



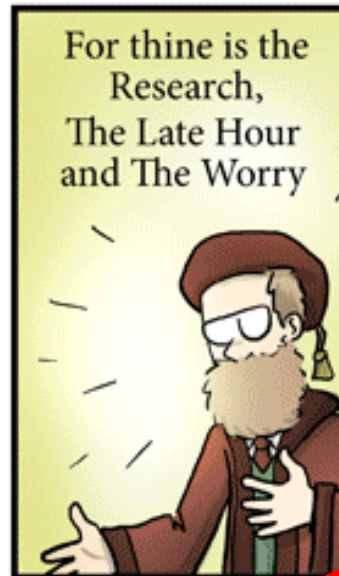
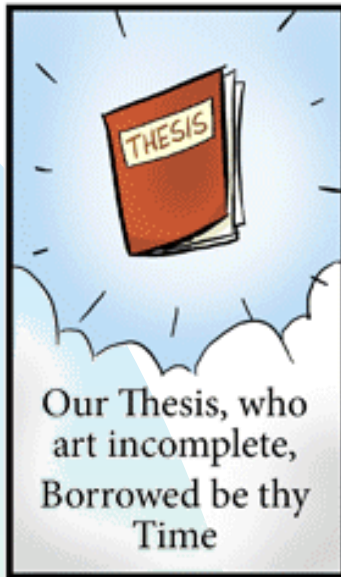
Relationship with your Advisor and Graduate Committee

I mean... really, what can you show in a presentation about this stuff? The typical “fake stock image” of people “looking interested”, like this ↓ ?



Claudio I. Meier
Advisor (& Assoc. Prof.)
Dept. of Civil Engineering
The University of Memphis

A PRAYER FOR GRAD STUDENTS



JORGE CHAM © 2011

Objectives of this session

At the end of today's lecture, students will be able to:

1. Better understand the motivations of graduate advisors
2. Differentiate the contributions of a MS thesis from those of a PhD dissertation (or also "thesis")
3. Understand the minimum expectations regarding the relationship between graduate students and advisors
4. Realize that it is a human bond, before all
5. Identify the typical characteristics of advisors and why these should matter to graduate students
6. Define the roles of a Graduate ("Thesis") Committee

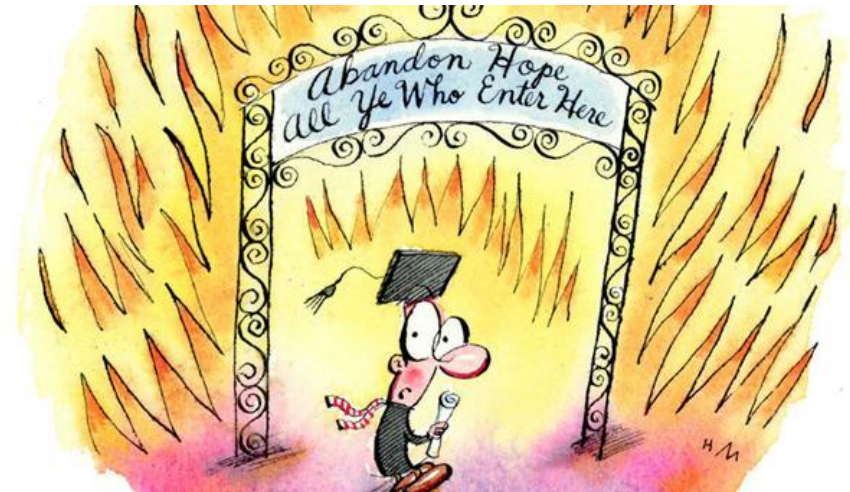
This presentation in one word (thanks, Dr. P):

Interpersonal trust (ok, that's 2 words, I know...)

“Interpersonal trust is defined as the perception you have that other people will not do anything that will harm your interest; the individual is giving the willingness to accept vulnerability or risk based on expectations regarding another person’s behavior.”

Tiara Williams, McKendree U.

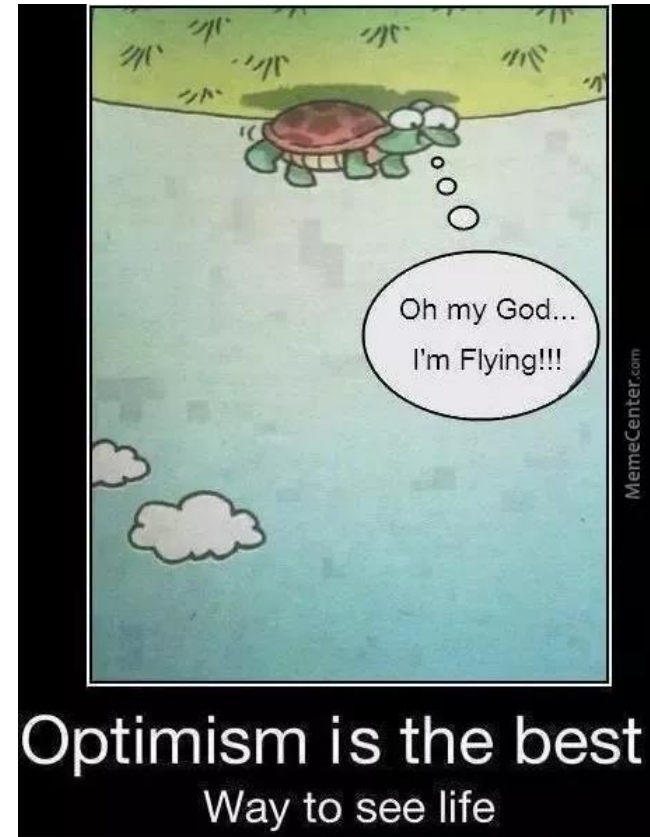
Let's face it: Advisee-advisor relationships start as a blind date!



The opposite of interpersonal trust is not mistrust. It is despair. This is because we have given up on believing that trustworthiness and fulfillment are possible from others. We have lost our hope in our fellow humans

Caveats

- *Very biased & candid* perspective on these topics
- Got my PhD at 42, instead of 32, because of... *lack of communication* with my first PhD advisor
- If you stay for the next 85 mins you *really* are an optimist!
- More seriously: I certainly hope you can gain something and learn from somebody else's (that'd be my) experiences...
- But not everyone is "*motivabile*"; hereafter I assume that students want to learn (= are academically motivated, broadly speaking)



Caveats (cont.):

- Time is of the essence: I invested 1½ day in preparing this powerpoint

Experience

- Advised 60 degree-seeking students (7 ♀ and 53 ♂ ... yup, engineering)
- All but four completed their theses and degrees
- But... always on time and happy? Not really...

That'd be you!

Your advisor

MARRIAGE vs. The Ph.D.



Marriage



Ph.D.

HUMANS!

Typical Length:

7.5 years

7 years

Begins with:

A proposal

A thesis proposal

Culminates in a ceremony where you walk down an aisle dressed in a gown:



Usually entered into by:

Foolish young people in love

Foolish young people without a job

50% end in:

Bitter divorce

Bitter remorse

Involves exchange of:

Vows

Know-how

Until death do you part?

If you're lucky

If you're lazy

What I (try to) promise my graduate students:

(i) I'll do my best at understanding and then explaining things to you

(ii) I will spare you the **BSU** ~~posturing~~

(iii) I'll try to treat you the way I would have liked to be treated (*in retrospective*)

Tough balance!!

(iv) I'll pay as well as I possibly can, but I'm no



How long your Prof. thinks it should take to do something



"Trivial"

How long it'll actually take you to do it



= There goes your week.

"Easy enough"

= Pull your hair out for a month.

"About a week"

= Actually, this is pretty easy. He/she doesn't know there's technology that will do this for you now. Take the week off!

"Should keep you occupied for the rest of the term"

= He/she will forget they asked you to do this by the end of the term. Don't even bother.

"This might make a good thesis topic"

= Say hello to your thesis topic.

"Hmmm..."

= Uh oh.

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

JORGE CHAM © 2008

Again: time is of the essence...

Graduate student stipends...

Sometimes, it is hard for grad students to understand that if we pay different stipends to different students “doing the same at the same level”, it is because of the different funding sources, not because we want it that way!

Conclusive proof it pays more to do nothing than it does to get a Ph.D.:

Average Maximum Annual
Unemployment Benefit

\$21,060

Average Graduate
Student Stipend

\$18,779

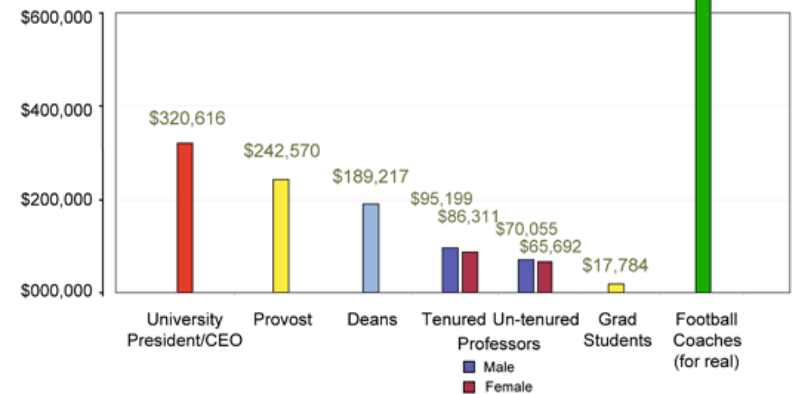
Sources: U.S. Department of Labor (via SF Chronicle), The Chronicle of Higher Education 2008-2009 survey of pay and benefits for teaching and research assistants. Unemployment benefits computed from average maximum state weekly benefits (typically 50% of base wages, capped by state) multiplied by 52 (in some cases, benefits can be extended up to 79 weeks). Academic year stipends extrapolated to 12 months.

JORGE CHAM © 2009

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

"Academic" Salaries

Actual average and median salaries at U.S. Doctoral-granting Universities



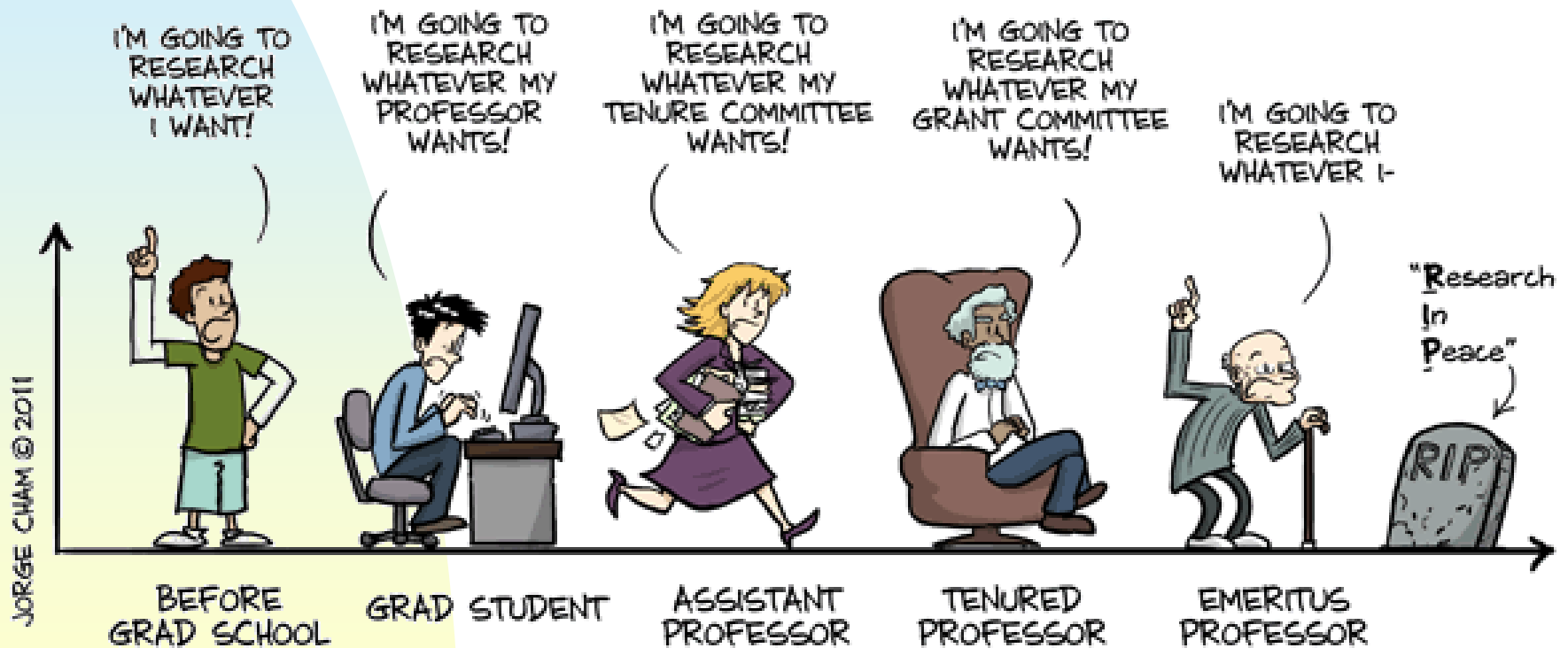
Notes: Administrator figures are medians salaries, the rest are averages. All figures in 2008 dollars. Sources: College and University Professional Association for Human Resources 2005 Survey; American Association of University Professors 2007 Survey; The Chronicle of Higher Education 2001 Survey of Graduate Assistants; USA Today Survey of Div. I-A College Football Coaches Compensation 2007.

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

JORGE CHAM © 2008

By the way, in case you didn't notice, funding strongly affects your freedom of choice for a thesis/dissertation topic!

THE EVOLUTION OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM



But I will also have high expectations!

Intellectual curiosity and honesty, hard work and dedication, ideas and discussions, showing up, telling when things are not OK, criticizing (with respect), asking questions, proposing solutions, etc.

I expect to learn from you and your research!

“By **learning** you **will** teach; by teaching you **will** **learn.**”

Latin Proverb

Important difference: MS vs. PhD

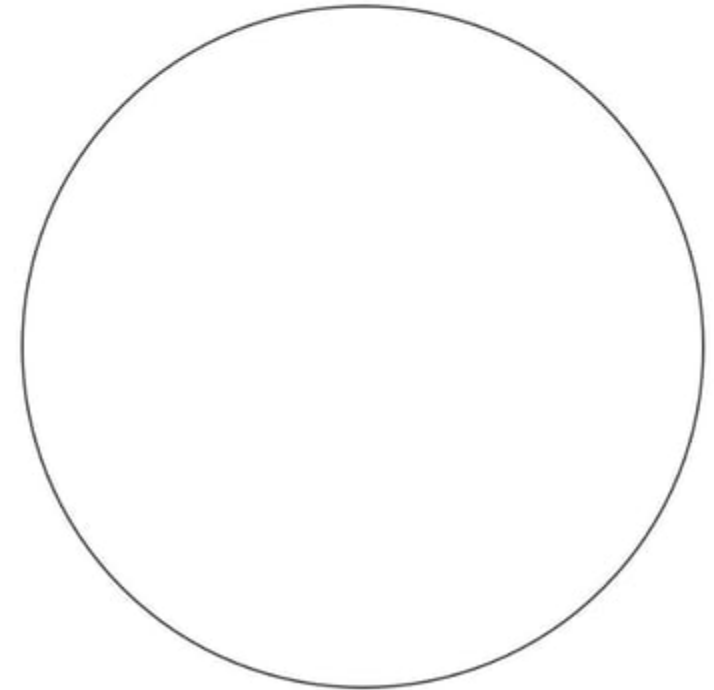
My PhD advisor (the 2nd one, that I did complete) used to tell me:

“A PhD is not three masters”

How come?? Isn't it just to do what you're told to do, but for 4~5 years instead of 1½ or 2??

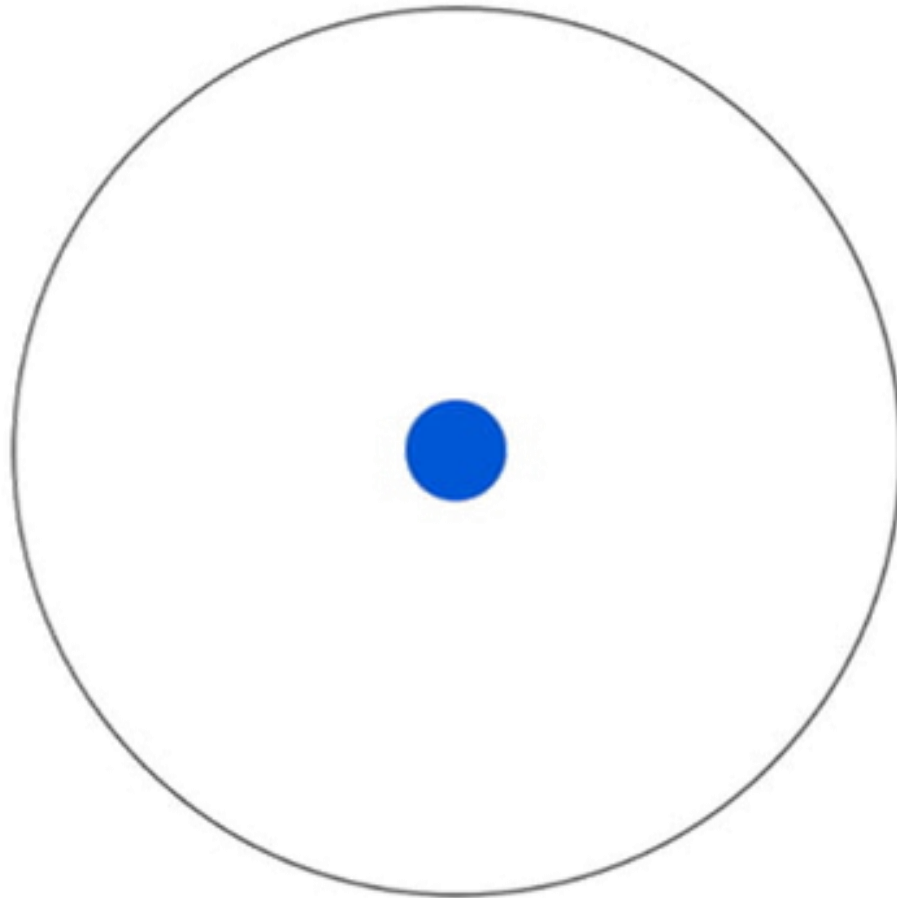
This is sometimes hard to explain...

Imagine a circle that contains all of human knowledge:



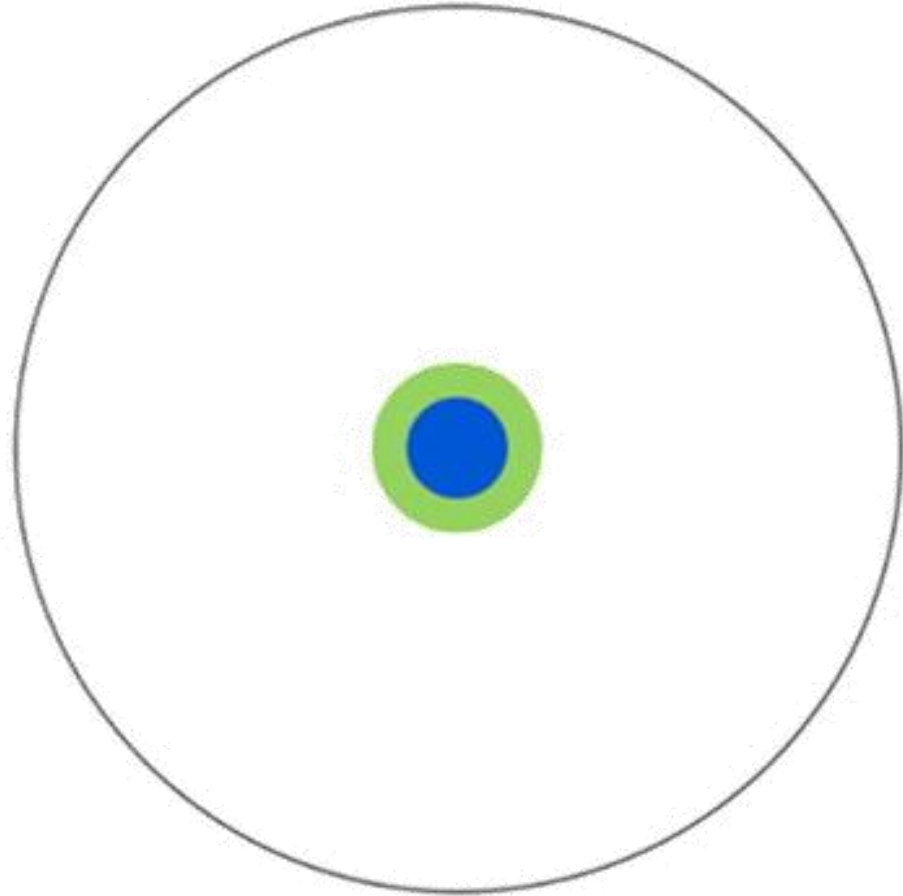
Important difference: MS vs. PhD

By the time you finish elementary school, you know a little:



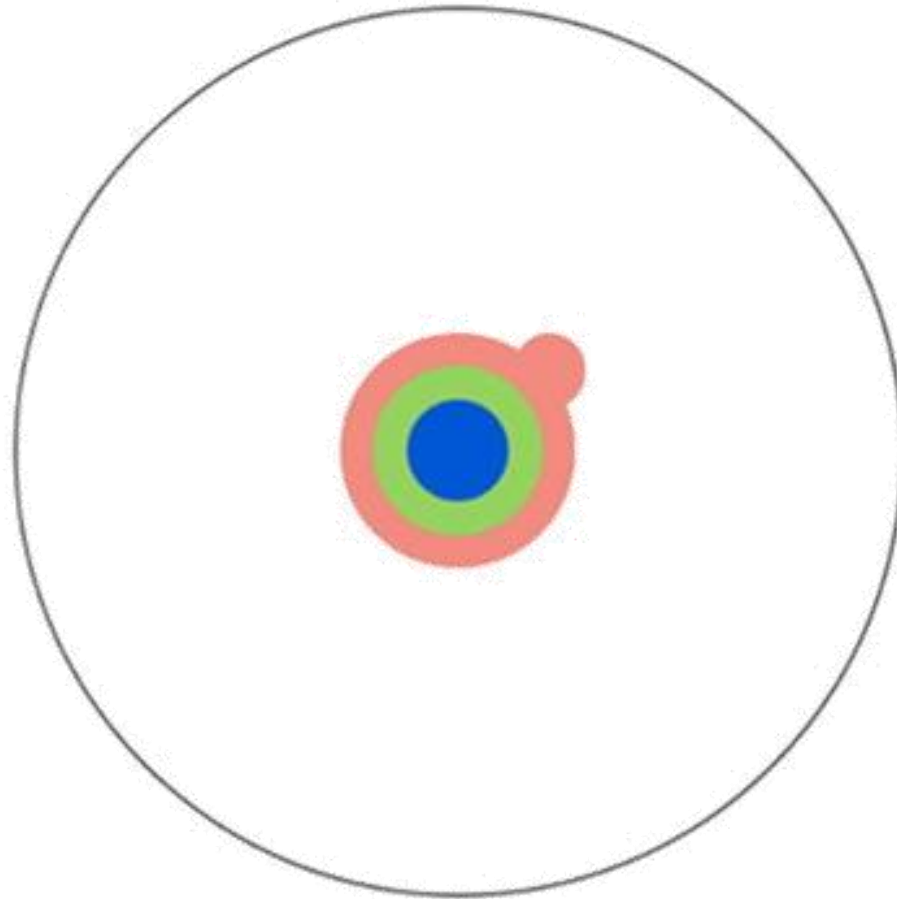
Important difference: MS vs. PhD

By the time you finish high school, you know a bit more:



Important difference: MS vs. PhD

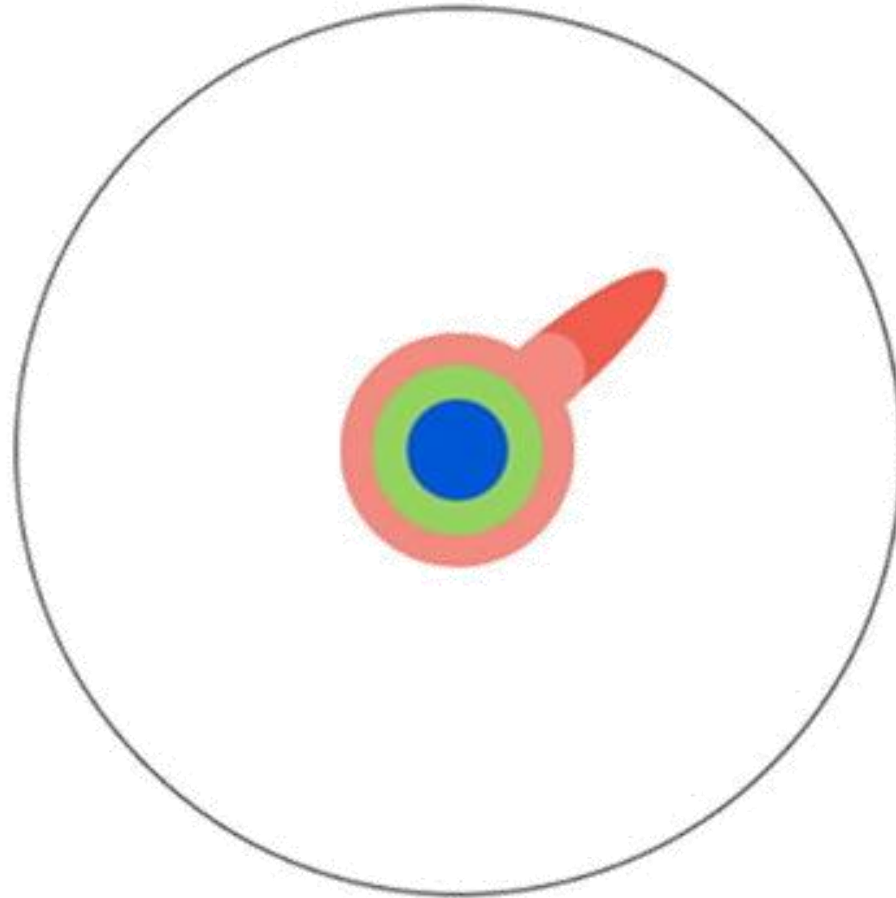
With a bachelor's degree, you gain a specialty:



Important difference: MS vs. PhD

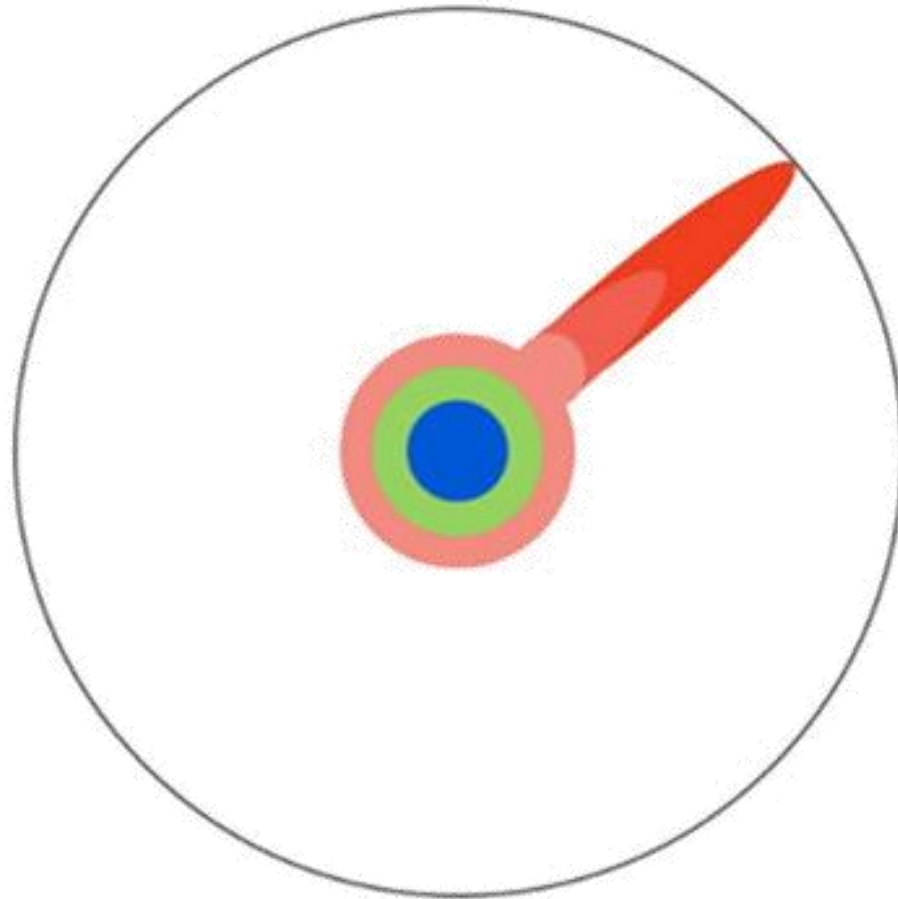
A master's degree deepens that specialty:

This would be
the case of a
MEng or a MSc
without a thesis



Important difference: MS vs. PhD

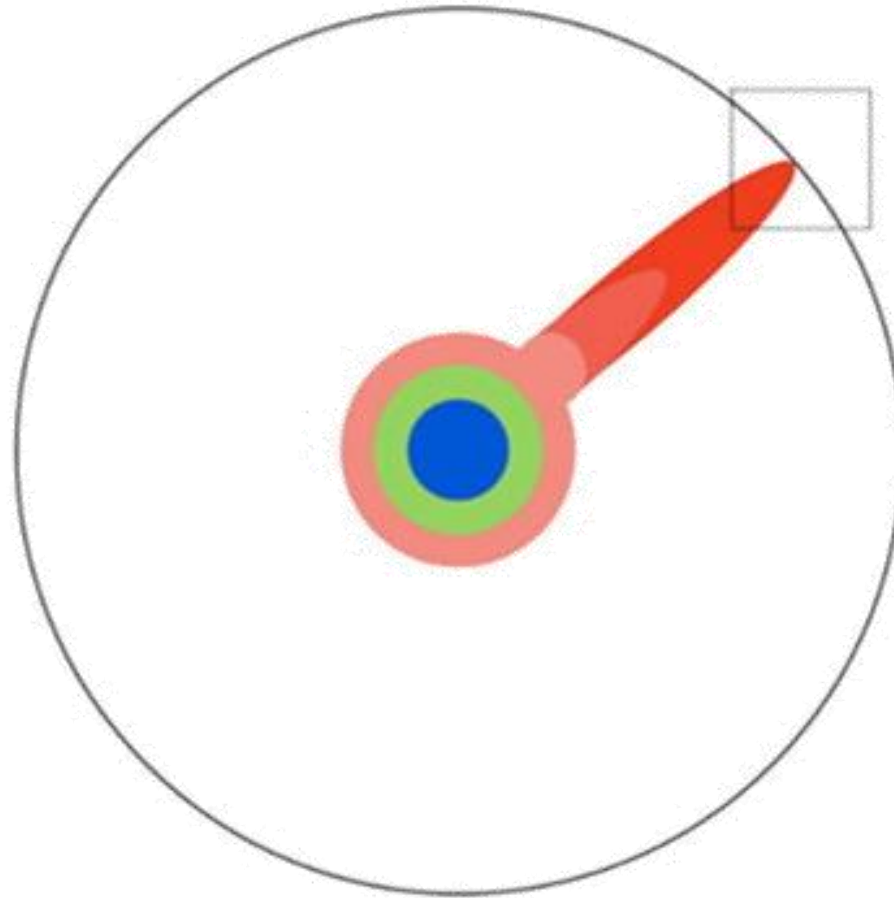
Reading research papers takes you to the edge of human knowledge:



This would be the case of a MSc with thesis, you're at "the state of the art"

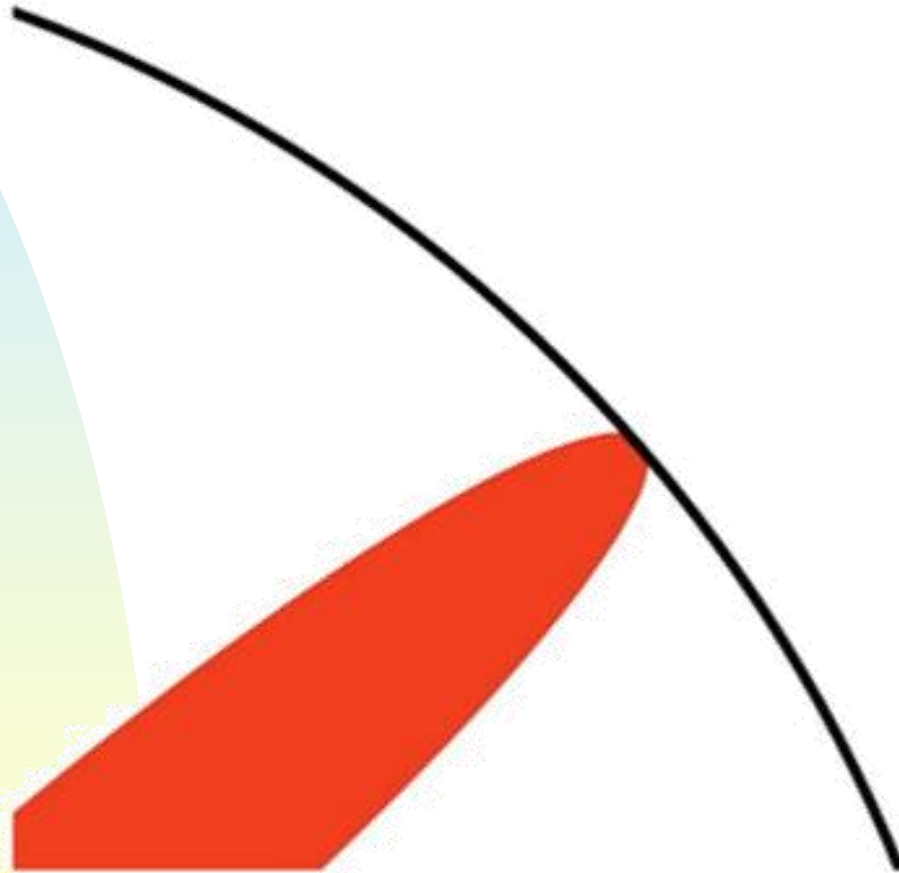
Important difference: MS vs. PhD

Once you're at the boundary, you focus:



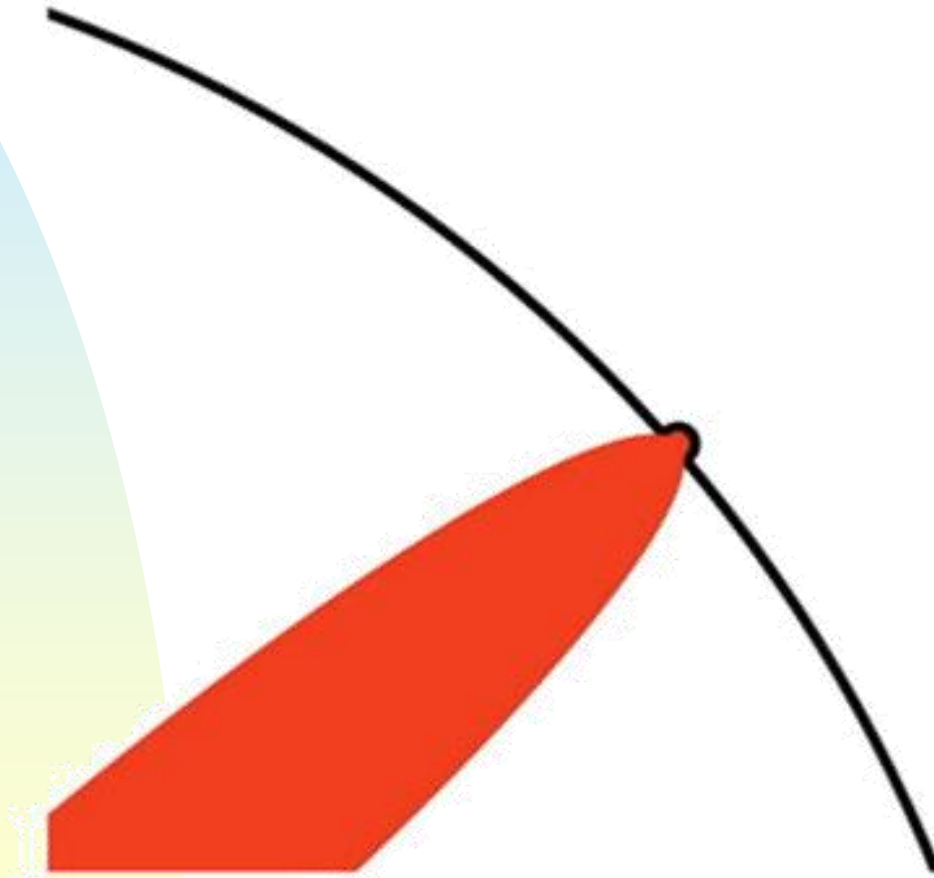
Important difference: MS vs. PhD

You push at the boundary for a few years:



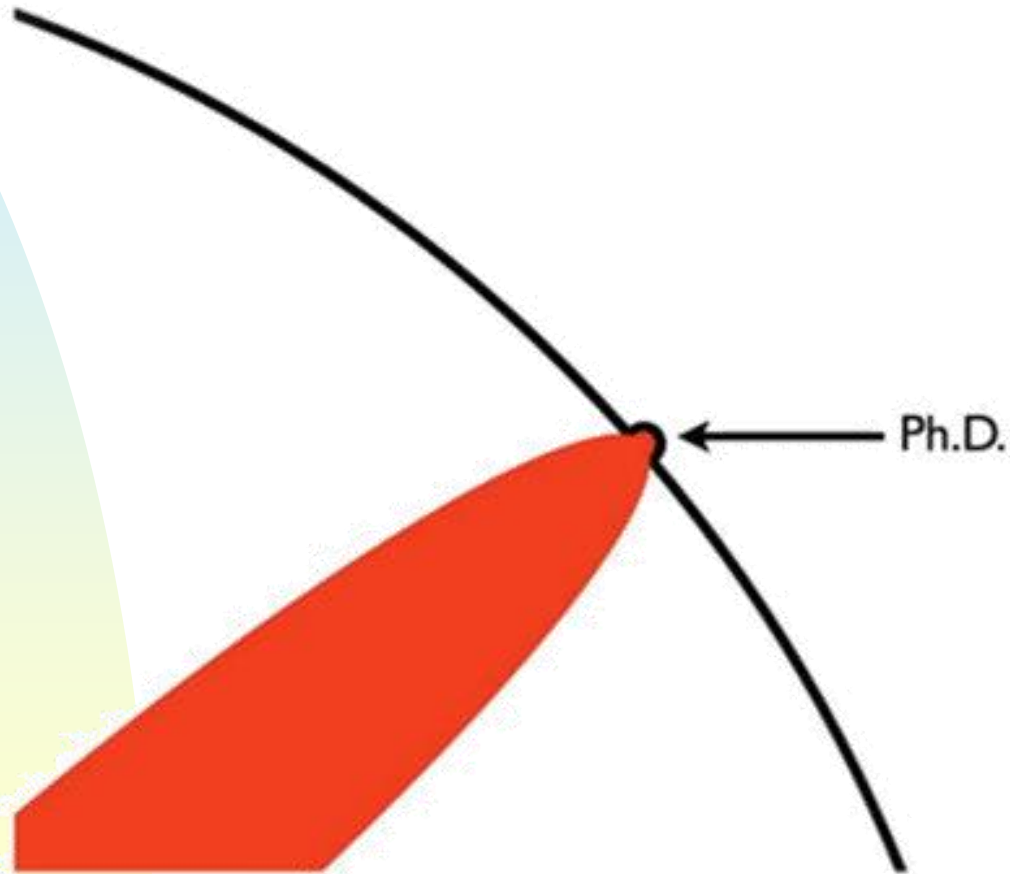
Important difference: MS vs. PhD

Until one day, the boundary gives way:



Important difference: MS vs. PhD

And, that dent you've made is called a Ph.D.:



Important difference: MS vs. PhD

Of course, the world looks different to you now:

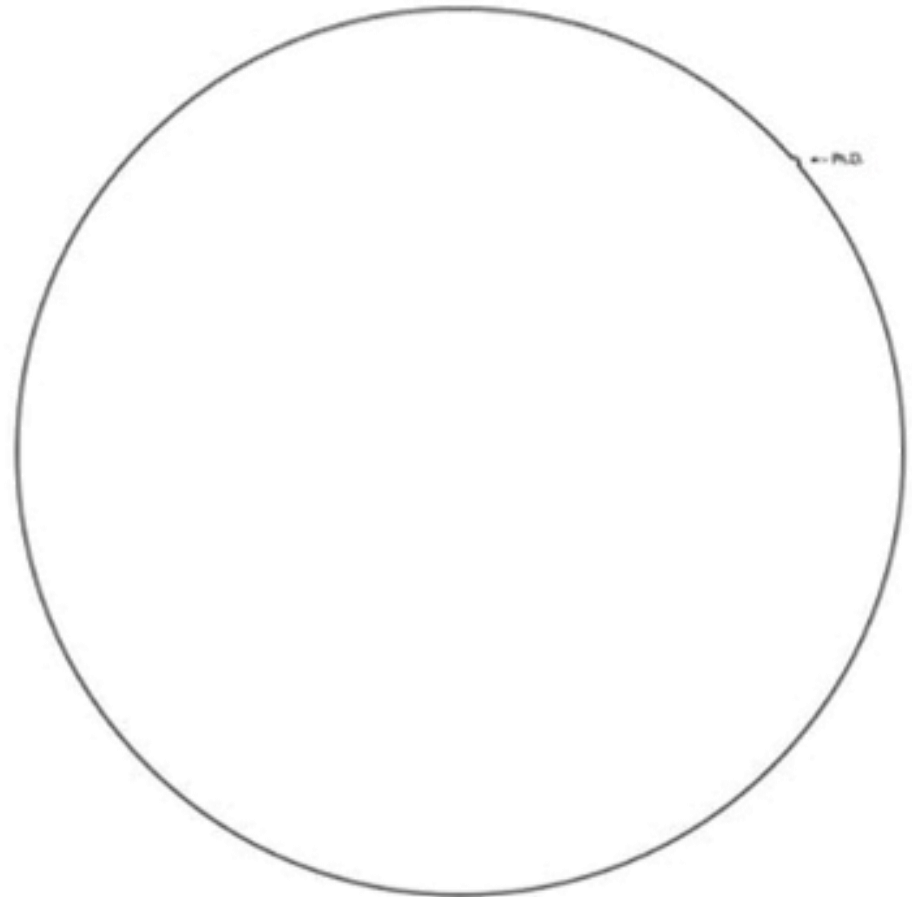


Important difference: MS vs. PhD

So, don't forget the bigger picture:

Discussion:

Why is it important in your career to never stop considering “the big picture”?



BEST PRACTICES

in Graduate Student Advising

COMMON VALUES

On the Graduate Student Experience

INSTITUTE POLICY

Guiding the Graduate Student Experience

The Orthodoxy:

“MIT’s resources for advisors and students on how to build and maintain a healthy, rewarding and productive relationship”

The Orthodoxy: “MIT’s resources for advisors and students on how to build and maintain a healthy, rewarding and productive relationship”

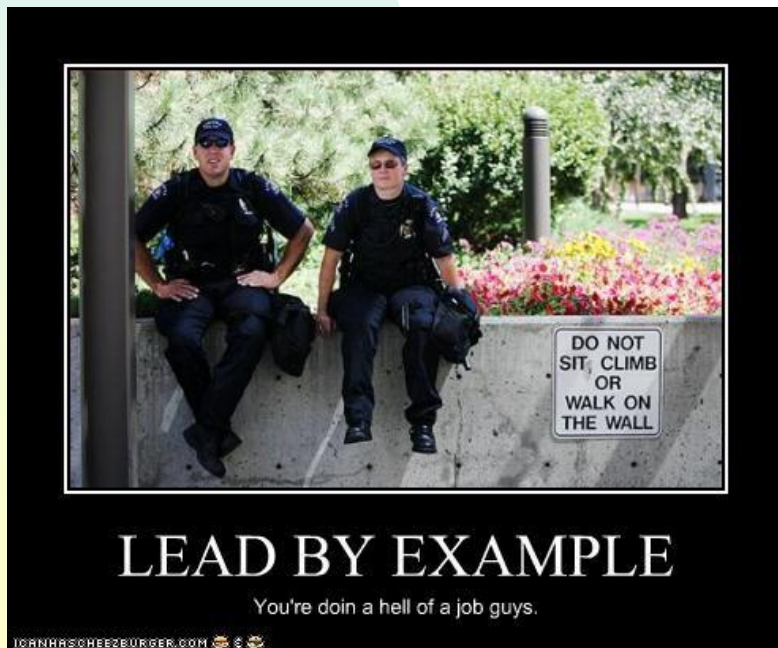
1. Faculty members and their graduate students are strongly encouraged to build their relationship by establishing common expectations on the major elements of their professional interactions, such as:
 - Requirements for achieving and maintaining an acceptable academic standing as well as graduation requirements for each academic unit;
 - A regular time for meeting; ✓
 - Lead times for feedback on work such as thesis and manuscript drafts; ✓

Ask the graduate coordinator, please!



1. Faculty members and their grad students ...(cont)

- A shared understanding of what constitutes sufficient notice and reasonable scheduling of events the student is expected to attend following a request from their advisor; ✓
- A shared understanding of academic integrity and responsible conduct of research. ✓



Office of Graduate Education



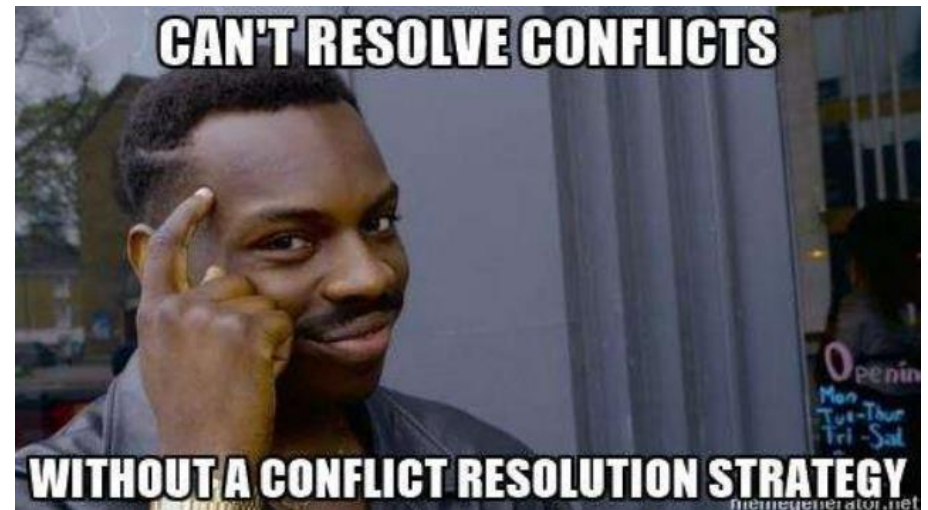
But of course, if that fails, you can always have a “*recipes manual*”...

2. Faculty and students are strongly encouraged to attempt to resolve conflicts through direct discussion and other informal procedures. ✓



Ok, sounds great, but what do you do when you do “tell” students – or try to have them *somehow* “get” - that you don’t like something, e.g., that they are late every single class, and they still don’t react?

→ I don’t know !!



3. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to keep their advisor apprised of academic progress and seek their advisor's input on the same subject on a regular basis. ✓
4. Graduate students should receive attribution for scholarly assistance to faculty, and vice versa, including contributions to publications and patents. ✓

Obviously, and obviously!!

5. Faculty are expected to be supportive of their students' participation in extra-academic activities and to recognize the value of such activities for their intellectual and professional development ✓



Yes! But what happens if a student is not motivated?

Example: Attending conferences with “all expenses paid” ...

A case of “Nice advisor!” ... Or “dumb advisor?”

6. A number of resources are available for graduate students who wish to terminate their relationship with their advisor & search for a new research group ✓

Sure! The “*Manual on Rules for Divorce*” ...



7. Graduate students share with the faculty the responsibility for securing, maintaining, and protecting the integrity of grades, scholarship, and research

 | Office of Graduate Education



8. Faculty members have the responsibility to inform graduate students of the source and amount of their financial support and of all expectations associated with any funded position. Faculty members should inform graduate students promptly of matters that affect their funding status.

 | Office of Graduate Education



9. Graduate students and faculty have a responsibility to inform each other as soon as they have knowledge of a possible change of their status. Graduate students should provide reasonable notice to their advisor if they intend to leave or change advisors; have a medical or personal issue that interferes with study and research; or are experiencing other academic or life issues that an advisor might reasonably need to know about. When circumstances require leaving a research project, graduate students should provide a summary of their work so that any delay associated with continuation of the project is minimized.



Office of Graduate Education



Who could argue against this, right?

And yes: Students can certainly ask to change advisors, even though many times this will mean changing schools, too...

10. Beyond the responsibility to provide an evaluation once per term via a thesis grade, advisors should consider providing additional periodic feedback of academic progress, performance and professional potential, preferably in the form of a written evaluation.



I should do this...

11. Graduate students are protected by a variety of policies and procedures, as summarized in the document Institute Policy Guiding the Graduate Student Experience. If a student feels that they have been unfairly treated, or treated in a way that is in violation of MIT policies, and attempts at informal solutions were unsuccessful, the student can appeal by means of confidential Institute Complaint Resolution procedures. The student can be accompanied by a member of the MIT community to a meeting about the complaint. These individuals may not be family members, subordinates, or attorneys. The role of the MIT community member is to provide support and guidance, not to be a substitute for the party, who is the primary participant.



Discussion:

So, how did you like this “**Best Practices Manual**” in Graduate Student Advising?

What did it feel like?



What is missing?

Interpersonal trust

I may be naïf (that's the masculine for "naïve"), but I like to think that all my students could become my friends (*I know it won't be the case always*).

I hope graduate students would be frank enough to ask for help, criticize, propose ideas, etc.

→ The relationship between advisee and advisor is fundamentally a human bond, *before* it is a contract or a manual!

(please don't tell administrators that I said this!!



)

Lelieveldt (2001) proposed the following typology of advisors (ouch!):

The unavailable is virtually never there, and if he is there he is “busy, busy, busy.”



The magnum opus writer is not concerned with the limited time that you have to write your thesis: “I also took ten years to get my Ph.D.”



The critic knows precisely what’s wrong with your text, but makes no suggestions about how you could modify it.



The nitpicker corrects minor grammar errors (preferably with a red pen), but has nothing to say about the content or structure.



The structuralist hammers on about structure, but has nothing to say about the content.



The indifferent has no opinion, thinks everything is OK.



The hyperactive sends you repeatedly into a new direction with his wild ideas, caring little about coherency and direction.



The conservative holds on to what he has grown up with, abhors everything he is not familiar with.



The talker does most of the talking without listening to what you have to say.



The imposer has strong ideas about what your research should be like and accepts no deviations from his ideas.

What about the reverse case?



The competitor feels threatened because you might soon surpass him; therefore he puts on the brakes.



The professional has ample time for you, reads your manuscripts promptly, gives adequate comments, motivates you, and combines the roles of coach and evaluator in an admirable way, and is thrilled to see your ideas forge ahead of hers.



Now clearly, each one of these “types” is a caricature, but you want something closer to *the professional!*

Traits to look for! The 'perfect' advisor is:*

- Professional, with good reputation in their research field
- Experienced and creative in research and in supervising graduate students
- Enthusiastic and knows how to motivate others
- Has the time to help students with their research and stimulate them in other ways
- Challenges their graduate students & helps them grow
- Has enough research funding to provide financial support and the infrastructure needed to carry out the research effectively, and
- Has good human skills

You would be lucky to find this by chance! So ***better ask questions and inform yourself*** before choosing an advisor

*From Snieder and Larned, 2009. The Art of Being a Scientist. Cambridge University Press.

But... There is no 'perfect advisor' to all:

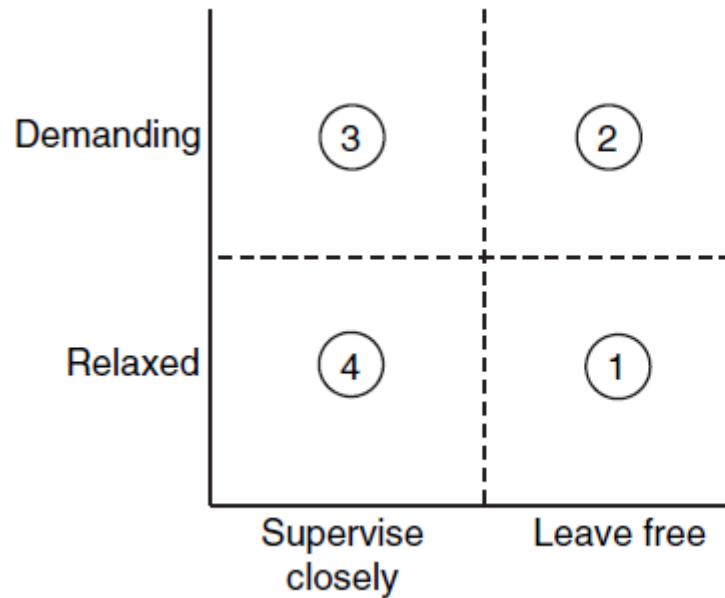


FIG. 4.1. Four quadrants with different styles of advisers.

Snieder and Larned, 2009. *The Art of Being a Scientist*. Cambridge University Press.

There are *styles of advising*, which may suit some students better than others... Better, more experienced advisors will adjust their style to match the needs of each one of their students.

Think about yourself: What would you prefer? Are you relaxed? Do you get easily distracted?

*The Graduate Committee**

In the US and many other countries, universities require students to have a graduate (“thesis”) committee

It is typically composed of 4~5 faculty, from the home department, from other departments, including an “external member” from another university (& country).







It serves a formal purpose:

- Agrees with & signs off on student graduate coursework
- Evaluates the student’s progress and judges their performance in preliminary and qualifying exams
- Evaluates the research proposal, the thesis, and the thesis defense

If a student’s committee is limited to these formal tasks, it would be an under-utilized resource!

Objectives of this session

At the end of today's lecture, students will be able to:

1. Better understand the motivations of graduate advisors  or  ?
2. Differentiate the contributions of a MS thesis from those of a PhD dissertation (or also "thesis") 
3. Understand the minimum expectations regarding the relationship between graduate students and advisors 
4. Realize that it is a human bond, before all 
5. Identify the typical characteristics of advisors and why these should matter to graduate students 
6. Define the roles of a Graduate ("Thesis") Committee 