommendation for remedial action on the part of the mentor, and a description of conditions for reinstatement.
b. Notification of the mentor and mentor's department chair of the proposal.
c. Within two weeks following notification, the mentor has the opportunity to respond in writing to the proposal.
d. GPB Executive Committee considers the proposal and faculty response and then votes on the proposal. A majority is required to approve the proposal.

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Institutional Guidance and Reporting Resources
(for more information see https://bioscience.ucla.edu/student-wellness-reporting-resources/)

For guidance and to submit a report on sexual violence and sexual harassment
Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, unwelcome requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when a person's submission to such conduct is implicitly or explicitly made the basis for employment decisions, academic evaluation, grades or advancement, or other decisions affecting participation in a University program (quid pro quo), or when such conduct creates a hostile working environment.
UCLA Title IX Office: https://www.sexualharassment.ucla.edu/
To report: https://equity.ucla.edu/report-an-incident/

For guidance and to submit a report of discrimination
Discrimination or harassment based on race, ancestry, national origin, religion, age, and other categories protected by law and University policy.
DGSOM Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor - Interim
Kathleen Brown, kbrown@ucla.edu, 310-267-8708
Life Sciences Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor
Paul Barber, paulbarber@ucla.edu, (310) 794-5349

UCLA Discrimination Prevention Office: https://equity.ucla.edu/about-us/our-teams/civil-rights-office/discrimination-prevention/
To report:
against a faculty member: https://ucla.i-sight.com/external/case/new/complaint
against a student: https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/report-an-incident-of-bias

For guidance and to submit a report of disability discrimination
The University prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities.
Center for Accessible Education (CAE): https://cae.ucla.edu/

The ADA & 504 Compliance Office: https://ada.ucla.edu/
To file a grievance: https://ada.ucla.edu/grievance-procedure

Student Code of Conduct https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/individual-student-code
For consultation and/or to file a complaint charging violation of the student code of conduct:
https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/

Faculty Code of Conduct https://catalog.registrar.ucla.edu/ucla-catalog20-21-1438.html
To file a complaint charging violation of the faculty code of conduct:
https://www.senate.ucla.edu/committee/charges

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