

The below policy outlines the guiding principles and process for students who wish to make a change in their PhD advisor. Students are encouraged to reach out to the ME ASO staff or ME Graduate Chair with any concerns about changing advisors or this policy.

Key points for students to be aware of:

- Students are encouraged to talk with their current advisor(s) about a potential change and should be comfortable reaching out to other faculty to discuss joining their research groups.
- Students are encouraged to reach out to ME department staff or leadership (including ASO, graduate chair, or department chair), the CoE, and Rackham if they are uncomfortable discussing a potential change with their current advisor. Funding is also available in case a student needs to abruptly leave a lab group mid-semester.
- Under normal circumstances students will finish the current semester prior to transitioning into a new lab group. Students and faculty should discuss the transition, handoff of responsibilities, resources, etc.
- Faculty advisors may not cut funding during the semester based on a student's plan to change lab groups, provided that the student is still making the appropriate commitment to the research effort.
- The student's new faculty advisor is expected to provide funding for their degree. Transition support (likely via a GSI position) can be provided by the ME department for a semester.
- Students who leave their current lab group without securing a new advisor will continue in the program as part of a funded probationary semester.
- Changing advisors does not impact the I-20, visa, or other immigration documents for international students.

ME PhD Program - Advisor Change Policy & Recommendations

Guiding Principles

An effective advising relationship is central to student success. Faculty should thus be clear and transparent about their expectations when taking on students, ideally through published statements outlining policies and practices in their research group. The ME department encourages each faculty member to publish a mentorship plan that is made available for incoming PhD students. It is important for students to make every attempt to understand faculty expectations and laboratory culture before committing to join a specific group. It is also important that both students and faculty understand and accept that despite best intentions and effort, an effective advising relationship does not always materialize. Faculty should thus support the process of changing advisors when necessary. The ME department does encourage students and faculty to seek a resolution to any issues, with the support of the department or Rackham, prior to initiating a change in advisor.

PhD students have the right to choose whether to continue to work with their advisors. Similarly, faculty continuously evaluate student performance against established expectations and can

choose whether to continue to work with PhD students or not. If it becomes apparent to either the student or the faculty advisor(s) that a change in PhD advisor is either desired or necessary, students are encouraged to speak with other faculty about their activities and interests in a free and open manner. Support from within the department can also come from the current advisor(s), Graduate Chair, Graduate Coordinator, DEI Manager, and Department Chair. Each transition is thought of on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendations for changing advisors

When switching advisors ideally the student's new advisor(s) and previous advisor(s) will all participate in a discussion about the transition prior to the transition. We also recommend the student meets with the Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Chair to discuss the change. When a decision is made to move forward with a new advising relationship, the previous advisor(s) will be informed by either the student and/or new advisor(s). In some cases the student may not be comfortable informing their previous advisor(s). In these situations the new advisor(s) or Graduate Chair can discuss the transition with the previous advisor(s).

Advisor transitions should be handled in a timely manner to minimize delay and disruption to a student's PhD studies. Transition issues may ideally be worked out cooperatively among the student and their old and new advisors, with facilitation as needed from the Graduate Chair or Graduate Coordinator. Some typical situations are provided here, but these may not represent every situation.

- [Previous advisor, potential new advisor, student] May include matters such as status of papers in progress or in-pipeline, completion or handing off of responsibilities for ongoing sponsored projects, and transitioning resources, equipment, code, etc.
- [Previous advisor, potential new advisor, student] Advisors may not cut off GSRA funding during a semester based on declared or anticipated advisor switches, and the student is expected to continue to fully perform on the associated project that is funding their current GSRA appointment. It is expected that the new advisor(s) will take financial responsibility for their new advisee at the beginning of the following term. If needed the ME department may be able to provide a semester of transition funding in the form of a GSI position.
- [Student] As noted above, appointment and/or continuation of GSRA funding does require that the student continue to fully perform on the associated project that is funding the GSRA appointment. Additional sources of funding are available in cases where continuation of these responsibilities is not possible.
- [New advisor] When a student switches to a new advisor's research group, it is generally good practice to allow for a transition period during which the student learns about the group's research, available projects, and background literature.

Students are encouraged to reach out to any and all sources for advice and support. This includes other faculty members, the Graduate Coordinator(s), the Graduate Chair, the DEI Manager, the Department Chair, the CoE CARE Center, and the CoE Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate and Professional Education (ADGPE), among others. For certain kinds of

conflict the Rackham Conflict Resolution office may also provide a valuable avenue for resolution.

Retaliation is unacceptable under any circumstances. If any individuals experience retaliatory behavior as a function of switching advisors, or think that they may have, then they should immediately reach out to the Graduate Chair, Graduate Coordinator, DEI Manager, Department Chair, or the Rackham Resolution Officers.

Funding & Student Status

The new advisor must have a plan in place to fund the PhD student and may not solely rely on department resources or GSI funding. However there may be times when a new advisor does not have sufficient resources to fund a student as a GSRA immediately upon transition. In that case, it is expected that the student will apply for and be funded as a GSI before a term begins.

If it is necessary to transition to a new advising relationship and the new advisor does not have funding, there are circumstances in which emergency support may be available through the ME department, CoE, and Rackham.

Students who leave their current advisor but have not secured a new advisor will continue in the PhD program for at least one full semester as part of a funded academic probation period. [Complete information on ME and Rackham policies regarding academic progress and probation can be found here.](#) During this probationary period the student will be fully funded, likely via a GSI position, and can continue the search process for a new advisor. Students are encouraged to connect with the ME Graduate Chair and Graduate Coordinator for assistance in connecting with faculty and finding potential advisors. The probationary status will be lifted once a new advisor has been finalized. Students who do not secure a new advisor during the probationary period will be discontinued from the PhD program.

Students who have already advanced to candidacy do not have to retake the candidacy exam (RFE) upon joining a new lab group. If there is a significant shift in research focus additional coursework beyond the degree requirements may be necessary to support the student's research efforts. Students may audit classes if they have already met all [course requirements](#) for the PhD.

For international students, changing PhD advisors does not impact the validity of immigration documents.