

# Duke | *the Program* *in Literature*

## Collective Statement on Mentoring Expectations

*| Adopted Fall, 2021 |*  
*| This Statement remains a “living document” that we*  
*will revisit annually|*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- PREFACE ..... 3**
- RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT & FACULTY ADVISORS ..... 4**
  - GENERAL OUTLINE..... 4*
  - SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS ..... 5*
  - SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE PRIMARY ADVISOR(S) ..... 6*
  - SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS..... 7*
- BASIC PRINCIPLES & BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP ..... 8**
  - Advisement Meetings..... 8
  - Communication ..... 9
  - Feedback on Written Work ..... 9
  - Letters of Recommendation..... 9
  - Teaching and Teaching Observations..... 10
  - General Participation in Departmental Events and Initiatives..... 10

## PREFACE

**To fulfill the educational, research, and professional mission of the Program in Literature, we uphold the present “Collective Statement on Mentoring Expectations,” which has been written in the spirit of respect, support, inclusion, accountability, and transparency.**

As Ph.D. students in the Program in Literature you are undergoing an intensive apprenticeship in how to conduct original research and write a successful dissertation in the theoretical humanities, how to produce publishable scholarship in your chosen field, and how to best prepare yourselves for a future career—be it in academic or in nonacademic job markets. This apprenticeship also includes training in effective service and teaching provided through the Research and Teaching Assistantships offered by the department; through other teaching or service roles you may assume within Literature and other departments at Duke; through your mentoring relationships with your primary advisors and your other committee members; through workshops and events organized by the department and the Graduate School; and through various positions you may assume in professional scholarly groups, associations, or societies. While the mentoring and advising you will receive will differ based on the circumstances of these roles and the stage in which you happen to be during your trajectory through the Ph.D. program, there are certain shared values, goals, and responsibilities that apply to all:

- an open and exploratory learning environment specifically aimed at fostering free dialogue and the production of innovative scholarship
- an ethos of interdisciplinary engagement that supports awareness of the current debates within a chosen field, while also recognizing cross-connections with other disciplines and ancillary fields, as well as with urgent social issues
- a culture of encouragement and of consistent evaluation, aimed at the advancement of research and teaching expertise, administrative skills, professional development, and the overall successful progress of students through the Ph.D. program
- professional, collegial, and respectful conduct, built upon diverse, equitable, and inclusive participation for all and a model of collaborative thinking
- a pledge to academic and research integrity
- a commitment to the current “Collective Statement on Mentoring Expectations,” as well as to the Program’s “Collective Statement on Climate, Values, and Conduct,” its “Research (or Graduate) and Teaching Assistantships” guidelines, and its “Graduate Student Handbook”
- an adherence to School and University policies.

To this end, our collective commitments regarding mentoring expectations for both the faculty/department and the students are outlined below. This is a working document that we will revisit each year to remind ourselves of the commitments outlined here, but also with the intent of updating these based on feedback and guidance from our community members.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT & FACULTY ADVISORS

## GENERAL OUTLINE

The Program in Literature is committed to providing thoughtful mentoring and advising for all students throughout their doctoral education, and to supporting them in their chosen career path. There are overlapping mentoring and advising resources for students as they progress through the Program:

- The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is available to all students for advice and guidance throughout the entirety of their tenure at Duke.
- The Post-exams/Job Placement Advisor is available to students for professionalization training and related consultation after the successful completion of their Preliminary Exams (typically in the fourth year).
- **In the first and second years**, the faculty members with whom a student is assigned as either Research Assistant (year one) or Teaching Assistant (year two) will serve as their initial mentors. During this early phase, these faculty mentors can be counted on for the student's general training needs related to the RA or TA assignments, but also for questions related to their coursework options, planning development, and matters of navigating the Ph.D. experience, the Program, and Duke.
- **Additionally for the second year**, each student will establish a closer advisory relationship with a faculty who will agree to serve as their instructor for the "Doctoral Exam Preparation" Independent Study (spring semester of second year). It is here that the student will begin working on their Preliminary Exam materials with the direct advisement of this faculty member.
- **In the third year**, each student will establish a formal advisory relationship with a faculty who will agree to serve as their primary advisor in the role of Preliminary Exam Chair. It is anticipated that this is the same faculty member with whom the student will have worked for the "Doctoral Exam Preparation" Independent Study, though changes are always possible based on the evolving nature of students' research profiles and their advisement needs. It is also possible to have two faculty members as Preliminary Exam Co-chairs. Once designated, the Chair or Co-chairs will be the primary mentor(s). This is also the time during which each student will establish closer advisory relationships with other faculty members who will agree to serve on their Preliminary Exam Committee (at least another three in the case of one Exam Chair, and at least another two in the case of two Exam Co-chairs). The student can count on these committee members for advice and guidance both in preparation for their preliminary exams, but also during and immediately after the successful completion of their exams.
- **In the fourth year and beyond**, each student will establish a formal advisory relationship with a faculty who will agree to serve as the Dissertation Advisor. Some students choose to continue working with the same faculty as the Preliminary Exam Chair, though changes are always possible (both at the start of this phase or midway) based on the evolving nature of each student's research profiles and their advisement needs. It is also possible to have two faculty members as Dissertation Co-advisors. Once

designated, the Dissertation Advisor(s) will be the primary mentor(s). This is also the time during which each student will continue or establish new advisory relationships with other faculty members who will agree to serve on their Dissertation Committee (at least another three in the case of one Dissertation Advisor, and at least another two in the case of two Dissertation Co-advisors). The student can count on these committee members for advice and guidance both during the research and writing phases of their dissertation, during the defense and submission of the dissertation, but also during the years afterward as the graduate applies for various career posts (counting on them especially as writers of recommendation letters).

- **NOTE:** As a courtesy, in cases where changes have been made such that a faculty has been removed from a student's committee or they are no longer the primary advisor and just a committee member, students are expected to notify these faculty as soon as is possible.

## SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS

The **Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)** is dedicated to the overall support of all graduate students throughout the course of their Ph.D. trajectory. This is with the aid of the **Director of Graduate Studies Assistant (DGSA)** for administrative issues, and the **Post-exams/Job Placement Advisor** for professionalization training and related consultation after the successful completion of students' Preliminary Exams (typically in the fourth year).

The support offered from these department officers involves several related matters, most importantly:

- Duke Graduate School and Literature Ph.D. requirements (coursework, milestones, progress, expectations, deadlines, training)
- Graduate School and departmental policies (matters of "Climate, Values, and Conduct," "Mentoring Expectations")
- the financial aid, procedures of payment, and other funding opportunities (internal and external fellowships, internships, etc.)
- students' service obligations and expectations (RA and TA assignments, teaching as Instructors of Record), as well as related training opportunities
- resources for assistance with personal challenges that may emerge
- resources for international students
- information regarding typical time-to-degree for our students and career outcomes of our graduates
- information regarding potential allied faculty in other departments at Duke and the Research Triangle
- individual development planning (especially during the first two years leading up to the Preliminary Exams, but also through the beginning and end of year individual DGS-student meetings and end-of-year annual reports)

- academic and nonacademic professionalization training and resources (workshops, mock job talks, Graduate School and Career Center resources, nonacademic career resources).

The DGS is also the initial point person for any individual or collective concerns the students may have, which can be communicated either during individual meetings, through the monthly Graduate Liaison meetings with the DGS and Chair, or at Town Hall or other general meetings organized for this purpose throughout the year. The other officers and many other faculty members in different positions are also available as contacts for raising such concerns or reporting grievances, as are other non-departmental officers and university-wide resources. Please see the “Statement on Climate, Values, and Conduct” for a detailed outline and further guidance on the matter.

### SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE PRIMARY ADVISOR(S)

The most important mentoring relationships a student will develop is with their **Primary Advisor(s)**: the **Preliminary Exam Chair (or Co-chairs)** and especially the **Dissertation Advisor(s)**. It is up to the student to choose which graduate faculty member(s) they would like to serve in these positions—of course, with the agreement of the faculty member(s) in each instance.

The student may prefer to have the same faculty member(s) serve as both the Preliminary Exam Chair (or Co-chairs) *and* the Dissertation Advisor(s), or they may have varying advisement needs that would benefit from someone else taking over the role of their Dissertation Advisor(s) after their exams. It is sometimes also the case that changes to an already established primary advisor role are necessary midway, based on the evolving nature of each student’s research profiles and their advisement needs. At all times, students are encouraged to discuss these changes with their primary advisor(s), other committee members, and the DGS, and should feel free to initiate a request for a change with the DGSA. **As a courtesy, though, students are expected to notify faculty that changes are being made/have been made to their participation in the student’s committee.**

The student can count on their primary advisor(s) for guidance and support for all matters related to the Ph.D. requirements (coursework, milestones, dissertation), conducting research in their chosen field, the composition of their committees (choosing other faculty to serve on the student’s committees), teaching and pedagogical training, publishing, applying for funding/fellowships, considering career options, finding/applying for posts, and navigating the profession. More specifically, the **Preliminary Exam Chair** is responsible for guiding the student through the process of identifying and configuring their two exam field lists (Teaching Field List and Dissertation Research Field List), conducting the relevant research, and preparing for, and navigating through, the whole Preliminary Exam milestone. The **Dissertation Advisor** is responsible for supervising the dissertation project, guiding the student through the research

and writing process all the way to the final dissertation defense, offering feedback to the student on all written work (dissertation chapters, essays aimed at publication, fellowship and job application materials), advising the student on teaching, mentoring the student on how to navigate their individual professional field, writing recommendation and evaluation letters, assisting with any relevant opportunities both at Duke and at other institutions, associations, or societies, and nominating the student for relevant positions or awards as relevant.

## SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

While the Preliminary Exam Chair and the Dissertation Chair are the student's primary advisors, the student should be encouraged to seek out additional support from the other members of their committees.

In the case of the Preliminary Exam Committee members, they can be expected to advise the student on the Preliminary Exam materials, giving substantive feedback to drafts as needed, offering guidance at the end of the oral exams, and writing recommendation and evaluation letters related to this early stage.

In the case of Dissertation Committee members, they can be expected to advise the student on their dissertation materials and their overall research project. This includes offering detailed feedback during the chapter workshop; giving feedback on full chapter drafts (once these have been finalized with the consultation of the primary advisor(s)) or, instead, feedback on the final draft of the entire dissertation before its final submission; being willing to give advice regarding the student's career goals; and being available to write recommendation and evaluation letters.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES & BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

The Program in Literature is comprised of different faculty members who follow distinct advising styles, relying on a variety of methods, and even adopting various approaches depending on the moment of the graduate student's career in the program. Any list of principles concerning the relationship between faculty advisors and graduate students must provide substantial leeway for this spectrum of advising approaches, as well as for the tenets of academic freedom. At the same time, because training graduate students is one of the most important aspects of our program's mission, we wish to articulate several basic principles and best practices regarding the respective responsibilities of faculty and graduate students who are in such a pedagogical relationship.

If a student consistently finds that their primary advisor does not meet these general expectations, they should not hesitate to contact the DGS for a confidential consultation to assess the help needed. In the absence of the DGS, or if the DGS is the student's primary advisor, the student should reach out to the Chair of the Program instead.

In all cases, the aim of the Program is to offer effective mentoring for all our students as they make their way through the multiple steps of the Ph.D. program and as they prepare for and navigate their chosen career path. To achieve this mission, we commit ourselves to the following basic principles and best practices.

### **Advisement Meetings**

Primary advisors are committed to meeting with their advisees regularly (in person and/or electronically) to discuss not only ongoing milestones, research, and written work, but also the full range of issues relating to the graduate program and broader professional development (as outlined in the previous sections). Whether in residence or not, the advisor and student should be meeting and consulting on a regular basis. While the specific frequency of these meetings will vary depending on the stage of the student's progress, it is a good practice to plan, by mutual agreement, a schedule for these meetings at the beginning of each year or each semester.

Generally, advisement meetings should take place **at least once a month at the earlier stages of the Ph.D., and at least once a semester thereafter**. A good practice is to schedule a subsequent meeting before the end of a current meeting, but always with a general goal of consistent frequency.

At the end of each year, students are also required to prepare an annual report of their progress, and to meet with their advisor to discuss this and their plans for the next year. At this moment, it is also advisable for students to update their other committee members of their progress.

### **Communication**

Respectful and responsive communication between faculty advisors and student advisees is key to a productive mentoring relationship. Faculty should respond to student emails in a professional manner and **within a week during the teaching semesters**—allowing for some flexibility during the summer months or when the faculty is on leave.

Similarly, students should respond to faculty emails in a professional manner and **within a week during the teaching semesters**—allowing for some flexibility during the summer months or when the student is on a research trip (or in an equivalent type of commitment). Students should also treat departmental officers and staff with the same respect and timeliness granted to their advisors, understanding also that not all requests can be accommodated.

### **Feedback on Written Work**

Faculty should also provide timely feedback on students' written materials: exam lists, the dissertation prospectus and drafts of chapters, essays aimed for publication, job/postdoc application materials, teaching materials, and so on. In general, it is expected that feedback on written work will be given **within no more than a three-week turnaround**. Special arrangements should be made between the student and the advisor in the case of the final draft of the entire dissertation, as the detailed work of this review process may require a longer turnaround than usual. Moreover, when the faculty will be on leave, they should discuss a reasonable feedback schedule with their advisees, clarifying how quickly they will be able to respond to drafts during this time.

Accordingly, students should plan their work and requests, respecting the time frames needed for correspondence and feedback. Students should not hesitate to follow up with faculty in cases where they are not as responsive as they should be—or even to reach out to the DGS (or Chair if the DGS is the unresponsive faculty advisor) if they need someone to intervene.

### **Letters of Recommendation**

All faculty in advisory roles, be it as primary advisors or as committee members, are expected to write letters of recommendation on behalf of their students for grants, fellowships, and employment opportunities. **An advance request of one month** for such a letter is especially important when it is the first time an advisor will need to write for their student. It is also a good practice for the student to write timely reminders to the faculty about the related deadlines, and to request a confirmation once the letter has been submitted.

Accordingly, students should plan their work and requests, respecting the time frames needed for writing letters of recommendation. Students should not hesitate to follow up with faculty in cases where they are not as responsive as they should be—or even to reach out to the DGS (or Chair if the DGS is the unresponsive faculty advisor) if they need someone to intervene.

### **Teaching and Teaching Observations**

All primary advisors can be expected to offer substantive and timely feedback on their advisees' pedagogical materials, paying special attention to advising their students on the syllabus (course description, weekly schedule, assigned teaching/reading materials, etc.). It is also expected that they will observe the student's teaching at least once over the course of their tenure in the program, offering feedback to the student immediately after. This teaching observation will also prepare advisors to write about their advisees' teaching for job, fellowship, or postdoc applications.

Before teaching as an Instructor of Record for the first time, students will also benefit from a specifically organized workshop with the DGS, the DUS, and/or the Post-exams/Job Placement Advisor. Here students can expect to be offered feedback and guidance on their syllabi, best practices for class preparation and teaching styles, and answers to any related questions they may have.

### **General Participation in Departmental Events and Initiatives**

An important part of students' educational experience takes place through lectures, workshops, job talks, working groups, and other events organized by faculty and students of the Program in Literature (as well as other departments at Duke and the Research Triangle). Participation in such departmental activities serves an integral role in the intellectual mission of the Program, and the educational enrichment of our community. It is a good practice for everyone to take full advantage of these opportunities as much as is feasible and regardless of the immediate focus of our individual research interests.