

# **“Navigating Difficult Conversations with Graduate Students”**

UW ADVANCE  
Fall Quarter Pre-Tenure Faculty  
Workshop

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**TOM DANIEL**

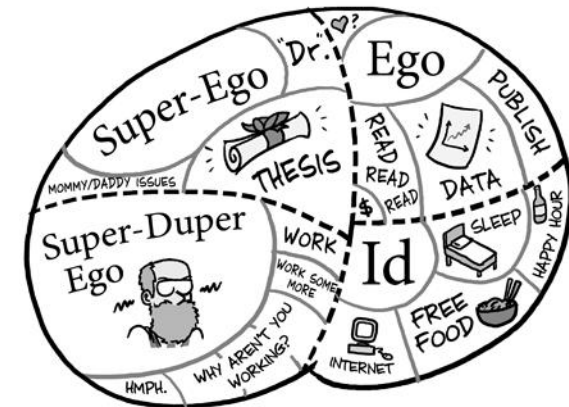
**PROFESSOR, BIOLOGY**

## Challenging conversations with your students\*

1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices

- Student 1: Does not appear to be engaged in grad school
- Postdoc 1: Can't write a paper to save his life
- Student 2: "I think an academic career is not for me"
- Postdoc 2: "I don't think I'm good enough"

\*undergrad, postbac, grad, postdoc



The Grad Student Brain

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices



- Head in the sand – whose?
- The one-one conversation rarely goes the way one thinks it would
- Humans vary over n-dimensional space
- The conversation is about the progress, goals, results, climate – less about either you or the person

1. A few examples from my lab
2. Observations from 30+ years
3. Some practices

- It is not all on your shoulders. That is what committees are about
- The process of annual evaluations and milestones is really helpful but few faculty enforce them.
- Document conversations
- Establishing mutually agreed upon expectations on day one help immensely
- Official warnings are necessary
- Weekly meetings work wonderfully (with goal setting)
- Ask if this program and this degree is a good fit (not are they good enough for your program and degree).



## Some resources

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/06/12/advice-how-have-difficult-conversations-essay>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/09/09/essay-finding-good-mentoring-advice-academic-careers>

# MARTY HOWELL

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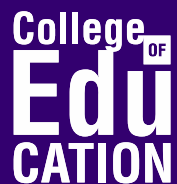
# Graduate Student Academic Progress: Expectations, Conversations, and Documentation(s)

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*Martin Howell*

*Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs*

*UW College of Education*



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# Setting Expectations

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- ❑ Define Satisfactory Academic Progress in your department, as well as how you assess it
  - ❑ Graduate School Memo 16, Unsatisfactory Performance & Progress
  - ❑ Grades
  - ❑ Program milestones
  - ❑ Performance in internships, labs, research seminars, etc.
- ❑ Discuss and provide information to students
- ❑ Involve other faculty in progress reviews
- ❑ A note about employment



# Having (Difficult) Conversations

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- Prepare for the conversation with the student in mind
- Invite others to join the conversation as needed
- Provide specific information about areas of challenge
- Focus and refocus the conversation as needed
- Conclude with a support and improvement plan
  - Describe needed improvements in specific terms
  - Describe available supports

# Creating Documentation

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- Document all concerns and conversations
- Write objectively and impartially (your documentation will become student record)
  - Write in the third person
  - Describe observed actions and behaviors
  - Be as specific as possible
- Consult with colleagues as needed
- Communicate with the student

# Creating Documentation

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## Document concerns and conversations

### Do:

- be objective and impartial; your documentation will become student record
- include dates and document while your memory is fresh
- write in the third person
- describe observed actions and behaviors
- be as specific as possible

### Don't:

- treat your notes as “for your eyes only”
- include labels or judgments
- include personal feelings
- be vague
- let your questions go unanswered!
- You can contact the Office of Student Services or the Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs for help.

# Questions?