Promising Practices

Promising practices identified by participating universities in the area of mentoring and advising include:

Resources for students

- Provide a comprehensive orientation to prepare students for graduate school
  - Review and revise current department/program new student orientation activities to promote collaboration with the Office of Graduate Studies and continue orientation activities throughout the first year
  - Design and pilot test a three-to-five day summer program aimed at preparing incoming underrepresented doctoral students for graduate study and their programs
  - Hold Graduate Student Information Fair
  - Continue workshop series to define requirements and reinforce information critical to degree outcomes
  - Review and revamp orientation programs based on feedback from evaluations and exit interviews
- Develop/revise graduate student handbooks
  - for the university that address academic, social, and orientation needs
  - for each program that convey information that is program-specific
  - for various stages of the Ph.D. process, e.g. first-year doctoral student handbook
- Make expectations and requirements transparent
  - Develop and review the content of departmental web sites
  - Clearly articulate program expectations/academic milestones, requiring completion of all pre-dissertation milestones before year four
- Develop/enhance online mechanisms so students and faculty can track progress and offer feedback or communicate with one another
  - Online milestone tracking systems, “dissertation checklists,” electronic portfolios, and annual progress report systems that integrate graduate school records, student input, and evaluative comments from faculty. Such online mechanisms create a framework for greater communication between the graduate school, faculty, and students on student progress in meeting the goals set each year and clarification of goals for the following year. These online resources may also enhance identification of potentially critical times when intervention or communication is needed. Such systems have been tailored to include coursework, annual* reviews, teaching materials, thesis proposals, research products, contact information for prospective employers, and file sharing and chat rooms that promote communication with peers and advisors.
Regularity and uniformity of progress review

- Implement regular advisor/advisee meetings and progress reports
- Encourage programs to set up annual student performance review systems
- Develop "best practices" for tracking student progress in relation to the amount and type of student financial aid
- Institute a modified report on students’ plans for the remainder of the academic year to be completed immediately upon their advancement to candidacy

Early advising

- Require each first-year student to have an advisor or advisory structure; conduct regular evaluations of progress
- Require faculty advisors to be on campus during advisees’ first-year as graduate students
- Encourage the participation of graduate students of color and women in targeted programs (for example, the “Bouchet Fellows” program at Yale University)
- Initiate the “Navigating the System” seminar program to address the theme of inclusion and diversity
- Establish administrative structures for the early identification of, and interventions aimed at retaining, “at-risk” students
- Create ombud position to support first-year students

Resources for faculty

- Offer workshops for faculty on mentoring
- Make such workshops part of new faculty orientation
- Develop materials/handbooks and online resources for faculty on mentoring
- Offer mini-grants to help faculty develop initiatives aimed at improving the quality of mentoring
- Create a Graduate Program Directors Council to share best practices, to work collaboratively with the Graduate School, and provide programming to strengthen the skills required for effective and innovative leadership of the University’s graduate programs
- Recognize excellence in mentoring through faculty awards

Other mentors

- Train peer mentors and ensure that all new students are assigned a trained peer mentor
- Provide students with external mentors