During the first semester in the Ph.D. graduate program at UW-Madison Department of Chemistry, the path chair serves as the advisor to the incoming graduate students. This relationship continues until the Ph.D. student joins a research group in mid-November, after which the PI of the research group serves as the student’s research advisor. The path chair continues to advise the students who need longer to join a research group.

The student is responsible for fulfilling the departmental and graduate school requirements for the Ph.D. degree. The research advisor shares responsibility for ensuring the fulfillment of these requirements. The research advisor’s responsibilities begin at the time of the advisor’s agreement to accept the student into their group. In addition to supervising the research, the research advisor is expected to guide the student on course selections, examinations, independent research pertinent to the student’s general development as a scientist, and any other matters affecting the student’s general progress toward a degree.

A student also gets advice and feedback from a mentoring committee (three faculty members including the research advisor), which administers the second-year TBE, gives feedback on the third-year RP, contributes to any subsequent requirements, and makes up part of the Ph.D. dissertation committee. The research advisor is not the chair of the mentoring committee. The mentoring committee chair is selected by Graduate Program staff, with guidance from the student (see below).

The faculty members on the mentoring committee are an important resource for the graduate student for scientific and professional advice and second opinions. When a student is applying for fellowships and for future employment, the student typically needs 2-3 recommendation letters; developing a mutual familiarity with the faculty on the student’s mentoring committee is a good way to build these relationships, resulting in more detailed, informed recommendations.

No later than November 1 of the fall semester of their second year, each student indicates several ranked choices of faculty on the committee preference form to be on their mentoring committee and submits this list to Graduate Program staff. Faculty from outside of the department can be on the mentoring committee (e.g. someone possessing expertise relevant to the research). Faculty not affiliated with Chemistry must be pre-approved by the research advisor. Before the spring semester of the second year, Graduate Program staff makes the mentoring committee assignments based on the student preferences with the approval of the faculty.

Students and their mentoring committee members will meet in the student’s 2nd year for the TBE (Thesis Background Exam) and in the 3rd year for the RP (Research Proposal). In the 4th year, students will meet with their mentoring committee members for the 4th Year Mentoring Committee Meeting. This important meeting is designed to provide a summary of progress and to establish a timeline for completion of work required the PhD degree. The Unified 4th Year Mentoring Committee Form should be completed by the student and the research advisor and be provided before the meeting to all mentoring committee members and to graduate program staff. The 4th year requirement includes a presentation of the student’s research to the mentoring committee (open to others, if desired), followed by a closed discussion of results and plans between the student and committee members.

Normally, the Ph.D. thesis will be completed and defended by the end of the 5th year or soon after. In the event that more time is needed, the mentoring committee will convene during the 5th and any subsequent years for a thesis planning meeting, during which the timeline and objectives for finishing the thesis will be reviewed.