Learning Outcomes:

The learning outcome of advising is the continuous education of our students on the structure, and the academic and administrative rules of the program, to ease their passage from orientation to graduation.

The learning outcome of mentoring is the provision of professional exemplars of advisement, teaching, and professional development, along with social support and counseling, both academic and personal.

Current Advising and Mentoring Practices:

1. The Executive Officer (EO), Deputy Executive Officer (DEO) and Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) serve as general advisors and councilors to all students. Members of the Climate Advisory Committee (CAC) also serve as general advisors and councilors, as do members of the Student Steering Committee (SSC).

2. The DGS meets annually with all pre-proposal students to provide anonymous feedback based upon faculty feedback on individual course performance.

3. The DEO provides advising and counseling to students failing to make satisfactory progress, as reported by the Registrar. The DEO reports plans of action for resolution to the VP for Student Affairs.

4. Prospectus sponsors and dissertation advisors take on the role of faculty mentors when students have completed coursework and Qualifying Papers (QPs). Course faculty and QP sponsors also serve as informal mentors until students advance to candidacy.

5. Individual veteran student mentors are assigned to incoming students in their first year and in principle continue as their mentors throughout their time in the program.

6. Students are assigned a veteran student teacher as their teaching mentor from the CUNY colleges to which they are assigned.

7. The program hosts a series of professional development seminars, on job-talks, conference presentations, publications, teaching (general and syllabi), and grant opportunities.
Evaluation:

Independently of the Outcome Assessment Committee’s (OAC) request to evaluate our advising and mentoring practices, our executive committee had already identified one serious deficiency, namely our failure to keep proper track of student progress from the time of completion of coursework to dissertation defense (beyond time to degree problems that crop up on satisfactory progress reports, by which time it may be too late to address problems with prospectus proposers/advisors and/or committee members). To address this deficiency, we will institute self-report forms to be completed by both prospectus proposers/advisors and advisees, to ensure that no students ‘fall through the cracks’ (for example, by getting themselves stuck at the prospectus stage) and to identify at an early stage any students who may be having problems. These reports will be read by the EO, DEO and DGS and discussed with prospectus proposers/advisors at a meeting to be held every semester. Identified problems will be followed up by the proposers/advisors and the EO, DEO or DGS as necessary. This new practice will be evaluated by feedback from proposers/advisors after two iterations of the process, and reported to the OAS next year.

A survey of students conducted online concerning their satisfaction with current advising and mentoring practices (repeated once to increase the participation rate) identified some major problems with respect to our current system of advisement and mentoring:

1. The absence of any formal advising for students transitioning to the dissertation writing stage.
2. Insufficient and insufficiently frequent workshops on prospectus preparation; publishing; funding, and qualifying papers.
3. Insufficient advisement in the first year, especially when it comes to course selection.
4. All current advisors are men.
5. Insufficient information about research interests of students, which makes it more difficult to match incoming students with mentors.

With respect to #1, we propose to hold a prospectus and dissertation workshop every semester rather than once a year as at present, to include advice about selecting a sponsor/advisor. We also plan to make the website descriptions of the prospectus and dissertation more transparent, and draw students’ attention to them when the workshops are advertised.

With respect to #2, this feedback was somewhat surprising, since there have been annual workshops on publishing and qualifying papers for the past five years or more, although workshops on prospectus preparation and grant funding have occasionally been missed. We will ensure that from now on that these are conducted annually, and prospectus/dissertation workshops bi-annually in accord with our response to #1.
With respect to #3 and $4, although the EO, DEO and DGS serve as general advisors and
counselors to all students, students are not currently assigned to individual officers as advisors,
which perhaps makes them reluctant to seek advice, especially in their first year, but also
beyond. In the future, incoming students will be individually assigned to either the EO, DEO or
DGS as their advisor, who will monitor their progress and meet with them at least once a
semester to discuss their progress (or at least connect via email or zoom), until they reach
advancement to candidacy. While it is unfortunate that the EO, DEO and DGS are all currently
male, they do have the advantage that they have detailed knowledge of program rules and
regulations, as well as the Byzantine minutiae of administration (all having been, or currently
being, Executive Officer). Female or male students seeking personal counseling rather than
information can contact members of the Climate Committee or the SSC, or individual faculty
members. This latter option will be elaborated during student orientation, and an annual notice
will be issued reminding students of this option.

With respect to #5, in addition to making information about admitted students readily available
to faculty and students, we will make a greater effort to have photos and information about the
research interests of all our students presented on the webpage (as in done in other programs
such as psychology, for example). This should greatly facilitate the matching of incoming
students to student mentors and also allow incoming students to be readily identified by faculty
and students. We will also monitor the success of individual student mentoring partnerships, and
institute a mechanism that enables students to change their mentors if they are dissatisfied with
the arrangement. We believe that the present system generally works well and that student
mentors take their responsibilities seriously, but we should not take this for granted and allow
some students to become disconnected or alienated from their student mentors. We plan to
evaluate our system of student mentoring by having student members of the C&EC or SSC
contact students individually and confidentially about their student mentoring experience.

Returning to #3, although detailed information about all aspects of our program are presented on
our website, it is clear that incoming students are often either not aware of or do not understand
them (they are particularly confused about the relation between first and second examination and
first and second qualifying papers, mistakenly assuming them to be the same). To remedy this
problem, we will endeavor to make the website material more accessible, and plan to introduce a
separate and longer information meeting for first year students after the initial general meet and
greet meeting, to cover the nuts and bolts of our program rules and requirements, to be conducted
by the DEO.