MORE

mentoring others results in excellence

MORE's Guide for Graduate Chairs

How to Implement Written Mentoring Plans

RACKHAM GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MORE's Guide for Graduate Chairs
How to Implement Written Mentoring Plans

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Why This Guide?

Rackham's requirement for written mentoring plans. To increase the adoption of mentoring plans, Rackham Graduate School will require all doctoral students and their faculty advisors to have a written mentoring plan. The MORE (Mentoring Others Results in Excellence) Committee, Rackham's faculty committee on mentoring, has been facilitating a variety of workshops to help faculty and students prepare their own mentoring plans for over a decade. The MORE Committee prepared this guide to assist graduate chairs in implementing Rackham's requirement.

The MORE Committee believes an effective mentoring relationship involves two-way conversations between the mentee and the mentor. These two-way conversations are facilitated by developing written mentoring plans which include academic, professional, and career development. A written mentoring plan is a tool that allows the mentee and mentor to gain a mutual understanding regarding expectations about training/ educational goals, guidance and support needed, and generally how to work together. Students and their faculty mentors share responsibility for ensuring productive and rewarding mentoring relationships.

It is essential that each program develop their own policy for implementing written mentoring plans. The policy should be developed with input from faculty and students and should be consistent with disciplinary norms and student's needs. In Section 2, we outline MORE's approach. In Section 3, we present elements of successful mentoring including the content of mentoring plans. In Section 4, we guide programs in their development of mentoring plan policy for their programs. Section 5 provides practical tools for programs to implement written mentoring plans. Finally, Section 6 summarizes Rackham resources discussed in the guide.

In preparation of this document, MORE benefited from examining examples of required mentoring plans that some departments have already implemented. Some programs have successfully developed their own mentoring plan templates and in some cases have incorporated mentoring plans into their annual review processes. However, some programs have developed formal mentoring policies that lack some of the essentials of a mentoring plan. We hope this document will help you launch a written mentoring plan process or improve your existing practices.

2. MORE's Approach

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a relationship between mentee and mentor centered on a commitment to advance the student's career through an engagement based upon the provision of guidance and the sharing of experience and expertise. Mentoring is more than advising. A mentor actively works to integrate a mentee into a new professional role. Mentors perform multiple functions, including cultivating scholarly capability and research collaboration, expanding social and professional networks, and assisting with career development (Paglis et al., 2006). A mentor feels an ethical responsibility for successfully developing the student's career (Alvarez A.N. et al., 2009). Effective mentoring involves understanding and acknowledging students' identities and communities and developing expertise in mentoring across differences (Alvarez A.N. et al., 2009). As such, mentoring is an important responsibility and can be both challenging and rewarding.

Why is mentoring important?

Faculty mentors serve a vital role in graduate education through the preparation of the next generation of intellectual leaders and scholars. Effective mentoring benefits both the faculty member and the student by ensuring they are successful in creating and transmitting knowledge in their disciplines. For students, effective mentoring improves academic performance and professional skills, increases scholarly productivity, results in greater self-efficacy, and expands their social and professional networks (Paglis et al., 2006). Effective mentoring rewards mentors in an abundance of ways as well, including gains in time and productivity and enrichment of networks and colleagues for future collaborations. Effective mentoring aids in the recruitment of future students. Mentoring is also personally satisfying.

Old and new drivers

The emphasis on the importance of mentoring has been well-established by the national agencies funding graduate education and research. The National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and others have tied training and research grants to requirements around mentor and mentee training. Rackham established a faculty task force that led to the establishment of the standing faculty committee on mentoring (MORE) in 2008. One of the most recent drivers for the implementation of written mentoring plans surrounds the mental health crisis in graduate education. Rackham commissioned a Mental Health Task Force from 2019-2021, and its published **annual reports** (https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/mental-health-and-well-being-committee) recommended that graduate programs require mentoring plans for all graduate students that are updated at least annually. In response to the task force recommendations, Rackham moved to set as an expectation that each graduate program require a written mentoring plan for their doctoral students. The expectation is introduced and discussed with each program during their Rackham Program Review, which started during the 2021-2022 academic year. Rackham expects to roll out the expectation to all programs by 2025-2026.

3. Elements of Successful Mentoring for Graduate Students

Establishing a Mentoring Network

The mentoring needs of graduate students are multifaceted. In addition to academic and professional support, students need psychosocial support. The MORE Committee and Rackham developed a fillable .pdf called "Graduate Student Mentoring Map" (see Resources) that highlights three domains/categories of mentoring: academic, professional, and well-being. This map makes explicit that multiple people should be involved in mentoring a student. One role of the faculty mentor is to help their mentee develop this network. This includes helping the student complete this document, which involves developing concrete suggestions for a mentoring network. For example, multiple people might appear in more than one category on the map, and some categories might be blank after the first mentor-

mentee meeting. Moreover, as students progress through your program, their mentoring needs will evolve and their mentoring networks will expand. For example, after students reach candidacy, the faculty serving on the dissertation committee, who can help students meet their goals and/or acquire new skills, should be added to the mentoring map. Similarly, when students get close to completing their doctoral work, they will need to establish external connections that will help them advance their careers.

Please note that the mentoring map does not include mental health resources. We know many students experience anxiety and stress. It is our responsibility to inform our students of the broad range of resources available on our campus (follow link to **Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Well Being** from https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/mental-health-and-well-being-committee).

Developing a Written Mentoring Plan

Mentoring plans are intended to facilitate two-way conversations between mentor and mentee. A mentoring plan is a written understanding between a mentor (or mentors) and mentee about academic and professional goals and expectations, as well as about their respective needs in the mentoring relationship. The plan is the outcome of an interactive process and is meant to be a working document, revisited and updated annually, as mentees progress through their graduate studies. The plan should be individualized for each mentee. For departments, tailoring questions and building your own template with the set of topics that best fit specific disciplinary needs and year in the program is not just encouraged, but expected. Please explore **MORE's templates** (https://rackham.umich.edu/mentoring), which list the main components of written mentoring plans arranged by topics/categories, to learn about the kinds of topics graduate students and their faculty mentor can benefit from discussing, pending different contexts.

- **Communication.** The hallmark of a successful mentoring relationship is a shared understanding of expectations. These expectations create the framework for the relationship and are largely established in the early meetings with a student. Mentoring plans should allow students and faculty to communicate clearly about their respective roles and responsibilities. They should explicitly discuss and build a mutual understanding around methods of communication and the structure of meetings. Giving timely feedback to students is critically important. Therefore, faculty should discuss how they will provide feedback, including to what extent a student is meeting expectations, and clarify how the student might provide feedback to them. There should be an understanding that these expectations will likely evolve over time (1st year to 5th year) and the mentor and mentee should anticipate discussing these changes.

- **Well-being and Access/Disability Needs.** Successfully shared expectations include accommodating each other's schedules, work habits, and restrictions or preferences related to physical or well-being needs. It also means meeting disability accommodations if the student elects to share this information, or if recommendations for accommodations are provided to faculty by a university office like Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Rackham Graduate Student and Program Consultation Services office provides employment or appointment related accommodations (https://rackham.umich.edu/rackham-life/students-with-disabilities). Mentoring plans ideally explicitly establish these needs and preferences for both mentors and mentees. Types of questions to be considered include: Are there physical space needs that each of you should be aware of (e.g., access restrictions or preferences)? Are there other types of needs that, if met, would help you do your best work (e.g., flexibility in working off campus)? What are the expectations for vacations, religious holidays, and other time off?

  It is the student's choice whether or not to disclose details around disability or disability accommodations while discussing the mentoring plan. The mentor should not prompt or ask about this directly, and any information disclosed must be kept confidential. All of the well-being, access, and disability needs may change over time as personal circumstances change, so revisiting and updating the plan annually helps address potential new aspects in the mentoring relationship.

- **Expectations for Research, Scholarship, and Collaboration.** The expectations for research and scholarship are discipline-specific and, for disciplines in which research is highly collaborative, often research-group-specific. As expectations are so variable, they must be discussed and updated over time, in the context of the mentoring plan. Topics that might be discussed include discipline-specific expectations for publication or other types of productivity, and for attending conferences, performances, and other events that advance the mentee's scholarship. In disciplines in which research is collaborative, the mentoring plan might specify expectations about the mentee's role in a research project (or projects); the accompanying discussion should also consider the discipline's standards for authorship. When the mentee is part of a research group, expectations about group meetings and presentations may also be specified.

- **Professional Skills and Career Growth.** The landscape of careers that students choose is constantly changing. While the specific paths differ between disciplines, successful mentoring prepares students for their career of choice. Irrespective of the specific discipline and career focus, to be best placed for success students need to develop a deep understanding of their chosen discipline, a broad operational knowledge of their field, discipline-agnostic transferable skills (e.g., communication, responsible conduct, time-management, teamwork, leadership), and skills for managing well-being. The mentor is not expected to be the sole resource for the student to develop all these skills. A mentoring plan helps define specific resources

that the student can access, in addition to the mentor, for skill development that complement those provided by the primary mentor. As the student focuses on a specific career, the plan will help identify specific activities (e.g., workshops, courses, internships, conferences) that focus the professional development of the student toward that career.

- **Completion of Programmatic and Other Milestones.** There is an assumption that all Ph.D. students make progress toward their degree, and this will involve meeting the expectations of their mentor, their thesis committee, and their academic program. The academic progress of students is monitored by the graduate program through a formal annual review process. However, the annual reviews may not capture some of the specific issues/expectations that the student and faculty laid out through the development/updating of mentoring plans. For example, students may identify skills they need to develop to be successful in graduate school and beyond or the faculty may come up with certain goals for the research project. The student and faculty need to monitor the progress for such agreed-upon milestones so that the student defends their dissertation in a reasonable time frame.

Managing the Evolution of a Mentoring Relationship

It is important to recognize that the mentoring relationship is dynamic and will evolve and change over time. As a student advances in their studies and research their needs and expectations will naturally develop and shift, and the mentoring plan needs to change accordingly. This adaptation is consistent with a growth mindset, essentially an acknowledgment that the student's abilities and talents are increasing, and they should be meeting new challenges and have higher expectations (Posselt, 2018).

The mentoring plan should be revisited and reevaluated on a regular basis (e.g., annually). The mentee should assess if research goals have changed in ways that might affect the mentoring relationship. The student should be encouraged to come up with new skills that they need to develop. Similarly, faculty should identify specific areas in which the student can be positively challenged to grow/develop skills. In some cases, students may benefit from professional development training to help with some aspect of their doctoral research or to help them in their careers beyond their Ph.D. Faculty should always foster the development of students' independence and support students' growth as scholars.

4. Guidelines for Graduate Programs

The MORE Committee recognizes that mentoring plans come in a variety of forms. The guidelines offered here are not intended to direct graduate programs on what to do, but rather to provide a path, a "how to" set of considerations to address when implementing a process for written mentoring plans. Your program is best positioned to determine the "what" parts given the program's milestones and timeline, the culture of the field, discipline, and the needs of your doctoral program.

Provide clarity and transparency about the program's mentoring expectations.
Your graduate program should provide clarity and transparency to students and faculty regarding the mentoring expectations in the program, including mentorship roles, available resources, and information on how written mentoring plans are used.

If there is an explicit difference between types of advising and mentoring (e.g., first-year students only have an academic advisor, and a research advisor/mentor is identified after the first year), students and faculty should be informed of program-specific structures. Each student should be aware of who their faculty mentor(s) are and vice versa. Specifically, each mentor-mentee pair (or triad) should know that they are expected to develop and maintain a written mentoring plan.

Your program should encourage each mentor-mentee pair (or triad) to set meetings specifically to develop a mentoring plan and then revisit and update it annually and/ or at key milestones (qualifying/prelim exam, candidacy, etc.). At the same time, the program should create a process to document and ensure accountability from both mentee and mentor. For example, the program should track that the mentoring plan was discussed in real time (in a meeting, as opposed to asynchronous communications) and that the mentoring plan is updated at the time of program-identified milestones (e.g., by including a question on the annual review about the last time the plan was revisited). Importantly, be explicit that the mentoring plan is a private document between each student and their faculty mentor(s), and, aside from the time it was most recently updated, its contents are not shared beyond the mentor(s) and mentee who collaborated on the document.

Ensure buy-in for mentoring plans in collaboration with faculty and students.
The process of developing good mentoring plans can be daunting for both faculty and mentees. Therefore, generating buy-in from faculty and students is crucial for promoting a positive mentoring culture in your department. One best practice to ensure buy-in is by developing your program's mentoring plan template in collaboration with faculty and

students. This can be done by emphasizing the collaborative, reciprocal nature of the plan, and highlighting that students and faculty should together figure out their mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship and distinguish between student and faculty responsibilities. Importantly, the burden of a mentoring plan should not be placed solely on the student. Encourage the view that the mentoring plan is an interactive, shared document between faculty and student, built with input from both. Note that various factors can affect the content of these plans. For example, the faculty member will need to decide how mentoring plans for first year versus more senior students should be different. Given this variation, providing a timeline that outlines milestones, goals, and expectations for each year of the program may prove useful, and can include elements created between mentor/mentee alongside those established at the department level.

Distinguish mentoring plans from the program's pre-existing formal reviews. Mentoring plans are distinct from annual graduate reviews or advisor check-ins (or Individual Development Plans [IDP] in the sciences). As there may be a distinction between mentor and advisor—or even mentor and dissertation chair—at any stage in the graduate program, the mentoring plan has goals quite distinct from the program's formal reviews, progress reports, and/or evaluations. As a holistic document, the mentoring plan serves as a necessary supplement to these more formal records. The multiple reviews and annual checkups that have distinct purposes around documenting progress towards degree should be understood as different from mentoring plans.

Uphold best practices. The process of designing effective mentoring plans requires time and effort; however, systematic and thoughtful creation of a program's mentoring expectations can result in a range of positive outcomes. Mentoring plans that can be carried out as intended, in a consistent manner, are the most impactful. Thus, an important step is to explicitly incorporate your program's criteria for what makes a useful mentoring plan and what the plans should accomplish. Successful mentoring plans will also have a mechanism in place for documenting the reciprocity of the process, adding proof of two-way communication between mentor and mentee.

Utilize and encourage use of MORE's resources. When developing your graduate program's mentoring plan template, your program leadership is invited to borrow from MORE's **mentoring plan templates** (https://rackham.umich.edu/mentoring). Tailoring questions and building your own program's template with the set of topics that best fits specific disciplinary needs is encouraged—and, indeed, expected. As a part of your graduate program's plan for implementing written mentoring plans, graduate students and their mentors can take advantage of the MORE Committee's "Getting Your Mentoring Relationship Off to a Good Start" workshop. This workshop helps enhance the mentoring relationship between the student and faculty mentor by guiding them in explicitly defining and documenting shared expectations. It is a great opportunity to develop the initial mentoring plan. In the first half of the workshop, mentors and mentees work independently in separate workshop sessions to identify their objectives and work styles and to consider strategies for dealing with possible mentoring challenges. In the second half of the workshop, student-faculty pairs work together to develop a written mentoring plan as a means of codifying some of the most important elements (needs, goals, mutual expectations) of a two-way mentoring relationship. We are proud to share that Rackham's mentoring guides for faculty and graduate students have proven to be popular for two decades; they have been requested, adopted, and adapted by graduate students, faculty, and staff around the country and we hope you will find them similarly helpful.

5. Checklists for Implementing Written Mentoring Plans in Your Program

Rackham expects your program to develop a written mentoring plan policy consistent with your disciplinary norms and students' needs. The policy should be developed with input from faculty and students. You can directly use one of MORE's mentoring plan **templates** (https://rackham.umich.edu/mentoring) or take elements from MORE templates or other sources to create your own department/program template. If you decide to develop your own written mentoring plan template, ensure that the following list of do's and don'ts are addressed/considered.

Developing Your Department Template	
Do's	**Don'ts**
Do use open-ended questions (i.e., who, what, when, how, where) to encourage communication.	Don't use closed-ended questions (i.e., yes/no).
Do arrange questions based on mentoring topic/categories (to keep the document manageable); limit to two to three questions under each category.	Don't have a long list of questions that are not organized.
Do format the plan to reflect your discipline (e.g., bulleted list or tables vs. paragraph form).	Don't borrow a different discipline's unfamiliar writing style and format for your mentoring plan templates.
Do make mentoring plan templates expandable, and otherwise modifiable, to allow for student-faculty pairs to tailor the questions to their mentoring relationship.	Don't provide a mentoring plan template that is unsuitable for modifications to meet mentor and mentee needs.

When Rackham reviews programs, they will look at the content of your written mentoring plan templates to confirm that they have all the essential elements. Mentoring plans should contain, at a minimum, the following:

- **Mentor-Mentee Communication:** How will we work together (including support needed)? What are the best methods for contacting each other? How often should we meet, in what format, and for how long? How will feedback be given? How will conflicts be handled?
- **Shared Expectations:** What are the established expectations for: work hours, time off, scholarship, publications, professional behavior, teamwork/collaboration, authorship, etc.?

- **Program Milestones:** Timeline that outlines milestones, goals, and expectations for each year of the program (is the timeline created between mentor/mentee or established by a department?)
- **Discussion of Career and Professional Development Goals**

In addition to the above checklist, we want to provide your program with a do's and don'ts list to support the implementation of your mentoring plan policy. You might find this list helpful before you launch your written mentoring plan requirements.

Implementing Written Mentor Plans	
Do's	**Don'ts**
Do create a mentoring plan template for your unit with buy-in and feedback from faculty and students that distinguishes the plan from the annual review process.	Don't treat a mentoring plan as the same as an annual review or IDP (though they can overlap or possibly be combined).
Do create a process to document and ensure accountability, from both mentee and mentor, that the mentoring plan was discussed in real-time.	Don't rely on students or faculty to initiate a mentoring plan on their own.
Do consider having a staff member confirm that the mentoring plan was jointly developed (e.g., via self-report by mentor and mentee).	Don't place the burden of a mentoring plan solely on students or faculty.
Do emphasize to both faculty and students that the mentoring plan is an interactive, shared document between faculty and student, with input from both parties, which is private to them.	Don't require sharing of the completed mentoring plan with parties other than the mentor/mentee.
Do encourage annual revisiting of mentoring plans to address changing needs of students as they progress through the program.	Don't ignore that mentees have unique mentoring needs at different stages in the program.

References

Alvarez, A. N., Blume, A. W., Cervantes, J. M., & Thomas, L. R. (2009). Tapping the wisdom tradition: Essential elements to mentoring students of color. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40(2), 181–188.

Paglis, L. L., Green, S. G., & Bauer, T. N. (2006). Does adviser mentoring add value? A longitudinal study of mentoring and doctoral student outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 47, 451-476.

Posselt, J. (2018). Normalizing struggle: Dimensions of faculty support for doctoral students and ... implications for persistence and well-being. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(6), 988-1013.
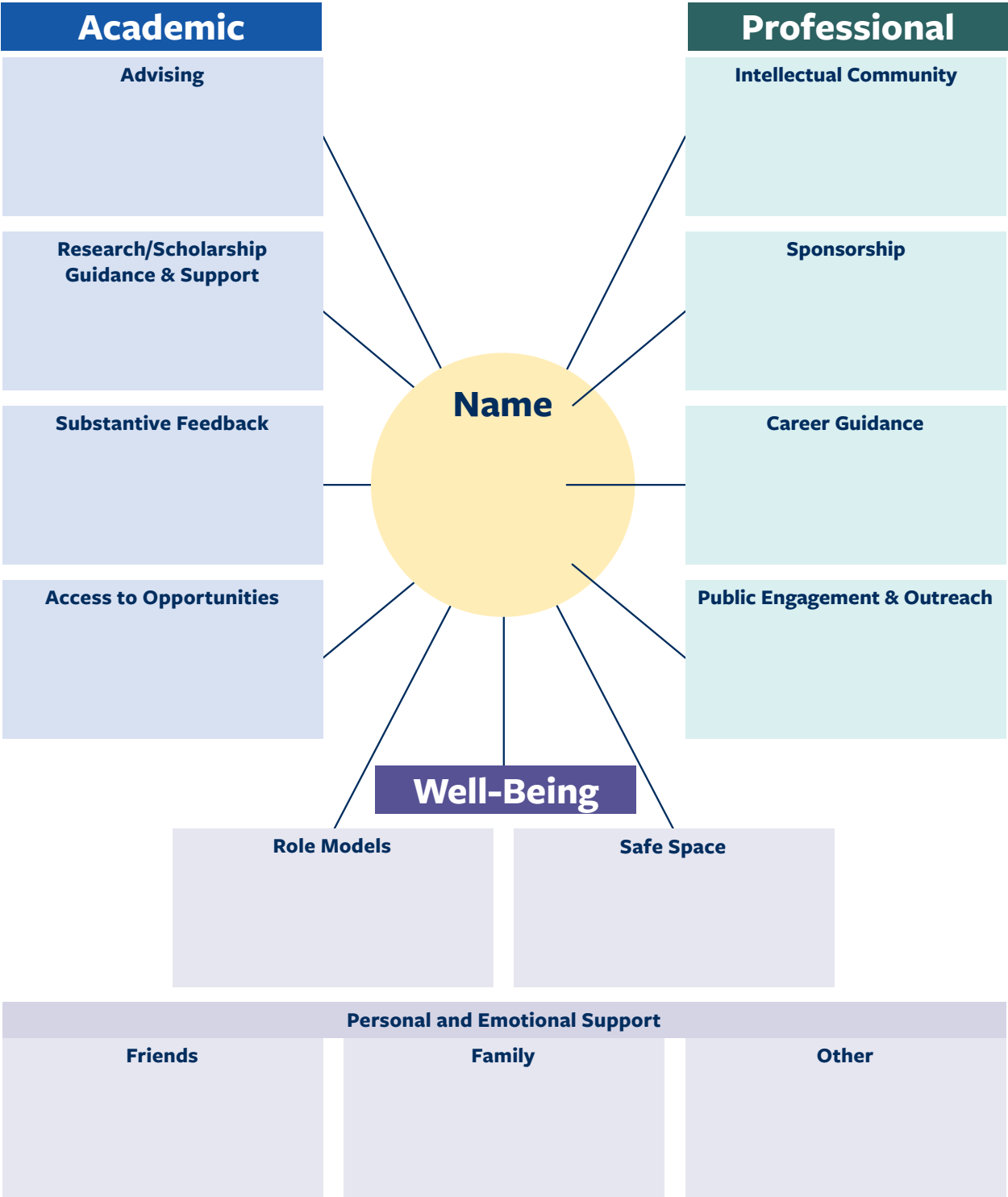
6. Resources

The Committee on Graduate Student Mental Health and Well-being (**https://rackham. umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/mental-health-and-well-being-committee**) calls on Rackham and graduate programs to prioritize graduate-student health and well-being alongside academic success. In promoting and prioritizing student health, the Committee emphasizes the World Health Organization definition of health: a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

Graduate Student and Program Consultation Services (GSPCS) (**https://rackham.umich. edu/about/directory/graduate-student-and-program-consultation-services**) provides a range of support services for graduate students, faculty, staff, and postdoctoral fellows. This Rackham office offers a safe and confidential environment to discuss concerns and explore options for resolution. GSPCS advises students, faculty, staff and postdoctoral fellows on matters related to emergencies, crisis situations, academic misconduct, student progress, disputes, and student conduct violations.

The MORE Committee webpage (**https://rackham.umich.edu/mentoring**) is a repository of useful resources for both mentors and mentees, including sample mentoring plan templates, guides on how to give and get great mentorship for students and faculty, and information about upcoming workshops. The website also has a support request form that graduate chairs might use to request a departmental workshop.

Graduate Student Mentoring Map

Academic

Advising

Research/Scholarship Guidance & Support

Substantive Feedback

Access to Opportunities

Professional

Intellectual Community

Sponsorship

Career Guidance

Public Engagement & Outreach

Name

Well-Being

Role Models

Safe Space

Personal and Emotional Support

Friends

Family

Other

*Adapted from the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity Mentoring Map

Academic

- **Advising:** Individuals who provide guidance on course selection, degree and program requirements, and milestones
- **Research/Scholarship Guidance and Support:** Individuals who support and guide research and scholarship activities (advisor, dissertation committee, other faculty, lab members, etc.)
- **Substantive Feedback:** Individuals who provide feedback that advances work in a meaningful way such as feedback on written drafts, oral presentations, etc.
- **Access to Opportunities: :** Individuals who provide connections to internal and external opportunities such as teaching, fellowships, additional professional development experiences, internships, etc.

Professional

- **Intellectual Community:** Individuals who promote intellectual growth and creativity through the open exchange of ideas both inside and outside of your department (peers, faculty, etc.)
- **Sponsorship:** Individuals who provide direct connections to opportunities (e.g., job interviews, speaking engagements) using their influence and networks
- **Career Guidance:** Individuals who support job planning and preparation which can include career exploration, job application materials review, interview preparation
- **Public Engagement and Outreach:** Individuals who identify and encourage participation in volunteer opportunities that have impact beyond the university such as lectures to broader public, diversity, equity, and inclusion, etc.

Well-Being

- **Role Models:** Individuals whose behavior, example, or success you want to emulate
- **Safe Space:** a place or environment that fosters confidence and protects from exposure to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm
- **Personal and Emotional Support:** Individuals who help you thrive while fully experiencing the diverse range of human emotions, experiences, and vulnerabilities
  - **Friends**
  - **Family**
  - **Other:** individuals/groups/organizations that are supportive of your mental and physical well-being

Notes

Notes

MORE
mentoring others results in excellence