

# **University of Michigan Anthropology: First Year Advising Guidelines**

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## **Introduction**

You are reading the University of Michigan Anthropology Department’s guidelines for first-year advising, which work with and enrich the ‘triad’ advising structure Michigan Anthropology introduced with the incoming cohort of 2020. Under this structure, each incoming first-year student is assigned two faculty mentors who meet with their advisee at least once per month. Founded on a principle of shared accountability between students and their advisors, the guidelines contained here will strengthen student/advisor relationships during students’ crucial first year in their program. In what follows, we provide an account of our understanding of shared accountability, a month-by-month timeline to structure monthly advising meetings, and an appendix suggesting formats for advisor/student “writing conversations.”

The authors of this document belonged to a working group on “Faculty/Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising” that was formed through Michigan Anthropology Graduate Students (MAGS) during the summer of 2020.<sup>1</sup> In preparing this document, the working group collaborated with the Michigan Anthropology Anti-Racism Collective (MAARC), and drew on

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<sup>1</sup> Students who contributed to the drafting and revision of this document included: Annie Birkeland, Anne Marie Creighton, Katie Dimmery, Chris Mulvey, Jennifer Sierra, Lukas Vrbka, and others.

the results of the 2020 Michigan Anthropology Climate Assessment. We spoke to students throughout their programs about their experiences in the first year, and we incorporated their suggestions into the document you are now reading. These guidelines were finalized in late 2020.

Because students arrive in the department with different experiences, goals, and knowledge of graduate education, clear, accountability-based guidelines for first year mentorship can improve the equity of advising that incoming students receive, while reducing the amount of excess labor that some have reported falls to BIPOC and non-male identified faculty. The authors of this document believe the structure it provides can help create the conditions for fruitful, productive, and long-lasting intellectual relationships between faculty and students, relationships that can positively influence the rest of students’ trajectories and careers. In this sense, these guidelines should be viewed as a contribution to the intellectual life of the department and its overall scholarly mission.

**Shared accountability in the mentoring relationship**

This proposal is built around the idea that first year advising is an intellectual and scholarly process as well as a relationship of support and advocacy. It can be an opportunity for both faculty and students to have meaningful conversations about substantive issues in anthropology, and it is one of the central sites where a vibrant departmental community is developed. It also requires shared accountability. Broken down in terms of “mentor” and “student” roles, here is a vision of what this kind of shared accountability can look like:

<b>MENTORS</b>	<b>STUDENTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish mutual expectations and boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish mutual expectations and boundaries</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adhere to those mutual expectations and boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adhere to those mutual expectations and boundaries</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• invite advisees to be full members of the academic enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seek to contribute to the academic enterprise</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discuss research ethics and ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work actively to develop research along both ethical and intellectual lines</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer timely feedback that focuses on improving students’ work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receive feedback and advice seriously and thoughtfully but not blindly</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• model collaborative, equitable relationships with faculty, staff, and students, in ways that include an analysis of power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pursue collaborative, equitable relationships with faculty, staff, and students, in ways that include an analysis of power</li> </ul>

MENTORS (Continued from above)	STUDENTS (Continued from above)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make mistakes and take accountability for them, including correcting future behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make mistakes and take accountability for them, including correcting future behavior</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• model respect for scholars working in other fields, disciplines, and types of institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show respect to scholars working in other fields, disciplines, and types of institutions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• render departmental processes more transparent and accessible</li> <li>• help students anticipate and plan for degree requirements</li> <li>• offer advice from an insider's point of view but <i>not</i> mean-spirited gossip about colleagues</li> <li>• create an environment of support for student research on an individual basis</li> <li>• do not encourage or create competition or comparison between student trajectories</li> <li>• ensure that joint students are welcomed as full members of the department <i>and</i> the discipline</li> <li>• do not retaliate against students for scholarly critique or disagreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as early career scholars, embrace the opportunity to learn</li> <li>• take responsibility for seeking out meetings and setting agendas with advisors</li> </ul>

### Using these Guidelines

This set of guidelines is meant to help create an improved state of advisor/advisee accountability. It pursues this goal by offering a month-by-month timeline intended to structure monthly advising meetings. Placing each month in the context of first-year students' academic trajectory, the timeline provides a list of necessary and suggested discussion topics for each month. While acknowledging that needs vary, this timeline has been developed to increase equity across advising relationships. We hope that the detailed suggestions contained below will help all students take the reins of their advising experience and become independent scholars rooted in a strong network throughout our department.

Towards the use of that timeline, we offer the following guidelines:

*Advisee responsibilities:* It is suggested that advisees compile monthly meeting agendas based on this calendar's meeting outlines, choosing some of the suggested topics for discussion each time. Agendas should be submitted to advisors prior to meetings. Students have the responsibility of setting the agenda for each meeting, and for reaching out to meet each month, beginning in October.

*Advisor responsibilities:* Advisors should be familiar with the overall timeline, and review submitted agendas prior to each meeting. While students are expected to take initiative in organizing meetings and pursuing goals, advisors will need to reach out to students directly in August and September, the first two months of students' time at UM. Between October and May, advisors have the responsibility to respond promptly to students' scheduling requests and to meet as scheduled.

*Triad structure:* Each month, students may choose whether to meet with their faculty advisors simultaneously or individually. Some triads prefer to meet as a group each time; other students prefer individual meetings with each faculty advisor. We recommend that the May meeting occur as a triad, with the student and both faculty members present for the year's final conversation.

*Meta-timeline considerations:*

- September setting of shared expectations: During the first official meeting in September, students and advisors should collaborate to establish a set of shared expectations for the advising relationships, using the 'Developing Shared Expectations' worksheet (see attached).
- October goal setting letter: In October, students should prepare brief letters outlining their goals for the academic year and link those goals to a broader vision of academic success. These can be based on the September conversation, the milestones set forth in this calendar and in the relevant doctoral degree checklist, and students' individual needs. These goal-setting letters should be discussed and collaboratively finalized during the October meeting, after which they become the basis by which progress is assessed for the "annual review letter" at the end of the year. Students and advisors share accountability for the established goals.
- Mid-year reevaluation: The January meeting offers a midpoint to reevaluate goals and mentorship practices. Reevaluated goals may be added as addendums to the goal-setting letter, while adjusted mentorship practices may be documented in the "Developing Shared Expectations" worksheet.
- Annual review letters: Annual review letters will ideally be written collaboratively between the student and advisors in May. Annual reviews should include discussion of student progress and what concrete actions both students and advisors will take moving forward to build on that progress. The goal of this process is to ensure that students have the resources they have to succeed in a collaborative fashion, rather than a process of judgement. Finished letters may be presented during the faculty meeting slated for discussion of annual review letters. At any point in the mentorship process, either students or advisors should feel empowered to seek facilitation aid from Rackham Resolution Officers.

## First year calendar<sup>2</sup>

### August

In August, first year students are typically arriving in Ann Arbor and settling in.

#### *Department*

In early August, the department will send out emails to all incoming first year students introducing the triad advising structure and student's advisors, along with this set of guidelines. Related to this, there will be a complementary email sent to all first year advisors with this set of guidelines, and with instructions to contact their respective advisees in mid August (see following section).

The department hosts an annual "New Student Orientation" for the incoming cohort where administrative staff explain the department's funding guarantee; strategies and common practices for funding students' work past the fifth year; and what kinds of funding count as 'internal' vs. 'external.' In addition to this orientation, individual meetings between each first year student and graduate program staff will also be arranged.

Early in the semester (August or September), the West Hall Business Office sends out a uniform email to all incoming first year students providing information about first semester grant applications, including eligibility, deadlines, and links to each grant application. It also typically lists upcoming workshops or other resources that students may take advantage of in preparing their grant applications. This email should indicate that, if students choose to apply to any major national grants during their first semester, they may have to rely on the recommenders that supported their application to the department since it may be too early for U-M faculty to have developed sufficient knowledge of the student to write a compelling recommendation letter. It is expected that triad advisors will accept responsibility for reviewing their advisee's application materials, as necessary, and that one or both of the advisors will be willing to write letters of recommendation for their advisee.

#### *Initial Adviser Contact*

While more substantive meetings will take place in September and October, in August, faculty members should reach out to introduce themselves, if they haven't yet, and should set up a brief initial conversation with incoming first year advisees to occur during August. These August conversations are meant primarily as an initial introduction to establish contact and to set up September meetings. However, they also provide an opportunity to address any concerns that cannot be postponed to September. Such concerns include early grant applications,

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<sup>2</sup> Note that each month, students and faculty have distinct roles in structuring the meeting. For their part, students should use these guidelines to formulate a meeting agenda that ensures their needs are being met. Faculty, in turn, are responsible for reviewing these guidelines and the agendas student have proposed. See "Using these Guidelines" above.

especially the NSF GRFP. While these issues will be addressed in greater depth in September, this initial meeting is an opportunity to make sure all incoming students are on equal footing in terms of their introduction to advisors and questions related to September.

## September

In September, first year students are beginning classes and are learning more about the department and graduate school at Michigan. The September advising meetings this month may take a variety of forms depending on student and faculty interest, but should focus on establishing the relationship, clarifying expectations around the advising relationship, and planning the upcoming year. This will look different by subfield, and also by student. To ensure equitable advising across the cohort, however, we suggest that the following common themes should be addressed in students' September meetings with their advisors. The September advising meeting, therefore, may run longer than other months; however, we believe it is important to discuss most of the following topics soon after students arrive in the program. Note also: the brainstorming from September can inform a more explicit formulation of goals, in the October "goal-setting letter" (see following month).

### *Developing Shared Expectations*

September meetings are a time to establish shared expectations between students and advisors, as well as to discuss begin developing a shared understanding for students' programs as a whole, with particular attention to the first year. The purpose of establishing these expectations and understandings in September is to ensure that students have the necessary support and relationships required to have a meaningful and successful first year, and to demystify the process of graduate study.

Faculty and students should refer to the worksheet 'Developing Shared Expectations' for establishing the norms of the advising relationships. Although not all topics are relevant to all subfields of anthropology, this worksheet includes topics like frequency of contact between mentors and mentee; how and on what timeline students may receive feedback on their work, especially their writing, ideas about conflict resolution, and more.

### *Program Milestones*

Discussing program milestones will allow students to situate themselves in the context of their first semester and in the overall program. Past students have expressed surprise when encountering major phases of the program, like the major grant writing phase in the lead-up to fieldwork. Especially important is an "inside view" of the structure of the student's program that may not be immediately apparent in the handbook, or that is grounded in tacit knowledge. For example, in addition to explaining that students typically begin preliminary fieldwork in their first summers, it may be useful to begin the conversation about how first year students might begin thinking about developing field sites and research questions over the course of the first

year (see below for more on first year fieldwork). Or, in addition to describing how preliminary exams work in the department and in the subfields, it may be useful to have a conversation about how the intensive reading and writing in the first year provides an opportunity to lay the groundwork for more in-depth engagement in specific fields of scholarship later on. And so on.

Useful questions from the student include, “How do students in our subfield advance to candidacy, and when? How do they know they are on track to advance to candidacy on time?”

### *Initial Research Discussions*

In September, first year students may be in significantly different phases in terms of their overall research development. Most students will plan on doing preliminary fieldwork or research in their first summer. The September advising meetings are a time to begin setting up a timeline that will help guide students towards creating a research plan for the summer months. Note that this of course *does not* mean that students need to have produced a finalized plan in these first meetings. Similarly, it is important to underline that some students may be intimidated to present their research if it is in the earlier stages. For this reason, the emphasis in early conversations on student research should be grounded in the assumption that it is the responsibility of the department to help all students develop a meaningful project, that this is a scholarly process rather than a competition. (As many have observed, this particular kind of competition does not serve the discipline). So, these initial conversations should focus on thinking about a set of goals and a timeline over the academic year that will ensure students are prepared to make the most of their preliminary research over the summer. (Note: these goals can be formulated in the October “goal-letter” – see the following month’s section for more information). First year fieldwork varies widely, but some domains to draw on in thinking about goals and timelines include:

- Identifying and applying for summer funding (intradepartmental and external) • IRB applications and approval, as necessary.
- Developing research questions, identifying areas of inquiry, selecting field sites, and engaging with secondary literature.
- Establishing initial rapport and relationships in the field.
- Logistics: research plans, travel and housing contingencies, “plan B” alternatives.

### *Course Selection*

Productive conversations about course selection often consider a student's broader goals, interests, and the construction of knowledge in anthropology. If the student wishes to discuss their course selection, they may bring a list of classes to their advising meeting, where faculty can advise them on integrating these ideas a meaningful set of courses to push forward student’s broader goals or interests.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “What interests you about the syllabus for [class], and why? How does that intersect with your research interests?”

### *Grant Applications*

Shortly after arriving at Michigan, the student will need to decide whether to apply for any major predoctoral grants for which they are eligible. The faculty advisor should discuss the application process with students, and the pros and cons of applying to major predoctoral grants in their first or second year. If the student decides to apply to a major predoctoral grant in their first year, their advisor should act as an interlocutor as the student drafts and edits proposals and acquires letters of recommendations. Because students are new to the program, the advisor is expected to write one of each advisee's letters of recommendations for these major national grants. The faculty member should take the initiative in offering a letter to the student.

Useful questions from the student include, "Do you generally advise that students apply to [grant] in their first or second year? What information would help you write me a strong letter of recommendation for [grant]?"

### **October**

In October, faculty and students should finalize students' "goal-setting letters" (see below) while also checking in about students' adaptation to graduate school and the department in general, including ongoing grant applications and lines of thinking about anthropological inquiry.

#### *Goal-setting letters*

Based on the September conversation, the milestones set forth in this calendar and in the doctoral degree checklist, and students' individual needs and desires, students should prepare brief letters outlining (1) their goals for the academic year and (2) how these goals are grounded in student's own developing view of academic success and/or meaningful scholarship. These goal-setting letters should be discussed and collaboratively finalized during the October meeting, after which they become the basis by which progress is assessed for the "annual review letter" at the end of the year. Students, advisors, and the department as a whole share accountability for the established goals.

While we leave notions of academic success and/or meaningful scholarship to the students and their mentors to envision and discuss, such conversations probably will be connected to conversations about anthropological inquiry (see section below). They are, ultimately, about the needs and interests of each particular student.

However, to assist students in thinking about the year, it may be useful to establish goals for the first year in the following domains—noting though that this is by no means an exclusive list:

- Coursework for first year.
- Funding plan.
- Research plans.



- Developing relationships with other faculty, students, and so on.
- Extra-curricular intellectual involvements (seminars, talks, conferences, et cetera).
- Skill and/or language development.

### *Adjusting to Graduate Coursework*

In October, students may wish to discuss their coursework and their participation in the intellectual life of the department. Faculty advisors have the ability to provide useful support and advice to students as emerging colleagues in anthropology. For example, faculty advisors may provide collegial support by discussing recent work the student has read, or that the faculty member would recommend; by asking about student's preparation for their classes and making suggestions for how to read scholarship 'like an anthropologist'; or by discussing recent presentations or reading groups held in the department, and what the faculty advisor and student each found interesting about those events.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "What did you like most about that reading? Did you find any parts of it unclear?"

Useful questions from the student include, "When you were taking graduate coursework, what strategies did you use to prepare for your classes?"

### *Grant Writing*

Students applying to the NSF GRFP, or other grants, may wish to discuss grant writing with their advisor(s). Possible formats for this conversation can be found in the Appendix ("Writing Conversations").

### *Anthropological Inquiry*

As students adjust to the program, they and their advisors may begin to engage in conversations about core questions in anthropological research, like the styles and ethics of contemporary fieldwork, the history of the discipline and their subfield, substantive research areas related to student's interests, and so on. While these conversations may have logistical or practical dimensions, students' entry into core debates in the field provides an opportunity to begin a significant (and ideally years-long) intellectual exchange with faculty members. It may be helpful to orient these conversations around readings recommended by the advisor or selected by the student, or to begin thinking creatively about exercises that might assist students in developing their research questions, areas of focus, or theoretical approach.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "What first drew you to anthropology? How does studying anthropology, rather than studying similar questions in another discipline, influence your research?"

Useful questions from the student include, "What first drew you to anthropology? What theoretical approaches have you found most useful in your work?"

## November

In November, students are approaching the end of their first semester in their anthropology and/or joint Ph.D. program. The November advising conversation should focus on some or all of these subjects: course selection for the Winter semester; getting started on final papers or projects; grant writing; preparing for examinations; and the relationship between the student's research interests and first-semester coursework and anthropology as a four-field discipline.

### *Working on Final Papers and Projects*

If the student is taking coursework with final papers or projects, November is the month when they should begin preparing for those assignments. Faculty should advise students on how to identify good topics for final projects and on developing each initial idea into a finished product. A good advising conversation might discuss ideas for one paper in depth, or mention all of the student's papers/projects more briefly.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "What topics from [class] have interested you, and why? What more would you like to learn about that?"

### *Preparing for Final Examinations*

If the student is taking coursework with final exams, they may plan their study strategies in November. Faculty should advise students about how to prepare productively for final examinations. A good advising conversation might focus on one exam, or discuss study strategies in general.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "What study strategies have worked for you in the past? How do you think they will work for [class]?"

### *Grant Writing*

Students applying to the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship, or other grants, may wish to discuss grant writing with their advisor(s) in November. Possible formats for this conversation can be found in the Appendix ("Writing Conversations").

### *Anthropology as a Discipline*

As students near the end of their first semester, students and faculty may talk about their understanding of anthropology as a whole. Such a conversation will help the student understand their own research and coursework in the context of our discipline.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "How have your first semester classes informed your understanding of anthropology?"

Useful questions from the student include, "What is one movement from the history of anthropology that you find particularly valuable, and why?"

## December

In December, students are working on final papers and projects, and/or preparing for examinations. The December advising conversation should focus on some or all of these subjects: finalizing course selection for the upcoming semester; exam preparation; grant writing; or writing final papers and projects. If students are applying to Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship, they will be finalizing and revising their applications during this month, and may wish to discuss their work with their advisor.

### *Preparing for Final Examinations*

If the student is taking coursework with final exams, they may plan their study strategies in December. Faculty should advise students how to prepare productively for final examinations. A good advising conversation might focus on one exam, or discuss study strategies in general. Useful questions from the advisor include, “What study strategies have worked for you in the past? How do you think they will work for [class]?”

### *Grant Writing, or Writing Final Papers and Projects*

Students who are writing final papers, final projects, or applying to the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship, may wish to discuss their writing with their advisor(s). Possible formats for this conversation can be found in the Appendix (“Writing Conversations”).

## January

January marks the beginning of the students’ second semester at UM, and the end of their first. As such, it is a time for *reflection* (on what is working and what isn’t, both in graduate school broadly and in the mentoring relationship), *reevaluation* (of goals and strategies), and *planning* (for the second semester and the summer’s research to follow). January’s advising conversation should begin with reflection and reevaluation. It may then focus on one or more of the following topics: summer research plan development; summer funding; course selection. Students should be aware that many summer funding application deadlines fall in January or February.

### *Reflection and Reevaluation* (required)

What worked well last semester? What did students learn about their own work habits/interests/project/goals? What were the challenges, both broadly and in the mentoring relationship specifically? Based on a discussion of these questions, the student and advisors should revisit and discuss the “goal-setting letter” the student wrote in October. The student and advisors may also revisit some of their answers from the ‘Developing Shared Expectations’ worksheet, as well as the student’s goal-setting letter, if

desired. In pursuing these conversations, both students and professors can seek facilitation aid through the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE).

#### *Plans for summer research and funding*

Many University of Michigan internal grants for summer funding are due in February (and anticipate submitted or soon-to-be submitted IRB applications), so it is important to begin thinking about and planning for summer research now. As with the September conversations, advisors should take the initiative in offering letters of recommendation and assisting students in locating sources for second letters of recommendation as well. This is also a time to:

- Broadly discuss summer research plans. What does the student want to understand? How can big questions be reframed to fit summer projects?
- Establish a set of specific expectations for receiving help and feedback on drafts of summer funding applications.
- Discuss logistics, resources, and relevant experiences toward IRB applications. Many students will not have applied for IRB approval before, so advisors should be prepared to provide an overview of IRB application resources.

#### *Course selection*

Productive conversations about course selection often consider a student's broader goals, interests, and the construction of knowledge in anthropology. If the student wishes to discuss their course selection, they may bring a list of classes to their advising meeting, where faculty can advise them on integrating a meaningful set of courses to push forward broader goals or interests.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “What interests you about the syllabus for [class], and why? How does that intersect with your research interests?”

### **February**

If the student’s summer plans require IRB approval—for example, field research rather than summer coursework—the student and advisor must discuss the IRB process and the ethical considerations of the student’s proposed research. Otherwise, February may provide a good opportunity for students and faculty to have a deeper discussion of the student’s areas of interest and developing research, as indicated in the agenda the student sends to their advisor.

#### *IRB (if applicable)*

Many students will not have completed an IRB review before. The student and their advisor should discuss how IRB approval works in anthropology and at Michigan, and they should discuss ethical considerations of the student’s research both within and beyond the

confines of the IRB process. The faculty member should advise the student about creating an ethical research project that will pass IRB review.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “What is one ethical challenge that your research might raise, and how do you think you might navigate that?”

Useful questions from the student include, “Has your research raised any ethical challenges in the past, and if so, how did you navigate that challenge?”

#### *Writing Summer Funding Applications*

Students who are writing summer funding applications that are due in February may wish to discuss their writing with their advisor(s). Possible formats for this conversation can be found in the Appendix (“Writing Conversations”).

#### *Coursework and/or Research Check-in*

The student and faculty may choose to have a wider-ranging conversation about the student’s developing intellectual interests.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “What have you learned in your winter semester classes so far that interests you? How have your ideas about your research changed since September?”

Useful questions from the student include, “Can you tell me about how you developed your first research project when you got to graduate school, or how you developed a more recent new project?”

### **March**

In March, students should begin planning summer research in greater detail. The March advising conversation could focus on any of these topics: course selection for the coming academic year; summer funding and research, funding plans for the second year, and pedagogy and teaching.

#### *Summer Funding and Research*

Advisors and students may discuss the student’s plan for initial fieldwork. Students and faculty should consider locations for possible field research, ethnographic and other fieldwork methods, and the framing of initial research questions.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “How might the coursework you’ve undertaken so far influence your approach to your summer research?”

Useful questions from the student include, “How should I go about establishing fieldwork methods before I head to the field?”

### *Funding Plans for Second Year*

In addition to beginning discussions centered on summer research, advisors and advisees should discuss funding plans for the upcoming year, including GSI-ships, FLAS fellowships, RMF funding, and external awards. Advisors should work closely with students in helping identify courses of interest (for teaching), in addition to continuing to discuss coursework for the beginning of the second year.

### *Pedagogy and Teaching*

As students prepare to transition into teaching as a GSI, after their first-year fellowship ends, advisors could also discuss pedagogical methods and teaching skills.

Useful questions from the student include, “How did you go about teaching your first few sections as a TA? What are useful pedagogical methods for survey courses and seminars?”

## **April**

In April, students will be preparing to finish their second semester, writing final papers and/or taking exams (subfield specific). April’s advising conversation should focus on one or more of the following topics: finalizing course selection for the upcoming Fall semester; end of semester issues from papers to exams, summer research plans, and mentorship beyond the first year.

### *End of Semester: Papers, Presentations, Exams*

In April, students and advisors should discuss the student’s end-of-semester coursework and progress in the program. Advisors should discuss the student’s final papers, any preliminary or course-based exams, and the student’s plans for the following semester. If the student wishes to discuss their writing with their advisor, possible formats for this conversation can be found in the Appendix (“Writing Conversations”).

Useful questions from the advisor include, “How might your final papers aid you in moving forward with your research project?”

### *Summer Funding and Research*

Students and advisors should continue to discuss summer research plans, establishing more developed research questions and beginning logistical discussions for reaching the field and starting research. Conversations around research should begin to focus on daily life in the field, going about establishing connections with informants, and other fieldwork or laboratory methods.

Useful questions from the student include, “What surprised you most when you began your own research? What was your biggest challenge?”

### *Ongoing Mentorship and Advising Plans*

In addition to continuing to prepare for summer research, advisors and students should discuss their plans for advising going forward, including the potential of continuing to work together after the first year, developing mentoring connections with other professors, and developing an initial preliminary committee (depending on subfield). Students and advisors could consider formalizing a discussion about future advising plans.

Useful questions from the advisor include, “What sort of faculty support—logistical or theoretical—is necessary to continue your research?”

Useful questions from the student include, “How did you go about building your committee in graduate school?”

## **May**

In May, students and advisors should discuss the student’s experiences with end-of-term examinations and final papers, their summer plans, and their overall experience of Michigan after the first year. May’s conversation should focus on any of the following topics, in addition to including a summative discussion centered on the student’s first year: summer funding and research, the annual review process, final papers and exams.

### *Summer Funding and Research*

Students and advisors should now finalize the student’s plans for summer fieldwork, establishing a firm timeline, detailed research questions, and fieldwork methods. Students should discuss their plans to be in contact with their advisors during the summer—during preliminary fieldwork and otherwise—and set up plans to report back with preliminary data. Advisors and students should address areas of potential theoretical interest in advance of preparing grants in the second and third year.

Useful questions from the student include, “How did you go about beginning your fieldwork in the first few days in the field?”

Useful questions from the advisor include, “How might you structure your time in the field on a daily basis?”

### *Annual Review Process and Second-Year Review*

Annual review letters should be written collaboratively between the student and advisors, and should assess success and areas in need of work through consideration of the goals set forth at the start of the year (and adjusted in January) as recorded in the student’s “goal-setting letter.” In the light of that assessment, this is a time to readjust goals for the coming year. Letters should also include discussion of what concrete actions both students and advisors will take towards those adjusted goals. Advisors should discuss the annual review process with students, including the student’s current status within the department, their plans for their second year, and preparations for the subfield-specific second-year review. As noted above, the fundamental aim

of the annual review is to ensure students have the resources they need to develop as scholars. It should *not* be viewed as a process of judging students as succeeding or failing.

Finally, as indicated earlier, if at any point problems arise in the mentoring relationships, students should reach out to the graduate program coordinator and/or the Director of Graduate Studies for advice and potential intervention. If more support is needed, advisee or advisors may seek facilitation aid from Rackham Resolution Officers..

*“Big Picture” Summative Conversation about the First Year*

Finally, students and advisors should discuss the first year as a whole, including learning takeaways, future objectives, experiences within the program, and any possible difficulties that the student might be facing or face in the future. This “big picture” conversation should address the student’s experiences within the department, their goals (within the degree program and beyond), and next steps.



## Appendix: Writing Conversations

During their first year, students will sometimes want to discuss their written work with their advisors. We suggest the following models as a starting point for approaching these conversations; we have placed our suggestions in this appendix because students may wish to discuss their writing—for example, of grant applications or final papers—at many points during their first year, not during any single month.

### *Approaching Writing in Graduate School*

Some first-year students are not yet familiar with writing long (>5 page) papers, with anthropology's disciplinary conventions, or with grant applications. Students may request a foundational discussion about effective strategies for approaching one or more of these genres.

The advisor should discuss what makes for successful written work in the genre about which the student has asked to learn more. Advisors may describe how they approach their own work today, or they may describe how they approached similar pieces of writing in graduate school; they can also refer to papers or applications they have read and discuss the qualities that make some pieces of writing work well, or common challenges in writing in the genre the student has asked to discuss. The advisor should also describe the student's access to on-campus writing resources, including the Sweetland Writing Center and the English Language Institute. These are also opportunities to begin substantive conversations about styles and possibilities anthropological and research more broadly.

Useful questions from the advisor include, "What is some of your favorite writing you have done in the past, and what about the approach you took could apply in this context?"

Useful questions from the student include, "What qualities make writing in this genre successful? What are common pitfalls?"

### *Revising a Long Section of Draft Writing*

If the student sends their advisor a long draft of their work by a deadline the student and advisor agree upon in September—generally between one and three weeks—the advisor may use that month's advising conversation to give verbal feedback to the student on their work. The faculty member should describe at least one strength of the manuscript and highlight one area where revision would improve the student's work.

Useful questions from the student include, "How did you understand my argument?"

### *Revising a Short Section of Draft Writing*

The student may want to bring an excerpt of their writing to an advising conversation and ask their advisor to read and comment on that section during their meeting. The faculty member should describe at least one strength of the manuscript and highlight one area where revision would improve the student's work.

Useful questions from the student include, "How did you understand my argument?"