

UNC-Chapel Hill Department of Music Best Practices: Graduate Program

Contents

Introduction

1. Advising and Mentoring
2. Funding
3. Teaching
4. Examinations
5. Ethics
6. Professional Development (Applying for Fellowships & Employment)

Introduction

The Music Department's [Graduate Handbook](#) outlines the official requirements of MA and PhD programs in Musicology. The present "Best Practices" document provides an unofficial and more informal commentary on those requirements and suggests how graduate students and faculty have approached in very practical terms different aspects of the program. This document is maintained by the Faculty-Student Committee (Graduate Program) and will be expanded, reviewed, and updated on a regular basis. The FSC welcomes comments, questions, and suggestions that might help improve the usefulness of this document.

1. Advising and Mentoring

The purpose of this section is to offer guidance on advising and mentoring to students as they move through the program. Although often used interchangeably, advising and mentoring are distinct activities. In the context of this program, advising refers to the academic support that a designated faculty member provides to advisees as they work toward completing their degree requirements, such as selecting courses, preparing for exams, or completing theses and dissertations. Mentoring is not strictly concerned with working toward specific academic outcomes. Rather, mentors support the professional and psychosocial development of mentees through networking, exposure to career-building opportunities, and fostering a sense of competence, identity, and belonging in academic and professional communities. (Moreover, mentoring can come from peers, although this document focuses on faculty mentors.) Nevertheless, there is some overlap between advising and mentoring, and advisors often provide

mentoring to their advisees and may become mentors once their advisees graduate. Typically, a student has one advisor at any given time but may (and is encouraged to) have multiple mentors.

What follows addresses common questions about advising and mentoring. After addressing general questions, it focuses on the advisor-advisee relationship, the role of thesis and dissertation committees, sources of mentoring and advising beyond one's designated advisor, and letters of recommendation.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. General

What is the role of the Director of Graduate Study (DGS) in advising?

The Director of Graduate Study (DGS), typically one of the tenured members of the academic faculty, is appointed by the Chair for a three-year term. The DGS serves all graduate students in an advising role, a role that varies depending on a student's place within the program. The DGS is the main and official advisor for all students before they have selected a master's thesis advisor (typically students in their first three semesters of the program). The DGS maintains an advising relationship with all other students as well, advising on matters of course registration and the composition of thesis and dissertation committees. The DGS meets with all students at least once per academic year. The DGS is also available to advise all students on matters related to progress through the program, Music Department and Graduate School policies, teaching (Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Instructors of Record), professional development, and conflict with faculty or other students.

How does advising work before I have a master's thesis advisor?

The DGS is the de facto advisor for all students in the early stages of the program, before they have identified a master's thesis advisor (typically in their third semester). First- and second-year students should, and are encouraged to, consult with the DGS on all matters related to the program.

What if I have a conflict with the DGS?

Typically, the DGS advises graduate students on issues related to conflicts with students or other faculty. However, if a student has a conflict with the DGS and feels unable to resolve it directly with that person, the student should consult the Associate Chair for

Academic Studies, who may request assistance from the Chair or from Graduate School staff.

2. Thesis and Dissertation Advisors

How do I ask a faculty member to be my advisor for a thesis or dissertation?

There is no single best way to approach a faculty member about serving as a thesis or dissertation advisor. Some students, even before they arrive, ask a faculty member if they would be willing to be their advisor. Other students have potential advisors in mind but wait until they have gotten to know them before making the request. Regardless, approaching a faculty member for this purpose can be awkward and stressful. To reduce this stress and awkwardness, students should try to get to know potential advisors by taking seminars with them and meeting with them outside of class to discuss their scholarly interests. Students should consider not only the expertise of a faculty member but also their methodologies, working and writing styles, and personalities to gauge whether it might be a good fit. Once a student has decided to approach a potential advisor, the student should request a meeting. A good practice is to inform the faculty member that the meeting is to explore dissertation topics and to discuss the possibility of the faculty member serving on the committee, potentially as an advisor. Students should not ask multiple faculty members to be their advisor as a way to “audition” them. If a student seeks out an advisor and the faculty member agrees, that professor typically expects that the matter has been settled. As always, students should consult with the DGS for guidance on choosing an advisor.

When should I identify a master’s thesis advisor?

Students should start thinking about potential advisors at the beginning of the program. Seminar instructors often serve as advisors for the master’s thesis, which is often built on a seminar paper, but this is not required. Students are encouraged to meet with other faculty (with whom they have not taken seminars) to discuss their scholarly interests and are welcome to ask them to serve as advisors.

Students should discuss potential thesis advisors with the DGS in the spring semester of their first year. Ideally, the student should approach a potential thesis advisor before the end of that spring semester. Although students do not typically enroll in MUSC 993 (Master’s Thesis and Research) until their fourth semester, it is helpful to begin the summer after the first year with a thesis topic in mind so that students can do research during the less busy months before the beginning of the fall semester.

If I base my master's thesis on a seminar paper, am I expected to ask the seminar instructor to serve as my thesis advisor?

No. Students may of course choose to ask the seminar instructor to serve as the thesis advisor, and many do. However, that faculty member might not be available, or the student might find it advantageous to have another faculty member serve as advisor in order to offer a different perspective on the topic. If the seminar instructor does not act as advisor, it is typical for that faculty member to serve on the committee, but this is not required.

Should I have different advisors for my master's thesis and dissertation? Is it okay to have the same advisor for both?

Students typically have different advisors for the master's thesis and dissertation, but it is not required. This practice is recommended because it exposes students to different perspectives and advising approaches, but there may be reasons for a student to have the same advisor for both projects.

When should I identify a dissertation advisor?

As with the master's thesis, students are encouraged to get to know as many faculty members as possible through seminars, independent studies, and informal meetings, and to begin thinking about potential dissertation advisors as soon as they enter the program. The formal process of choosing a dissertation advisor should begin after a student has passed the MA Comprehensive Exam, typically at the end of the fourth semester. The PhD Written Examination, usually taken in the fifth semester, is designed to help students choose an advisor and committee. In consultation with the DGS, students ask three faculty members to serve on the Written Examination committee, one of whom acts as chair. Some students already know with whom they would like to work as an advisor and may ask that faculty member to serve as the examination committee chair. However, students may also use the process to help them decide on a potential advisor, or their prospective advisor may be on leave. In that case, the chair of the examination committee is not necessarily the student's future dissertation advisor. In such situations, students should consult with the DGS about identifying the chair of the examination committee.

How often should I meet with my thesis or dissertation advisor?

Students should meet regularly with their advisors and develop expectations about meetings (frequency, content, preparation, etc.) early in their working relationship. There is no mandated frequency of meetings, however, and the frequency of meetings may

change over the course of the project. Often students meet weekly or biweekly at the beginning of the project and may continue to do so until the end, or they may meet less frequently over time.

What should I do if my dissertation advisor is on research leave, retires, or leaves the program?

Faculty members on research leave are not expected to conduct their usual teaching and service duties, but it is standard practice for those faculty to maintain contact with their advisees. Advisors should set expectations regarding communication before going on leave. In the case of retirements or other departures from the program, faculty will either continue as advisors or work with the student to ensure continuing assistance from a different member of the faculty.

What happens if I have conflicts with my advisor?

Students should first seek to resolve conflicts directly with their advisor. If this fails, students should consult with the DGS. The DGS will maintain student confidentiality and will not intervene unless requested. However, the DGS is considered a “Responsible Employee” by the university. According to [UNC’s Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), “When someone discloses an incident of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on any protected status, sexual assault or sexual violence, sexual exploitation, interpersonal violence, or stalking to a Responsible Employee, that employee must report that information to any EOC professional staff member.” Students may also contact the [University Ombuds Office](#), which identifies itself as “a safe place where all Carolina staff, faculty, students and administrators are welcome to come and talk in confidence about any campus issue, problem, or dispute.”

What do I do if a faculty member declines or is unable to work with me?

It does happen that a faculty member declines to act as an advisor. This may be because of time constraints, impending leave or retirement, or because the faculty member does not feel best equipped to supervise the proposed project or has concerns about the effectiveness of the working relationship. Students should not take such demurrals personally and should consult with the DGS to help identify an advisor.

Can I change advisors?

Yes, students may change thesis or dissertation advisors. This happens for a variety of reasons: the student decides to change the research topic and a more suitable advisor is available; the student or the advisor or both decide, for whatever reason, that the working relationship is failing or unproductive; or the advisor, because of various circumstances,

is unable to continue to serve in this role. In any of these cases, the student should consult with the DGS to identify a new advisor.

What mentoring, feedback, and support can I expect from my dissertation advisor?

The advising relationship is a professional one with respect, honesty, and intellectual support at its core. Personal relationships between advisor and advisee can enrich intellectual and professional exchange; however, caution should be exercised to ensure that inappropriate demands are not placed on either side. Advisors are expected to respect students' privacy and private life and recognize students' diverse backgrounds, needs, and goals. Similarly, students are required to abide by these same guidelines.

Advising and mentoring graduate students is one of the most important functions faculty perform. Through regular meetings and communications, advisors provide sustained guidance and feedback. Advisors respond to written work with reasonable promptness, write letters of recommendations for fellowships and job opportunities, and offer professional mentoring about research, including funding opportunities, as well as networking, conference presentations, and job interview preparation. Advisors act as a liaison to the DGS and department when necessary, utilizing reasonable discretion. They also offer information on alternate sources of support (see below) and should be open to students obtaining advice from other faculty members. Faculty must adhere to [professional ethical standards](#). Advisors are not responsible for emotional or psychological counseling. For support in these areas, graduate students can consult, as a University resource, [UNC's Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#).

What are my responsibilities to my advisor?

Students also bear a share of responsibility in the advisor-advisee relationship, though unequal power relationship between advisor and advisee puts the burden of responsibility on the advisor's shoulders. Students are encouraged to take an active role in initiating meetings and communication and should give advisors fair warning about deadlines for letters of recommendation and other requests. Students are expected to complete assigned and agreed-upon research and writing in a timely manner, and to inform the advisor if they encounter problems, whether personal or research-related (access to fieldwork, archives, etc.). Should personal problems arise that impede or hinder progress, students should communicate necessary information to their advisors, while maintaining privacy. Students must adhere to [professional ethical standards](#). Students, in their capacity as advisees, are not responsible for performing any service (e.g. personal errands, housesitting) for advisors.

3. Other Advising and Mentoring Sources

Is my advisor my only source of advising and mentoring relationships?

Certainly not! A student's advisor is just one of many potential advising and mentoring sources. The DGS is another source of advising beyond the thesis or dissertation advisor. Where mentoring relationships more generally foster the professional and psychosocial development of mentees, there are many options for students. Faculty members who supervise students as TAs or have taught them in seminars may serve as mentors. Students also seek mentoring from members of their committee who are not the advisor. A student's peers (inter- or intra-cohort) can also support their psychosocial development within our departmental community. Studies suggest that the greatest predictor of student satisfaction with mentoring is the number and variety of mentors and mentoring they received, so students are encouraged to develop these relationships with other individuals or groups.

Are there advising/mentoring resources outside the Music Department?

Advising is the support a student receives as they work toward completing their degree requirements. Typically, this support is codified in the advisor/advisee relationship with supplemental support from the DGS. As such, advising tends to remain in the department with the individuals who know the program requirements best. Students may seek outside support for their thesis and dissertation writing from [The Writing Center](#) and/or [The Learning Center](#).

Mentoring, on the other hand, is widely available both in and out of the department. Students can pursue individual, group, or peer mentoring, with in-person and remote options available. The [Center for Faculty Excellence](#) offers ever-expanding resources for graduate student mentoring, including trainings for how to be an effective mentee. The Graduate School's [Diversity and Student Success](#) Program has developed several initiatives that offer targeted and inclusive support for diverse groups of graduate and professional students, such as the [Initiative for Minority Excellence](#), [Carolina Grad Firsts](#), and [Global Grads](#). While it does not provide in-house mentoring services, The Graduate School [Office of Professional Development](#) also supports students' career development through courses, programming, and resources to facilitate effective mentoring relationships, such as the [Individual Development Plan](#).

How do I choose a thesis or dissertation committee?

Officially, all advisors and committees are appointed by the DGS. This does not, however, mean that the DGS decides for students. Typically, once a student identifies a thesis or dissertation advisor, the two discuss potential committee members. At any time, the student may consult with the DGS for guidance, but in all cases the DGS must sign off on the committee for it to be official.

Can students have committee members from outside the department or university?

Yes. Of the five dissertation committee members, three, including the advisor and chair, must be regular faculty from the student's home department at UNC. (The advisor and the committee chair, who is responsible for procedural aspects of committee meetings and defenses, are typically one and the same person, but are not required to be, if, for example, the advisor is no longer a member of the Music Department.) Students and/or advisors may find the addition of committee members who do not belong to the UNC Music faculty to be beneficial for a variety of reasons. These can include UNC faculty from other departments or scholars from another institution who provide expertise in a foreign language, subject matter, or methodology not represented among the musicology faculty.

Students interested in having an outside member on their committee should begin by discussing this idea with their advisor. If the advisor and the outside individual both agree to their involvement in the committee, then a formal process of special appointment to the graduate faculty is required. Students should work with their advisor, the outside individual, and the DGS (who appoints the committee) to ensure that the Graduate School, which is empowered to make the final approval of special appointments, has everything they need to assess the outside individual's credentials and to understand the reasons that the outside individual is wanted for the project.

How do I make the best use of my thesis or dissertation committee?

Students should ask committee members early in their working relationship how they see their role on the committee. Members will be involved to differing degrees or may want to focus on particular aspects (or chapters) of the thesis or dissertation depending on their expertise. Some may be willing to read early drafts while others will ask to see more finished drafts. Committee members may be open to regular check-ins, while others may prefer to wait until later in the process to be involved. There are no set expectations for committee members other than that they offer guidance and feedback to students. Students should also have a conversation with their advisor about sharing materials with committee members; for example, some advisors may want to see drafts before they are

sent to others. Working as early and as often with committee members as is agreeable to all parties makes best use of their scholarly expertise and advice.

What peer mentoring can I expect from other musicology graduate students?

As a key initiative of the GMSF's Welcome Committee, the Peer Mentorship Program pairs incoming graduate students with a peer mentor in the program to serve as a "buddy." Buddies are tasked to meet regularly throughout the academic year and offer the opportunity for incoming students to ask questions about academic course of study, departmental resources, and life in Chapel Hill. Through the Peer Mentorship Program, incoming graduate students have a dedicated student contact to check-in on their well-being and connect them to information. The Peer Mentorship Program is intended to align with the welcome committee's purpose of creating a culture of collegiality built on inclusion and mutual care.

Outside of the official one-on-one Peer Mentorship Program for incoming graduate students, upper-level graduate students informally mentor lower-level graduate students, for example, by discussing expectations for specific TA assignments, degree milestones, professional conferences, and more.

2. Funding

The purpose of this section is to help graduate students understand the variety of ways in which they may identify and obtain funding to support their research during and beyond their time at Carolina.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. General

How do I keep track of funding opportunities?

Funding is a moving target. Deadlines and application requirements change regularly. The *gradfunding* listserv should be joined via UNC's [Graduate Funding Information Center](#) (GFIC). Bookmark the Graduate School's [Resources & Databases](#) page. Besides the listserv, GFIC also provides individual consultations, workshops on identifying funding, and announcements. Keep in mind, however, that notifications for application deadlines often come closely behind the deadlines themselves.

Who is my “go-to” person in the department when it comes to funding questions, advice on a specific award/fellowship, and letters of recommendation?

Funding and letters of recommendation should be addressed as an important component of advising/mentoring relationships; students should also consult the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) with questions not addressed by this document. For more on letters of recommendation, see the “Professional Development” section below.

I am traveling to an academic conference. What funds are available to support me?

Within the Music Department, students can apply to the [Kenan Graduate Student Activities Fund](#) to help with travel costs to conferences, especially when making a presentation or participating in another official way. The Graduate School and several Centers on the UNC Campus also offer support for conference travel. Academic societies like the AMS, SAM, SEM, or SMT offer support for student conference travel as well. Check into being a graduate student mentor, buddy, or conference assistant, as this work is often given in exchange for free conference registration or other support.

I am traveling for research and/or need support for dissertation writing. What funds are available to support me?

See the [Kenan Graduate Students Activities Fund](#) as well as Graduate School Fellowship opportunities (see below). The [Marcia J. Citron Graduate Research in Musicology Fund](#) is another opportunity for students who are ABD.

I need assistance for an unforeseen emergency or extenuating circumstances. What should I do?

The Graduate and Professional Student Government’s (GPSG) [Emergency Fund](#) and the Office of the Dean of Student’s [Student Emergency and Hardship Funds](#) are available. Students should always feel free to contact the Director of Graduate Studies whenever presented with unforeseen challenges.

What employment opportunities are available on campus?

At UNC, graduate students in the past have found employment at the [Writing Center](#), the [Learning Center](#), as [Graduate Research Consultants](#), in UNC’s [Libraries](#), and at the [Ackland Art Museum](#). Employment opportunities in the form of Graduate Assistantships at various UNC offices are often advertised via the GFIC listserv.

What support is available for international students who have more limited funding and employment opportunities?

Although the status of each specific student may vary according to visa status, immigration documentation, and other arrangements, most of the opportunities offered by UNC, the music department, and professional associations are accessible for international students. UNC Diversity and Student Success (DSS) often offers funding workshops for international students. International students should also consult the informational and funding resources through the [International Student and Scholar Services](#), a division of UNC Global.

2. Department of Music

What kinds of funding are available through the Department of Music?

The Department offers appointments as Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), and Instructor of Record (IOR). For further information on each of these, see the “Teaching” section below. Funding is also available through the Kenan Graduate Student Activities Fund, the [Marcia J. Citron Graduate Research in Musicology Fund](#), and the [James W. Pruett Summer Research Fellowships at the Library of Congress and Wilson Library \(UNC\)](#).

How are Summer Teaching opportunities applied for, and on what basis are they made available?

Graduate students may apply to teach during UNC’s summer sessions. There are three: Maymester, Summer Session I (early summer) and Summer Session II (mid-summer). Maymester courses meet daily for three weeks; the summer sessions run for five weeks. The courses offer a full semester’s work in abbreviated timeframes. The Summer School Coordinator typically sends out a call to both faculty and graduate students in late September, and the Summer School Coordinator decides which courses to run during the summer sessions. Even then, the employment is not guaranteed, as courses must normally achieve a registration of at least ten students to be offered.

What kinds of funding are available through the Graduate School?

Consult the [Funding from the Graduate School](#) page for the most up-to-date information. Awards and funds include:

- [Graduate Tuition Incentive Scholarship](#)

The Graduate Tuition Incentive Scholarship is for students who have received dissertation research awards that do not otherwise support tuition and fees.

- [Graduate Student Transportation Grant](#)

The Graduate Student Transportation Grant supports conference travel when a graduate student is presenting their dissertation research.

- [Graduate Student Opportunity Fund](#)

The Graduate Student Opportunity Fund supports unusual and unexpected academic expenses.

- [Dissertation Completion Fellowships](#)

Dissertation Completion Fellowships support doctoral students in the final year of their dissertation by enabling them to focus full time on research and writing. Recipients **cannot** hold a service position (RA/TA/GA) simultaneous to this fellowship without prior Graduate School approval. Fellows are expected to complete and defend their dissertation by the end of the fellowship year. Some dissertation completion fellowships through the graduate school come with membership in the Royster Society of Fellows.

- [Off-Campus Dissertation Fellowships](#)

Off-Campus Dissertation Fellowships support students conducting dissertation research away from the UNC-Chapel Hill campus. Several different fellowships are available, including the Luce Fellowship for conducting research in France and the Werner Friederich Fellowship for conducting research in Switzerland.

- [Summer Research Fellowships](#)

Summer Research Fellowships provide summer support to doctoral students so they may focus exclusively on their dissertation research. The fellowship is intended to enable students to complete their degree more quickly and supports students who normally do **not** have funding during the summer. Each named fellowship is made possible through a generous gift to The Graduate School, and fellows interact with their benefactor during a reception each fall.

What funds are available through the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG)?

Consult the GPSG's [Funding](#) page. Of special note should be its [Senate Appropriations for social or academic and professional events hosted by the GMSF](#), its [Travel Awards](#) (for individuals and groups), and the [Emergency Fund](#).

I specialize in a global topic or region of the world. What funding opportunities are available through UNC's [Area Studies](#) in the College of Arts and Sciences?

Check out the [student page](#) of UNC Area Studies. Fellowships in foreign languages, as well as through the Carolina Asia Center, Center For European Studies, Center for Global Initiatives, Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, and the Institute for the Study of the Americas. There are other funding opportunities advertised through centers and projects on campus that target particular research specializations. Students are encouraged to raise questions about specific funding needs with their advisors and the DGS.

What funding opportunities are available through UNC Global?

Consult the [UNC Global: Office of the Vice Provost for Global Affairs](#) page for more information. Programs include: Global Partnership Awards, Connect Carolina Classrooms with the World (CCCW), the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Award, the James Peacock REACH Fellowship, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, and [Carolina Navigators](#).

3. Beyond UNC

What kinds of funding are available beyond UNC? What do professional societies offer in terms of funding?

The websites of the [American Musicological Society](#) (AMS), [Society for American Music](#) (SAM), [Society of Ethnomusicology](#) (SEM), and [Society for Music Theory](#) (SMT) provide information on their funding and award programs. A lot of smaller funding opportunities are made available through society listservs. Additionally, students should look into funding through societies and conferences related to their specialization.

Many research centers (e.g. archives and libraries) have funds to bring scholars for research trips. For longer travel beyond the US, there are travel grants through the US Department of Education (e.g. Fulbright) as well as other non-profits. Your advisor and the [Graduate Funding Information Center](#) are good resources for navigating these. Do be aware that travel fellowships often do not cover your rent in NC. Students (and faculty!) have sometimes put their belongings in storage or sublet their housing for longer research travel. This is to say: budget with this burden in mind.

Postdoctoral fellowships: how and where should I begin researching and applying for them?

A postdoctoral fellowship (or postdoc) is a temporary position, typically one to three years, that allows recent PhDs to continue their training as a researcher and gain skills and experience that will prepare them for an academic career. Some postdocs include (or allow for) teaching, but research is the central function of most. Postdocs often are interdisciplinary in scope; some are convened around a theme. Students interested in scholarly careers should consider applying for postdocs as they are finishing their dissertations. For listings of current postdoc opportunities consult the websites of professional scholarly organizations as well as the Academic Jobs Wiki for Humanities and Social Sciences Postdocs, which posts a new site each year.

3. Teaching

Graduate Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Research Assistantships, and Instructors of Record are all assigned by the Department Chair, based on the recommendations of the Associate Chair for Academic Studies and the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). These assignments take into account students' experience, seniority, preferences, and research interests. The responsibilities of Teaching Assistants (TAs) include grading assignments, leading recitations (small-group tutorials), and lecturing.

The Department views the experience gained by its TAs to be an important part of a student's professional development and makes every effort to ensure that TAs have an opportunity to be involved in a range of courses with different faculty members. As of spring 2023, the Department has two recurring research assistantships. One research assistant (RA) works with the Director of Graduate Admissions; the other serves as the Arts Everywhere Graduate Fellow in Music Technology. Instructors of Record (IOR) are responsible for the direction of a self-contained course and may supervise one or more TAs; they in turn are supervised by the Associate Chair for Academic Studies.

The DGS announces appointments about two-thirds of the way through the previous semester. The allocated position is subject to change until the beginning of the classes, particularly in relation to scheduling conflicts and graduate students securing external funding.

TA responsibilities

A few weeks before the beginning of each semester faculty instructors and their assigned TA(s) will meet to review:

1. The design and purpose of the course in terms of its content, level, and student constituencies.
2. The instructor's grading expectations including rubrics, methods for grading, due dates, and distribution of grading assignments among TAs.
3. Opportunities for TAs to guest lecture (where appropriate), which should include the instructor's support for the TA developing material in preparation for the lecture and feedback on pedagogy (e.g. instructional content and delivery) following the lecture.
4. Operating procedures for classroom technology, including steps to follow to call the ITS Help Desk (962-HELP) or the department's facilities manager for assistance with equipment.

5. TA academic schedules, noting when a TA may be absent from class and/or recitation. Absences should be approved by the instructor, and in cases where the TA is directly involved in instruction (e.g., by way of recitations), both the instructor and TA must make every effort to find a qualified substitute or assign students work to be completed in lieu of the missed recitation.
6. The instructor's expectations for gradebook monitoring throughout the course of the semester.
7. University policies regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, falsification of information, or misuse of University resources, plagiarism (see <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/>), or any other infringements as noted in the honor code (<http://instrument.unc.edu/>), and outline appropriate actions to take should apparent infringements of these policies arise. TAs who suspect a case of plagiarism should immediately bring the case to the attention of the course instructor and not report it to the honor court without the knowledge of the faculty instructor. It is the instructor's responsibility (with the assistance of the TA) to report all instances of alleged plagiarism according to university protocol.
8. Guidelines for TAs' interactions with undergraduate students in the classroom, in office hours, and in electronic communications.
9. The instructor's expectations for TA behavior during class when the instructor is teaching, and when and how TAs should communicate with the instructor outside of class.
10. Mechanisms for the TA to express concerns or raise grievances, whether to the faculty instructor (in the first instance) or at some higher level.

About midway through the semester (Week 6 or 7) faculty supervisors will:

1. Check in with TAs on grading and recitation workloads.
2. Review the TA's grading performance (e.g. by reviewing samples of grading).
3. Bring any concerns over TA workload and performance to the attention of the Director of Graduate Studies, who will assist in resolving any issues that might have arisen over the course of a semester.

The Graduate School recommends that students should normally conduct service work (research or teaching assistantships) not in excess of 15–20 hours per week for doctoral students and 12–15 hours per week on average for master's students. This recommendation enables them to work on their own studies and research for at least the remaining 20–25 hours per work week. TAs are encouraged to reach out to the course instructor, other graduate students, and their advisor about

strategies for grading and lesson preparation if their work is consistently exceeding the Graduate School target.

RA Responsibilities

The RA for the Director of Graduate Studies corresponds with and arranges campus or virtual visits from prospective graduate students and assists with other tasks as needed. The Arts Everywhere Graduate Fellow in Music Technology helps manage the Beat Lab (Hill Hall 109) and the Video Presentation Studio (Hill Hall 210), supporting students, faculty, and staff as well as community artists as they engage with these spaces.

IOR Responsibilities

Instructors of Record are responsible for the organization, teaching, and grading of a stand-alone course. IORs report to the Associate Chair for Academic Studies.

Evaluation of TA/IOR performance

1. Faculty will observe at least one recitation (or lecture when appropriate) led by each TA each semester and give feedback as appropriate. The Associate Chair for Academic Studies will review the performance of IORs.
2. At the end of the semester faculty will share with the TA/IOR the instructor's written report on the TA's/IOR's overall performance that semester. This report will be submitted to the DGS with a copy to the Department Chair and a copy for the student's official file.
3. TAs and IORs will have the opportunity to respond to the report by way of an addendum sent to the DGS, with a copy to the instructor.

Resources

TAs are strongly encouraged to attend relevant workshops organized by the Center for Faculty Excellence (<http://cfe.unc.edu/>) and the Graduate School Professional Development Office (<https://gradprofdev.unc.edu/>). Incoming TAs in particular are encouraged to complete relevant TA orientation workshops hosted by the CFE at the start of Fall semester. International TAs should take advantage of UNC's PITAP (<https://gradprofdev.unc.edu/pitap/>).

Frequently Asked Questions

How are teaching assignments made?

Teaching assignments are guided by several criteria: departmental needs, past courses taught, overall professional development, academic standing, and progress toward the degree. The Department makes a conscious effort to assign students to a variety of areas within music (e.g., ethnomusicology, history, theory), a variety of responsibilities (grading, recitations, instructor of record), and a variety of faculty members. Student preferences are also considered within the context of these parameters.

Who makes teaching assignments?

The final assignments are made by the Department Chair and based on the recommendations made jointly by the DGS and the Associate Chair for Academic Studies.

Can I request specific courses or faculty members?

Yes, though this request cannot always be accommodated. The DGS communicates with students about staffing in advising meetings and through formal inquiry.

What should I do if I have concerns about a particular teaching assignment?

Consult in the first instance with the DGS. If this does not satisfy concerns, consult with the Associate Chair for Academic Studies.

How can I be named Instructor of Record for a course?

Students may request to be considered for appointment as the Instructor of Record for those courses that have been designated as appropriate for graduate student IORs. The student appointed as IOR will work closely with the DGS and the Associate Chair for Academic Studies in preparation for this assignment and be observed teaching by the Associate Chair. An IOR should feel free to solicit additional observations from other faculty as well and consult with other graduate students who have served as an IOR for their experience and advice on leading a course independently.

Can I teach Summer School?

While there are normally no TAs for Summer School courses, there are typically opportunities for graduate students teach summer courses as an Instructor of Record. These appointments are made by the Department's Director of Summer School; they lie outside the standard framework of Graduate Teaching Assistantships and are paid by the Summer School. The DGS puts out a call for requests toward the end of the Fall semester.

Are there online classes I can teach?

Carolina Courses Online, previously a source for teaching opportunities, has been phased out. Online teaching opportunities may come up in the department, however.

Can I teach elsewhere?

A Teaching Assistantship of 15–20 hours per week, combined with classwork, dissertation writing, etc., is sufficiently demanding, and it is not recommended that students seek additional teaching responsibilities. Students who do not hold a TAship, however, may take the opportunity to teach elsewhere pending their personal and funding situations. Students considering this possibility should consult with their dissertation advisor and the DGS.

4. Examinations

Four exams structure a graduate student's career at UNC: the MA Comprehensive Exam, usually taken at the end of the fourth semester; the PhD Written Exam, usually taken at the end of the fifth semester; the first PhD Oral Exam (commonly known as the dissertation proposal defense), usually scheduled for the end of the sixth semester; and the second PhD Oral Exam (commonly known as the dissertation defense), which is scheduled in consultation with the advisor when a full draft of the dissertation is complete. For policy and more information about these exams' structures, please see the [Graduate Handbook](#) for the Music Department.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who do I talk to if I have questions or concerns about an exam?

If your question concerns logistics or procedure, your first resource is the DGS. Other good resources are your PhD advisor or the chair of your PhD Written Exam committee (who is usually guiding your independent study in the semester leading up to that exam).

For the MA Comprehensive Exams, there is a committee of three faculty members charged with writing and assessing the exam in conversation with the whole academic faculty. The chair of that committee is a resource for preparation and study techniques and can also address questions about expectations. You can expect that person to claim that the faculty is looking for “breadth and depth” across your answers, which people generally find to be both true and useless advice. Students have approached studying for

the MA exam in various ways, including weekly study groups, sharing outlined answers, and looking for strategic overlap among questions.

How long should my answers be for the MA Comprehensive Exam and PhD Written Exams?

Length is not a primary focus in exam assessment: a priority for the exam taker should be offering a complete answer to the question, which will be evaluated by faculty cognizant of time constraints and fatigue.

MA Comprehensive Exams usually come with a maximum word count to encourage synthesis rather than encyclopedic responses. PhD Written Exams usually indicate a suggested amount of time per question to indicate the weight of each answer for the final assessment.

The annotated bibliography for the PhD Written Exams seems like a really important document, what is it usually like?

For the PhD Written Exams, students have their annotated bibliography on hand as a reference while they write answers. The document has three functions: 1) to communicate with your committee about your ideas, interests, and takeaways (which often shapes how they write questions); 2) to help organize your thinking as you write answers and prepare; and 3) as a useful launching pad for students in the following semester they develop dissertation proposals.

There is no one correct way to annotate; some committee members may make strong suggestions or articulate preferences and it is often on the student to explain a rationale for their annotation method. Consider looking at the Oxford Bibliographies Online for ideas, or developing a kind of checklist for each item. Many students have found it useful to group readings thematically/methodologically so that they can show... “breadth and depth.” Bibliographies with extensive annotations can be overwhelming the day of the exam. At the same time, some fields will engender bibliographies with 100 items, while others will clock in closer to 45. This number will also depend on whether the majority of items are articles and chapters or entire books.

How do I interact with my PhD Written Exam committee members?

When you ask people to join your committee, ask them if they have preferences for how to work with you. As with advising and mentoring, there is a lot of variability here across faculty—and they will likely be taking into account how their expertise relates to yours. A good base practice is to have one substantial meeting—draft bibliography in hand—

with your non-independent-study-leading committee members. This is a kind of warm-up for your dissertation proposal defense. Usually, the best practice is to take committee members' suggestions. Tell them what you are really excited to learn and what you are not sure you need to know. If you disregard a suggestion, be ready to tell them why; your committee members will have contradictory opinions and navigating them is a part of the task of this exam, and indeed the dissertation process.

What happens at the PhD Oral Exams? What do I need to prepare?

Both the dissertation proposal defense and the dissertation defense begin with a brief consultation among the committee members; the student is asked to leave the room for this. That conversation usually addresses the state of the document being defended and any circumstances of which the committee needs to be aware.

After that the student is invited into the room and asked to give a brief statement to contextualize the proposal or dissertation. There are various approaches to the statement, which students and advisors discuss. Length and approach will be specific to the scholar and project as well as the document being defended. Some give personal background and motivation for the dissertation, some share a bit of music/sound or other evidence to explain how it provokes questions for the dissertation, some look to next steps (either what research will launch the dissertation or how the dissertation might be shaped into a book). In the case of the dissertation defense, students sometimes share how their thinking on the dissertation has changed since the proposal.

The bulk of these exams is made up of rounds of questions from committee members. In the first round there tends to be more back and forth, with some committee members asking follow-up questions for clarification or engaging in open conversation. After there are no more questions, the student is sent out of the room again, and faculty deliberate on the response to the student as well as whether or not the student has passed the oral exam. Often when a student has passed the oral exam, the faculty request specific changes to the document or responses in writing to the defense.

5. Ethics

Few aspects of teaching and research are as important and yet complex to frame or regulate as ethics. The issues covered under this concept reach from integrity (both personal and institutional) to freedom of speech and of scholarly inquiry. As the Ethics Statement of the

Society for Ethnomusicology suggests: “Ethics are not codified law, but emerge dynamically through continuous critical engagement with contemporary concerns.”

In music studies, several professional societies have developed ethics-related documents that offer thoughtful and extensive guidelines on ethical conduct.

1. American Musicological Society, “[Guidelines for Ethical Conduct](#)”
2. Society for Ethnomusicology, “[SEM Position Statement on Ethical Considerations](#)”
3. Society for Music Theory, “[SMT Policy on Ethics](#)”

At UNC, integrity and ethics are addressed officially through two instruments:

1. UNC Graduate School, “[Academic Integrity and Ethics](#)”
2. [UNC Honor Code](#)

The Department of Music’s [Mission Statement](#) emphasizes inclusive and ethical practices of teaching and learning. This page also has links to resources available to students, faculty, and staff on the UNC campus who face discrimination, harassment, or misconduct.

6. Professional Development

The advisor-advisee relationship(s) and one-on-one mentoring are crucial scaffolding for every graduate student and should be the first course of inquiry, followed by the DGS. In these relationships, the specific needs and goals of the individual student can be prioritized.

There are two structures for professional development in the Music Department: MUSC 750 (for first-year students) and MUSC 991 (for students who have passed their PhD Written Exams). Over the years, these courses offer varied content ranging from introduction to publishing, discussions on diversity in music studies, assistance in fellowship writing, visits from early-career scholars to discuss job opportunities in academia and beyond, and more. Some graduate seminars integrate professional-development components; on occasion there are additional workshops in the department. Students are encouraged, too, to take advantage of the Graduate School, which offers regular professional development workshops on particular topics aimed across academic disciplines. Finally, attending conference paper run-throughs, the departmental colloquium series (including its informal meals and receptions), and being engaged in the activities of GMSF offer students exposure to different aspects of “professionalization,” by which we mean the components of graduate school that prepare students for jobs utilizing tools

and skills central to music scholarship and teaching. Other departments and centers on campus also have lecture series, workshops, and opportunities to network.

A key to job opportunities (or many sorts) is the letter of recommendation or professional reference. That is the thrust of this FAQ section.

Frequently Asked Questions

How and whom should I ask for letters of recommendation?

Typically, students begin with their advisor if they have started working with one. But students are encouraged to approach any faculty member who knows their work well. (Staff and administrators can be appropriate recommenders as well.) Many fellowships and job opportunities ask for multiple letters, and it is best to communicate clearly with committee members about whether and when you will ask them for letters of recommendation over the course of your graduate study. It is best to ask for recommendations at least two weeks before the deadline. Requests should identify the grant, fellowship, job, etc., with the official description and any instructions to recommenders; note the deadline and provide relevant links if possible. The general principle to keep in mind is to make it as straightforward as possible for someone to write a detailed letter and as easy as possible to submit it to the relevant institution.

Many job opportunities ask for names and contact information for references instead of recommendations. In such cases it is best to ask faculty along the same practices as the request for letters of recommendation. For job opportunities “off cycle” (not advertised in the fall for appointment the following academic year) it is advisable to double-check with letter writers that they are still available, since these requests can sometimes have very short turnarounds, often automated by Human Resource Offices.

What happens if I need a recommendation letter on short notice?

This happens, and sometimes can't be helped. In such cases, note the deadline up front and ask if the potential recommender can produce a letter in time. If there are particular circumstances that have made it impossible to make the request sooner, briefly mention them. The usual niceties of social interaction apply; ask politely and don't be insistent.

The deadline is looming, and my recommender hasn't submitted the letter. Help!

It is appropriate to send a polite message to a recommender a few days before the deadline as a reminder. If there is no response, follow up a day or two later. The best way

to avoid this situation is to provide recommenders with plenty of advance notice and to ask them to confirm when the letter has been sent. Most recommenders take their role very seriously and do everything they can to meet deadlines.

I feel bad asking my advisor for so many recommendation letters. Should I?

No. Although requesting recommendations feels like asking for favors, most faculty members consider writing recommendations to be one of their professional responsibilities. Nevertheless, students should have an explicit conversation with their advisor and other letter writers to set expectations early. Though never required, the occasional thank-you is always appreciated.

Can I ask for letters of recommendation from my advisor or committee members after I've graduated?

Yes. Most advisors and thesis or dissertation committee members are willing to continue writing for advisees. They are typically the ones best situated to write letters in the first years after graduation. It would be helpful to have a specific conversation about this as graduation nears to set expectations. Advisors often write on behalf of their advisees for many years and do not consider it a burden.

Does a recommendation letter have to come from my advisor or a committee member?

No. Recommendation letters are most effective when they include specific and substantive assessments of the skills, experience, and qualities of the applicant. Although advisors and committee members tend to be well-equipped to write letters for fellowships, grants, and academic job applications, others can also contribute meaningful recommendation letters. Faculty who supervise students as an RA or TA can speak directly to research and teaching ability. Students who work elsewhere on campus (such as in a library or at the Writing Center) can ask their supervisor to write on their behalf. The faculty or staff advisor for a registered student organization may also be well-qualified to write a letter of recommendation.

Can I ask my advisor, the DGS or a committee member to observe my teaching for the purpose of a recommendation letter?

Yes. It is in fact good practice for dissertation advisors to have observed their advisees teach. Students may ask other committee members as well as the DGS to observe their teaching as well. The student should initiate this request and provide plenty of time for the scheduling of the observation and writing of a letter.

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Appendix: Some Useful Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABD - All but dissertation, completed coursework

AMS-SE - AMS Southeast

CAPS - Counseling and Psychological Services

CSMC - Carolina Symposium of Music and Culture

CUAB - Carolina Union Advisory Board

DGA - Director of Graduate Admissions

DGS - Director of Graduate Students

DWW - Do the Work Wednesdays

FDOC - First Day of Classes

FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

FLAS - Foreign Language Area Studies

FLPA - Foreign Language Proficiency Exam

FSC - Faculty-Student Committee

GMSF - Graduate Music Student Forum

GPSG – Graduate and Professional Student Government

GSHIP - Graduate Student Health Insurance Plan

KCL - King's College London

KMB - Kenan Music Building

LDOC - Last Day of Classes

SCGMC - (“Scagmac”) South Central Graduate Music Consortium

QGAPS - Queer Graduate and Professional Students

TGS – The Graduate School

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