

Department of Statistics Policies for PhD Students Changing Advisors

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The Department of Statistics aims to promote a flexible and open culture of scholarship and collaboration among PhD students and faculty. While the PhD degree primarily involves focused, extended engagement with one advisor (or occasionally with two co-advisors), our students should always feel welcome to discuss research ideas and challenges that they are facing with any member of the faculty.

We encourage our students to begin discussions with potential thesis advisors early in the program, and all students are required to conduct faculty-supervised research during the summer following their first year. This early research experience is exploratory and may lead students to consider a different advisor, however the presumptive thesis advisor should be identified by the end of semester 3. Students typically advance to candidacy between the middle of year 2 and the end of year 3. Advancing to candidacy represents a considerable commitment and investment of resources from both the student and advisor, and in the vast majority of cases a student will complete their thesis under the formal supervision of the person named as their advisor when advancing to candidacy.

The Department of Statistics offers all admitted PhD students support for 5 years of study, and this support is not tied to a specific advisor (it is contingent on maintaining good academic standing and fulfillment of GSI responsibilities). Thus, there is no direct implication for funding in the event that a student switches advisors.

The Department of Statistics maintains formal [policies](#) defining milestones and academic progress. Changes of advisor during semesters 1-3 will ordinarily not delay progress on the standard timeline, but when a student changes advisors after semester 3 it is likely that some milestones may be delayed. While we expect students to reach candidacy no later than the end of semester 6, this can be extended by one semester in cases where the student changes advisor or other extenuating circumstances are present.

We cannot anticipate all situations that may arise, but below we discuss a few circumstances where a student may seek to change advisors, and how the department would view these situations.

- During their first three semesters in the program, all advisor relationships should be deemed provisional. All students have an assigned academic mentor in year 1, and must identify a research mentor to work with during the summer following their first year. However students are welcome to discuss and engage in research with other faculty

members at will during this period. Students should let all their research mentors know if they are engaged in work with several faculty in parallel.

- If a student is making slow research progress, and in particular by the beginning of year three has not established a clear path to candidacy, the student and advisor should discuss whether continuing the advising relationship is in the student's best interests. At this point the student may elect to work with another advisor while there is still time to advance to candidacy during year three.
- If a student has two advisors and it becomes mutually agreeable to proceed with only one of these advisors, this will not be considered a change of advisor for the purposes of these policies. Similarly, adding a co-advisor at any time during the PhD program will not be considered to be a change of advisor.
- In the event that a conflict arises between a student and mentor, we expect the student and mentor to engage in a process of mediation, aiming to resolve the conflict. The PhD Program Director will either serve as the mediator, appoint another full professor to serve as mediator, or the student and advisor will seek mediation using other University resources such as those provided by Rackham. If the issue cannot be resolved with mediation, the department will assist the student in finding a new advisor and, if needed, developing a plan on how to continue or change their research projects, so that the student will be able to continue their planned research under alternative supervision.
- In the event that a student's thesis advisor leaves the university, in most cases the advisor will continue to mentor the student and will serve as an external member of the student's thesis committee. In most such cases another faculty member will serve as a thesis advisor, and will primarily guide the student in completing work begun under their original advisor.
- If a student who has advanced to candidacy is making slow progress toward completing their thesis, this is not likely to be resolved by switching advisors. The student and advisor should discuss the situation with the PhD Program Director, and a written plan should be developed that defines a path to graduation.