Responses to Assessment Questions: Mentoring and Advising

1. Advising and mentoring reviews should address the following questions (when applicable):
   
   a. Do you have a system of academic advisors concerned with academic progress and professional development in place? Do you have individual advisors for individual students, or one or more faculty (e.g., EO, DEO, DGS) who serve this function for all students? Which do you think is optimal?

   Our system of academic advising is built around a relatively new program – our advising fellows program. These fellows are advanced graduate students in PhD programs at the Graduate Center. They provide individualized academic support to MALS students, guiding them in choosing courses, managing their workloads and meeting academic challenges, and helping students figure out how to enlist faculty mentors to supervise their theses.

   Advising Fellows hold office hours between 5:30 PM and 7:30 PM Tuesday through Thursday and by appointment.

   Every student is assigned to work with an advising fellow. They receive their assignments before registration begins for their incoming and are able to meet with an advising fellow semester.

   The EO and two DEOs are also consistently available for advising. Each of them holds office hours and are available by appointment. We find that students gravitate toward the advising fellows, who they see as their peers.

   b. Do you have a system of individual mentors for individual students, who can serve as counselors as well as guides for academic and professional development? Are these faculty members or students, or both?

   Yes. The advising fellows serve as individual mentors for individual students. They also provide small group advising sessions for students every Spring. These are required in order for students to register for the subsequent semester. Faculty serve as thesis/capstone advisors. Some of those relationships develop into more day-to-day advising relationships through the program, but most students identify their faculty advisors for their thesis/capstone after they have completed most of their coursework.

   c. How are faculty/students assigned as mentors/advisors?

   Students are assigned an advising fellow before the start of the first term that they enroll. They will keep that advising fellow for their whole time in the program, although if they prefer to work with a different advising fellow, that is no problem and they can switch easily. Students choose their faculty advisor over the course of the program. We encourage them to approach a faculty person to be their advisor well before they plan to write the thesis/do the capstone.
d. How often do students meet with their mentors/advisors throughout the semester? Does your program have a policy on this? Do you think the current frequency is optimal?

We believe that the advising fellows program is working well in part because students are required to meet with their assigned advising fellow at least once per year (Spring). Incoming students are asked to meet with their advisor their first semester in the program and all students are asked to participate in small-group and one-on-one advising with their advising fellows during these Spring sessions. We also encourage students to come more often. During these Spring sessions, students meet with their advising fellows in a small group. Those groups are formed based on how many credits students have. Immediately after the small group sessions, students are invited to stay for 10 to 15-minute individual meetings with the advising fellow to discuss their progress through the program, have their schedules looked at and discussed, and get their hold lifted.

Students are also encouraged to meet with their advising fellows during the year. Advising fellows send out individual and group emails periodically, updating students about developments in the program and inviting them in for consultations.

e. Does advising/mentoring continue when students select a supervisor for their dissertation/capstone/thesis project? Or does the supervisor take on the role of mentor/advisor?

Students are still encouraged to meet with their advising fellows after they have chosen a thesis/capstone advisor. They are also welcome to meet with the EO or DEOs if they have any questions or concerns. They are actually required to touch base with their advising fellow each Spring. Once they have 27 credits, they are no longer required to attend the small group advising sessions, and their holds can be lifted with a simple email exchange.

f. What system do you have in place to ensure that advisors/mentors (and students generally) are aware of what is expected of an advisor/mentor, and of academic requirements and regulations?

Advisors meet weekly with the EO and DEOs. We discuss what is expected, academic requirements and regulations.

For incoming students, the EO and DEOs hold advising sessions before registration opens. This is an orientation to the program, and also advisement that addresses how students may want to move through the program, make choices about courses, and begin to think about their theses/capstone projects.

The system we have in place to ensure that students are aware of what is going on is that we put advising holds on their accounts in the Spring and they cannot register for the next fall without checking in with their advising fellows. We also reach out to students regularly, inviting them to meet with their advising fellows and encouraging them to attend our workshops and panels.
Advising fellows begin to work in August and are available to incoming students before the beginning of the Fall semester. They also work the three days before the semester begins in January and we encourage incoming students to meet with them then as well.

g. What system do you have in place to ensure that advisors/mentors (and students generally) are aware of resources and support services?

We regularly send out emails about events/resources/support services. We also use our annual advising hold to ensure that they meet with an advising fellow.

h. Do you have systematic procedures in place for student and advisor/mentor reports on student progress?

Our advising fellows fill out forms recording their meetings with each student.

i. Do you have annual (or semester) evaluations of student progress, and how is this administered? By individual mentors/advisors, or a specific tasked committee? How is feedback communicated to students?

Our evaluations of students’ progress happen during our annual advising sessions where students are given detailed feedback in person in one-on-one or small group settings.

j. Do you have separate teaching mentors? Faculty or students? How are these assigned?

Our students do not teach at CUNY through our program.

k. How are your policies on mentoring/advising made available to students and faculty (e.g., are they made available in your student handbook or online)? Are such policies discussed at orientation?

Our policies on mentoring and advising are in our student handbook, available online, and discussed at orientation.

Data Available:

Gather data from those involved in advising and mentoring. Some ideas for collecting evidence of the effectiveness of advising and mentoring within your program include:

1. Comparing information on how frequently students are expected to communicate with advisors/mentors throughout the semester with how often meetings actually occur;

Advising fellows keep in touch with students in the MALS program through both email and face-to-face interactions.
Advising fellows typically meet with or connect online with six to eight MALS students per week.

There is a core of students who reach out to the MALS advising fellows consistently. Fellows report that they have about 4-8 students who contact them a few times over the course of a semester.

Fellows report that at least half of incoming students come to visit them for a face to face meeting at least once in their first semester in the program. Of these students a small portion reach out to MALS advisors regularly either online or in person. About twenty students interact with advising fellows a few times a semester.

Fellows report the in the Fall semester, each of them answers about 100 email inquiries per term. In the Spring semester, this goes up significantly because of the required advising sessions mentioned above.

2. Using surveys of Master’s and doctoral students (provided by OIRE through the Experience Surveys or any program-level surveys), alumni, and faculty regarding their satisfaction with current advising/mentoring practices, offer suggestions about how current practices might be improved, and how such improvements could be most effectively implemented in your program. In considering how current practices might be improved, you might explore how advising and mentoring is conducted at other institutions.

This program emerged out of our external review, which was conducted in 2016. This has been replicated in other programs at the Graduate Center, including the Digital Humanities Masters Program and the CUNY Baccalaureate in Unique and Individualized Studies.