

Resources for Students Experiencing Conflict

Even under the best of circumstances, conflicts during graduate school may arise. These may involve a student's faculty advisor, other graduate students, lab members, or other university community. This document aims to provide information about UCI resources available to our graduate students. First and foremost, our department and School wants our students to succeed, so we encourage you to take advantage of these resources early and often. More information is available in the [EEB Graduate Handbook](#) or the [MCRS Handbook](#).

What if I am having a conflict with my primary advisor or capstone advisor?

It is not uncommon for a student and an advisor to have conflicts. Generally, the earlier a student (or faculty member) reaches out for help to manage the situation, the better. Many conflicts arise from miscommunication, and these are easiest to work before they become too tense.

Students should always feel free to contact the department graduate advisor to privately discuss any issues about conflicts with their advisor, or anyone else. Student-advisor conflicts are more common than students usually assume, and many can be resolved or mitigated. Helping students with such issues is a main job of the graduate advisor.

Of course, there may be reasons that a student does not feel comfortable talking to the graduate advisor. Another good option is to seek support from your other committee members, if relevant. Your committee is not just there to evaluate your degree progress, but to support your progress. They have a unique inside perspective on your academic progress, so they may have some specific ideas that other faculty do not have. They also have a responsibility to make sure you are being treated fairly by your advisor; however, they cannot help to do this if you do not make them aware of the situation.

The EEB department Chair, Travis Huxman, is another good resource. Depending on the type of conflict, he may be able to offer resources that can help mitigate the conflict.

The current EEB DECADE Mentor is Nancy Aguilar-Roca (nmaguila@uci.edu). [DECADE Mentors](#) are committed to fostering an inclusive environment within UCI's graduate programs and promoting diversity within the graduate student population campuswide. They serve as a resource to graduate students and faculty alike, collaborating with Equity Advisors and UCI's Graduate Division to accomplish their program's goals.

Sometimes there are reasons that you might not want to discuss a conflict with someone in the EEB department. In this case, you are encouraged to contact our Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Craig Walsh (949-824-8487, cwalsh@uci.edu). He has oversight of all BioSci graduate programs and graduate advisors and can also work to mediate conflicts.

Less formally, an excellent resource is the Graduate Division's [Office of Wellness and Inclusion](#). In particular, the Graduate Division Counselor, Phong Luong, (pbluong@uci.edu, 949-824-0246) can offer outside support, suggest strategies for communication and conflict resolution, and point you to resources. The nice thing about this office is that they are familiar with the types of issues that arise during graduate school.

Finally, the [Office of the Ombuds](#) offers confidential, impartial, and informal dispute resolution services for all of campus (949-824-7256).

Is changing labs or capstone projects even an option?

Even if there isn't a conflict, a student's research interests may change to such an extent that the faculty advisor initially chosen is no longer appropriate. While changing advisors/projects is obviously not a trivial matter, neither is it necessarily a sign of academic vagary. Students contemplating a change to a different faculty advisor should consult with the graduate advisor or alternatively, the department chair.

What if the conflict involves sexual harassment or discrimination?

UCI does not tolerate sexual violence (dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault) and sexual harassment. UCI's [Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity](#) (OEOD) deals with issues of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. The OEOD can provide an individual who experienced such sexual violence and/or sexual harassment with supportive measures, such as changes to housing or classes, academic assistance, withdrawals and extensions, financial aid assistance, Visa assistance, safety escorts to walk with on campus, workplace accommodations, and more.

A less formal option is to consider talking with a [Sexual Harassment Prevention Advisor \(SHPA\)](#). SHPAs serve as neutral advisors (not advocates) and a resource for students, staff, and faculty with concerns related to sexual harassment, stalking, dating or domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of sexual misconduct. SHPAs possess knowledge of applicable laws, University policies. In addition to facilitating a warm hand-off to OEOD, they may assist OEOD in the implementation of Title IX-related academic, housing, and workplace accommodations. In EEB, Sarah Kimball is our SHPA (949-824-7151, skimball@uci.edu), and BioSci has additional SHPAs outside the department. In addition, you might also contact the BioSci Equity Advisor: Monica Daley, (949) 824-6654, madaley@uci.edu.

What if your worries of conflict are general? How can I report this type of issue in the department?

The EEB graduate advisor and chair are excellent options for this. In addition, the EEB graduate student representatives (grad reps) are elected by the grad students and

serve as a mechanism of graduate representation to the faculty and staff. If you have ideas or complaints about the way the department runs, problems with faculty members, or similar issues, a good place to start are the grad reps.

The EEB [ARDEI](#) council is also a good forum to bring up general concerns in the department. They have a [link](#) to submit concerns, and these can be submitted anonymously if preferred.

What are the campus resources for mental health and wellness?

The office of [Wellness, Health & Counseling Services](#) supports students during situations and crises that may be impacting their personal and academic well-being, through short-term resource referral and long-term case management. Services are available to the entire UCI community at no cost. They maintain an online collection of all campus and community resources for basic needs, medical, and local mental health and counseling providers.

What if you are worried about someone else rather than yourself?

If you are concerned for a colleague, please know that all of the resources above are also available for you in working out how to best assist someone. Wellness, Health & Counseling Services has an excellent [webpage](#) that provides resources for community members that are worried about a student and are not sure how to help them. Keep in mind that, in simple terms, UCI employees (including graduate students when disclosures are made in their capacity as employees) are required to report knowledge of discrimination, harassment, and assault (more [specifics](#) here).