

## **What can the GSC do?**

### **How the GSC works:**

The GSC will treat issues that it addresses as confidential in the sense that discussion will only take place among members of the GSC and, if appropriate, the department chair. Drawing from multiple perspectives ensures a more balanced solution and extends the support that GSC can provide a student. In cases where a greater degree of confidentiality is required, for example, because of an issue arising with a member of the GSC or department leadership, additional confidentiality can be arranged by the directors of the GSC or departmental leadership.

Graduate students may, of course, also speak with individual faculty members for purposes of advice where the level of confidentiality should be agreed upon individually. As a reminder, all faculty are mandatory reporters on Title IX issues.

### **Note on Title IX mandatory reporting:**

The GSC has limits to the anonymity it can provide. We are mandatory reporters (as are all faculty) of any violations of the University's [Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy](#). This means that if a scenario is shared that tips toward a Title IX issue (e.g., sexual harassment), the GSC member will need to report the problem to the Office for Gender Equity. To be clear, this does not mean that further action is taken. The student will always be informed when the GSC member makes a report to the Office for Gender Equity. The student (in this case) is in full control of the process. See an extended list of university resources categorized by confidentiality [here](#).

### **How to contact the GSC:**

- Directly by email (both EPS and ESE students can contact both EPS/ESE GSC members)
  - Dave Johnston (co-chair EPS): [djohnston@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:djohnston@fas.harvard.edu)
  - Rebecca Fischer: [rebeccafischer@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:rebeccafischer@fas.harvard.edu)
  - Peter Huybers: [phuybers@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:phuybers@fas.harvard.edu)
  - Kaighin McColl (co-chair EPS): [kmccoll@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:kmccoll@seas.harvard.edu)
  - Jerry Mitrovica: [jxm@eps.harvard.edu](mailto:jxm@eps.harvard.edu)
  - Robin Wordsworth (co-chair ESE): [rwordswo@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:rwordswo@seas.harvard.edu)
  - Eli Tziperman (co-chair ESE): [eli@eps.harvard.edu](mailto:eli@eps.harvard.edu)
- Through GSC office hours (informal meetings with a rotating GSC member with open agenda)
- Indirectly through Aimee Smith (Graduate Student Coordinator):  
[aimee\\_smith@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:aimee_smith@fas.harvard.edu)
  - Aimee Smith can act as a go-between for the GSC and the student in order to provide greater student anonymity. The student can email/communicate to Aimee the issue they are seeking advice on. Aimee will then facilitate communication between the student and the GSC without revealing the student's identity to the GSC. Please note that Aimee Smith is also a mandatory Title IX reporter. (See above.)

**Where can we (the GSC) help:**

- The GSC can help with any issue related to your relationship or communication with an advisor
  - Calibrate what is normal in an advisor-advisee relationship
  - Provide a sounding board for how you can communicate with your PI
  - Moderate conversations between a student and their advisor(s)
  - Speak to the PI on your behalf
  - *Tip:* In terms of timing, if you feel comfortable, please consider reaching out to us early and often to address concerns when they tend to be smaller and more manageable
  - Help you switch groups/advisors
    - *Note:* handled on a case by case scenario but helping manage this type of transition is a central role of the GSC
- Point you to resources inside and outside of the Department to ensure that you are getting the support you need to be healthy and successful
- Calibrate general academic workload/work-life balance expectations
- Discuss concerns about graduation timeline
- Give advice on course requirements/which courses are appropriate

**Typical process for how GSC handles problems:**

The list below covers some typical examples but is by no means exhaustive.

1. A student reaches out to GSC member(s) to discuss a new or reoccurring issue. We highly encourage students to reach out as early as possible (if they are comfortable) to address issues before they get worse.
2. GSC member(s) and the student start with a conversation to learn more about the situation, and the GSC rep works with the student to solve the problem. Depending on what the problem is, this may be the first and only step.
3. If more action is required, the GSC may\*:
  1. Join student in a meeting with their advisor
  2. Meet one on one with student's advisor to talk about an issue on the student's behalf
    1. Goal of conversation: communicate student's concern and put in place actionable steps to foster a safe, equitable workplace
    2. GSC member will then - with input from the student and advisor - assess whether further action needs to be taken
  3. Provide logistical support if switching research groups (e.g., help the student switch offices, get set up in a new lab, re-work timeline of classes/quals). Note:

in cases of a student switching research groups, the department provides tuition and stipend funding for the student during the first semester following the switch.

- d. Inform the department chair of the mentoring situation and group switch (see [here](#) for more details on how patterns of unsuccessful mentorship are handled)
- e. In parallel to those cases noted above, if expertise or resources outside of the scope of that which can be provided by the GSC, the GSC will help connect a student to other Harvard resources that may be more appropriate.

\*While these are some of the next steps the GSC may take, the GSC member(s) will work with the student to come up with a “best” next step. There are many situations that could arise, and the GSC will work with each student to find a next step that they are comfortable with.

#### **Other roles of the GSC:**

- Qualifying exams and thesis defense: During both your qualifying exam and defense, a GSC representative will be assigned to sit on your committee. Their role is to run the meeting and make sure standards are uniform across different disciplines in the department. This is also done to ensure equity and fair treatment during the exams.
- Town halls: The GSC will host a town hall at least once per semester, and meet with student representatives as needed, to provide a space for graduate students to voice comments/questions about department life and to provide information about changes occurring within the department or important events.
- Plan of study: The GSC approves every student’s plan of study (usually submitted at the end of G1 spring, see more details in [graduate student handbook](#)), particularly courses toward graduate requirements.
- Graduation timelines: A GSC representative will be assigned to reach out to each G5+ student at the start of fall semester to check in on graduation timeline. This is an opportunity for students to engage with the GSC member to 1) better calibrate what is a sufficient amount of work (i.e. what constitutes a PhD) and 2) voice concerns about differences of opinion with their advisors w.r.t. finishing, and all other related matters.

#### **If you are experiencing discomfort related to your identity, here are resources:**

- Resources for support: <https://eps.harvard.edu/resources-support>
- Reporting: <https://eps.harvard.edu/reporting-feedback>

#### **Other resources available to graduate students are compiled here:**

<https://sites.google.com/g.harvard.edu/epsgradresources/resources?authuser=0>

CAN HELP	CANNOT DIRECTLY HELP
Concerns about expected research workload	Title IX issues (but can serve as a liaison to appropriate support)
Communication issues in advisor-advisee relationship	Perceived issues with community culture (recommend DIB)
Concerns about course requirements and graduation timeline	Consequences for faculty with patterns of unsuccessful mentoring
Expectations for qualifying exam/graduation	
Bullying, power-based, and other forms of harassment	
Student-student conflicts	
Student conflicts with any other community members	

## FAQ

Please submit FAQs anonymously to [this form](#).

**Q:** How/when does the GSC involve a neutral, third party in their procedures?

**A:** If a situation is elevated to the level where the GSC no longer feels comfortable or adequately trained to manage a situation, the GSC member will seek outside assistance (with the consent of the student).

**Q:** What procedures should I follow if I am facing identity- or power-based harassment/discrimination?

**A:** The GSC is at your disposal as a tool to keep you safe and productive. Please use whatever resource you are most comfortable with, including members of the GSC. You can find other resources beyond the GSC [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

**Q:** What training does the GSC receive on confidentiality?

**A:** GSC members do not receive any training on confidentiality specifically directed toward their role on the GSC. There are often different training workshops across campus that many of our faculty attend. These are all “opt-in” as there is no formal requirement. That noted, we outline at the top of this document how the GSC operates and shares information.

**Q:** When (if ever) does the GSC compile an official report about student problems? Are such reports tracked in any way?

**A:** The GSC keeps a record of student exits from research groups but does not report this information to any offices outside the department. The GSC does not currently officially collect qualitative information on the nature of the student exits. Tracking over time occurs only unofficially, and situations are handled at the discretion of the department chair. (See [here](#) for more details on how patterns for unsuccessful mentorship are handled.)

**Q:** Can the GSC offer any advice for the student who is afraid going to the GSC will make their problem worse?

**A:** As with any challenging situation, the GSC can act in a number of fashions to help resolve issues, manage conflict, and help define a safe and productive working environment. This can include keeping the situation confidential if the student prefers and this is explicitly agreed upon by both parties. However, in this case, the Faculty member is acting as an informed mentor, and not capable of decision making on behalf of the GSC. That noted, and as mentioned above, Aimee can facilitate communication between a student and a GSC member without revealing the student's identity to the faculty member.

**Q:** Am I *required* to go to the GSC at any point for a workplace issue?

**A:** You are never required to contact the GSC. This is purely by choice.

**Q:** When a GSC member talks to an advisor about their student's concerns on behalf of the student, how does the conversation usually unfold?

**A:** In most cases, the advisor is either unaware or does not fully appreciate the student's concern, so the first step is for the GSC member to fully explain the concern on the student's behalf. Then, the GSC member may recommend strategies for improving advising practices and professional conduct as necessary. This is most commonly adequate to get the relationship

between the student and advisor back on track. Further action is taken/facilitated as needed if the student's concerns are not addressed by this level of intervention. A GSC member will not communicate with the relevant advisor the student's concerns unless the student expressly gives consent—unless the advisor happens to be a member of the GSC in which case the student cannot approach the GSC without the possibility that their concern will be relayed to their advisor (per the current GSC confidentiality statement). This is a situation that the GSC is currently working to clarify in order to protect the students' concerns.

**Q:** If the student is worried about potential retaliation for going to the GSC, what other resources could they turn to?

**A:** An interim FAS policy on academic retaliation is outlined [here](#). University resources external to the department can be found [here](#), and university tools for anonymous reporting options are listed [here](#).

**Q:** Can the GSC moderate in situations of intra-grad-student conflict/exclusionary behavior, or are they limited to faculty-student relations?

**A:** Yes, the GSC can moderate in situations of intra-grad-student conflict/exclusionary behavior. The GSC is employed to help in all aspects of a graduate students professional life on campus.

**Q:** What does a student advised by someone on the GSC do if they wish to seek out assistance from the GSC?

**A:** The student can approach Aimee and use her as a mechanism for confidentiality, or the student can approach a faculty mentor (outside of their research group, this could also include the department chair) and ask for a confidential conversation.

**Q:** Does the GSC promise anonymity among even its members?

**A:** No, any information shared with a GSC member in their role as a GSC member can be shared among the entire GSC. See full statement on confidentiality expectations above for full details.

**Q:** Where can a student find resources they can use if they are having workplace or interpersonal issues?

**A:** University resources external to the department can be found [here](#). Other departmental resources beyond the GSC include the graduate student coordinator (EPS: [Aimee Smith](#)), the DIB council ([anonymous form](#), [members](#)), and the department chair (EPS: [Ann Pearson](#), ESE: [Steve Wolfsy](#)/[Frank Keutsch](#)).

**Q:** How serious does the problem need to be to consider asking for help?

**A:** This is at the discretion of the student; however, involving the GSC sooner—while issues tend to be smaller—is often easier. Do not feel that you are bothering a GSC member when you have a question—this is part of our job!

**Q:** Who gets to sit on the GSC? When do members rotate? How long can an individual faculty member stay on the committee?

**A:** The GCS is chosen by the department chair, and for reasons of continuity, members tend to sit for multiple years. That said, as our faculty composition changes, so does the membership of the committee. Based on the anticipated workload of the GSC for a given period, GSC members who are on sabbatical, parental leave, or other extended absence may be replaced from the committee.

**Q:** Is the GSC the right group to petition for using a unique (e.g., history of science) course for a graduation requirement, and if so, how do I go about doing this?

**A:** Absolutely. The GSC is the body that signs off on formal requirements. We field and approve petitions all the time, and can simply be an email to the GSC chair and Aimee Smith outlining the request and justifying the substitution.

**Q:** What if the student is not happy about the GSC's suggestions/solutions?

**A:** The student can go to a different GSC member, go to a member of the staff, or go directly to the department chair. The student can also seek advice from the Office for Gender Equity, file an anonymous report through Harvard's [anonymous reporting hotline](#), or seek advice and/or file a complaint through the Harvard Graduate Student Union's [Workplace Issue Form](#), if appropriate.

**Q:** What consequences will faculty members who regularly have student complaints against them face?

**A:** Addressing the repeated nature of complaints against a faculty member or determining consequences for faculty behavior is outside the role of the GSC. See "[Steps that occur beyond the GSC in cases of unsuccessful advisor-advisee outcomes](#)" for further details on how the department can handle such situations.

**Q:** How does the GSC proceed with students who have known "problematic advisors"?

**A:** At present the GSC does not proactively engage with students based on faculty members' historical behaviors.

**Q:** Are there preemptive measures or check-ins to help students who may be in a bad situation?

**A:** Every year the GSC reaches out to every G1 and G5+ student to check in. Additionally, the co-chairs of the GSC meet with the second-year students as a group about qualifying exams, fellowships, and other milestones. Finally, a member of the GSC is present at every student's qualifying exam and thesis defense to ensure equity and fair treatment during these critical junctures in a student's PhD. The GSC member may follow up with the student if they observe behavior during the exam that concerns them.

**Q:** When (if ever) does the GSC compile an official report about student problems? Are such reports tracked in any way?

**A:** The GSC keeps a record of student exits from research groups but does not report this information to any offices outside the department. The GSC does not currently officially collect qualitative information on the nature of the student exits. See [here](#) for how the department chair and dean can handle a pattern of unsuccessful mentorship.

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