



## How to Be a Best Practice: Trends and Guidelines for Doctoral Advisors

Pimurai Limpapath

Director of Ed.D. Program in Educational Studies, Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the trend and guidelines of the role and characteristics of the best practices of doctoral advisors gained from the recommendations of the advising policies from three prestigious universities (Ball University, the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts, and the University of Pennsylvania, 2024). Thematic analysis was used to discover the categories and characteristics of doctoral advisors so as to obtain trends in the best practices of doctoral advisors.

The findings were that four categories of recommendations for the role and characteristics of the best practices of the doctoral advisors emerged: 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s); 2) Research and Academic Achievement; 3) Particular Personal Issues; and 4) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy. The recurring themes and categories helped create the trend and guidelines for the best practice of the doctoral advisors, with three categories from the most to the least as follows: 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s); 2) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy; and 3) Research and Academic Achievement.

**Keywords:** *Best Practice, Trends and Guidelines, Doctoral Advisors*

### 1. Introduction

It is believed that effective advisors can increase academic self-concept and sense of belonging, particularly among doctoral students who enroll in the university they come to for their doctoral degree (Curtin et al., 2013; Omar et al., 2016). The academic advisors' responsibility plays pivotal roles in guiding, supporting, and encouraging their doctoral students throughout their PhD journey (Baker, 2023) by providing research knowledge and skills (Ismail, et al., 2021). Thus, effective advising signifies an advisor's personal understanding of the student and their goals, and the graduate advisor-mentor can effectively help guide them in a positive direction for their academic, personal, and career success (Hoover, 2023).

Being an advisor versus being the best practice advisor is a different issue. While the phrase "Best Practice" has been diversely defined as: 1) a working method or a set of working methods that is officially accepted as being the best to use in particular business or industry, usually described formally and in detail (Dictionary Cambridge, 2024); 2) the way of running a business or providing a service that is recognized as correct or most effective (Collins, 2024); 3) a procedure that has been shown by research and experience to produce optimal results and that is established or proposed as a standard suitable for widespread adoption (Merriam-Webster, 2024); 4) a way of doing something that is seen as a very good example of how it should be done and can be copied by other companies or organizations (Oxford, 2024); 5) a procedure or set of procedures that is preferred or considered standard within an organization, industry (Dictionary. Com, 2024); 6) a unique processes or methodologies that provide outstanding performance results which can be replicated or adapted at other locations to provide similar results (LinkedIn, 2024); and 7) A procedure that has been shown by research and experience to produce optimal results and that is established or proposed as a preferred standard suitable for widespread adoption (CSRC, 2024).

Thus, with those definitions, it can be concluded that best practice, is a method or unique procedure, as a good example of experience to produce optimal results that have been recognized as the most officially effective standard suitable for widespread adoption which can be replicated or adapted at other locations to provide similar results. Putting together the doctoral advisors and best practices. The purpose of this study, thus, was to find out the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors recommended by various universities so



that the trend and categories of the best practice of doctoral advisor could be obtained. Once they become doctoral advisors, they must be able to fulfil the expectations of their student advisee(s) in both intellectual and professional growth throughout their PhD life (Yale, 2024). One best way to clarify those expectations is to investigate the recommendations for graduate advisors offered by prestigious universities that carefully proposed the guidelines for helping their doctoral advisors to be best practices in advising their students. Among several universities, three prestigious universities were found in terms of precise advising policy and clear guidelines geared for the best practice in doctoral student advising (Ball University, 2024; The Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts, 2024; University of Pennsylvania, 2024).

## 2. Objectives

The Purpose of the Study;

Hence, this study was conducted to find out the trends and guidelines of the role and characteristics of the best practices of doctoral advisors gained from the recommendations of advising policies from different universities. With the expectation that those trends and guidelines of the recommendations for the best practice in advising doctoral advisors could be used as a primary source in furthering research and/or applying to the realm of the best practice in advising at the doctoral level.

## 3. Materials and Methods

The method used in this study was thematic analysis. Recurring themes of the role and characteristics of the doctoral advisors were analyzed, summarized, categorized, and named, respectively. After all the recurring themes were categorized and put together, the trend and guidelines for recommendations for the best practices in advising doctoral advisors became the trend.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Data Analysis

Analysis of the Trends and Guidelines for Recommendations for the Best Practice in Advising Doctoral Advisors

After analyzing the recurring themes, the statements with similar content, were put together, and categorized into the same category and then named after those shared characteristics. As such, four categories of recommendations for the role and characteristics of the best practices of the doctoral advisors were:

- 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s);
- 2) Research and Academic Achievement;
- 3) Particular Personal Issues; and
- 4) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy.

The following tables included and illustrated the results of the analysis of the recurring themes and categories of the recommendations that represented the role and characteristics of doctoral advising.

Table 1 deals with the recommendations regarding the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors from Ball State University. Among six items of recommendations, it appeared that:

- Items 1 and 2 represented Research and Academic Achievement;
- Items 3, 4, and 5 represented Advising Doctoral Advisee(s); and
- Item 6 represented Rules and Regulations Involving Policy

Table 1: The Recommendations of Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors: Ball State University



| Number | Recommendations of the Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors                      |
|--------|---|
| 1      | Help students to develop proper designs, objectives, and methodologies.                   |
| 2      | Being attentive in reviewing all research materials at any phase before formal submission |
| 3      | Advise in a continuous and ongoing manner.  |
| 4      | Be responsible for student graduation.  |
| 5      | Be available to doctoral advisees.  |
| 6      | Have the excellent level of expertise needed to supervise                                 |

Table 2 shows the recommendations for the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors from the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Among nine items, it appeared that:

Items 1, 2, 3, and 6 represented Advising Doctoral Advisee(s);

Item 7 represented Personal Issues and

Items 4, 5, 8 and 9 represented Rules and Regulations Involving Policy

Table 2: The Recommendations of Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors: The Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

| Number | Recommendations of the Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors  |
|--------|---|
| 1      | Create a respectful and inclusive environment.  |
| 2      | Communicate expectations with the advisee(s)  |
| 3      | Effectively communicate and engage with committee members, directors of graduate studies, or other staff members. |
| 4      | Encourage professional development as it reflects the advancement of the curriculum.                              |
| 5      | Foster the well-being of both the advisor and the advisee(s)  |
| 6      | Guide and inspire students to reach their scholarly potential.  |
| 7      | Keep well, physically and mentally.   |
| 8      | Let students get familiar with their broader department or program community.                                     |
| 9      | Familiarize with various offices and resources, especially Graduate School  |

Table 3 represented the recommendations of the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors from University of Pennsylvania. Among 25 items, it appeared that:

Items 6, 7, 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 24 represented Advising Doctoral Advisee(s);

Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 16 represented Research and Academic Achievement;

Items 22 represented Particular Personal Issues and

Items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 23, 25 Rules and Regulations Involving Policy.

Table 3: The Recommendations of Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors: University of Pennsylvania.

| Number | Recommendations of the Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors                        |
|--------|---|
| 1      | Provide conditions conducive to a student's research and intellectual growth.               |
| 2      | Give appropriate guidance on the progress of the research and the standards expected.       |
| 3      | Maintain the advisee(s) in the selection and planning of an original research topic.        |
| 4      | Guide the advisee(s) so that they can successfully complete within the expected time frame. |



| Number | Recommendations of the Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors   |
|--------|--|
| 5      | Establish a realistic timetable for the advisee(s)'s completion of various phases of the program.  |
| 6      | Be accessible to give advice and provide feedback with a realistic timetable of the advisee(s)   |
| 7      | Be professional and constructive and provide concrete advice for improvement.  |
| 8      | Ensure adequate knowledge of the relevant theories and methodological and technical skills necessary for the research.   |
| 9      | Provide feedback through an ethical review process where applicable.   |
| 10     | Establish a dissertation committee at an appropriate time and stage.   |
| 11     | Encourage participation in graduate group seminars and colloquia.  |
| 12     | Advise on matters of career options, strategies for launching a career in research and/or referring students to relevant career and professional development   |
| 13     | Ensure that advisee(s) adhere to responsible conduct of research standards for their field.  |
| 14     | Advise the advisee(s) for additional funding as needed.  |
| 15     | Avoid personal or business relationships that may cause a conflict of interest.  |
| 16     | Advise students to attend and/or present work at local, national, or international conferences and to publish their work in appropriate journals.  |
| 17     | Be aware and sensitive to the academic needs and concerns of international students, students from underrepresented groups, students with disabilities, and/or students with family responsibilities |
| 18     | Ensure the research environment that is safe, unbiased, and free from harassment and discrimination.   |
| 19     | Be ready to advise on-site and online, when necessary, to return to academic good standing.  |
| 20     | Serve as an advocate for the student.  |
| 21     | Establish an effective communication system (i.e., mailboxes and/or e-mail lists) and workspace, where possible.   |
| 22     | Provide orientation sessions for both new and continuing students.   |
| 23     | Recognize that success in academic work is contingent upon students' mental and physical health.   |
| 24     | Promote free inquiry and free exchange of ideas while abiding by policies on confidentiality of research.  |
| 25     | Informing students of their responsibility to comply with all University policies, including those pertaining to   |

According to the findings above, it can be seen that four categories of recurring themes emerged from the statements of the roles and characteristics of doctoral advisors provided by Ball State University, The Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the University of Pennsylvania were found: 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s); 2) Research and Academic Achievement; 3) Particular Personal Issues; and 4) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy. Next, the results of the analysis of the recurring themes and categories were rated from the most to the least.

Table 4 presents, the frequencies among the three universities, from the most to the least of the recurring themes and categories of the recommendations of the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors:

Ball State University: with three categories

1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s) = 3 items;

[89]



- 2) Research and Academic Achievement = 2 items;  
 3) and Rules and Regulations Involving Policy = 1 item  
 The Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences has 3 categories

- 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s) = 4 items;  
 2) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy = 4 items; and  
 3) Particular Personal Issues = 1 item; and

University of Pennsylvania: with four categories

- 1) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy = 9 items;  
 2) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s) = 8 items;  
 3) Research and Academic Achievement = 7; and  
 4) Particular Personal Issues = 1 items; and

Lastly, among the 40 items of recommendations of the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors, from the most to the least, the recurring themes and categories were presented:

- 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s) = 15 items;  
 2) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy = 14 items  
 3) Research and Academic Achievement = 9; and  
 4) Particular Personal Issues = 2

**Table 4:** The Most to the Least of the recurring themes and Categories of the Recommendations of the Role and Characteristics of Doctoral Advisors from all Three Universities

| Universities  | Advising<br>Doctoral<br>Advisee(s) | Research and<br>Academic<br>Achievement | Particular<br>Personal<br>Issues | Rules and<br>Regulations<br>Involving<br>Policy | Total |
|---|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|-------|
| Ball State<br>University  | 3                                  | 2                                       | -                                | 1   | 6     |
| The Harvard<br>Kenneth C.<br>Griffin Graduate<br>School of Arts<br>and Sciences | 4                                  | -                                       | 1                                | 4   | 9     |
| University of<br>Pennsylvania   | 8                                  | 7                                       | 1                                | 9   | 25    |
| Total   | 15                                 | 9                                       | 2                                | 14  | 40    |

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out and obtain the trend and guidelines of the role and characteristics of how to be the best practice in advising doctoral advisees so that it can be used as preliminary information in further research and/or applied to practice for effective doctoral advising. The reveal of the results of the study illustrated the trend and guidelines of the overall recommendations of the role and characteristics of doctoral advisors offered by all three universities, from the most to the least, of the recurring themes and categories. Accordingly, the category of Particular Personal Issues was dropped because of the very least number among the four categories. That the trend and guidelines of the recommendations of the role and characteristics of the best practice of the doctoral advisors, finally made up of three categories: 1) Advising Doctoral Advisee(s); 2) Rules and Regulations Involving Policy; and 3) Research and Academic Achievement, respectively.

[90]



The following is a discussion and explanation of the trend and guidelines of the role and characteristics of the best practice of doctoral advisors from other perspectives in the field of doctoral advising. First, it can be concluded that the trend of the best practice of the doctoral advisors, proposed by the top universities (in this case, all in the US), mostly emphasizes the responsibilities and duties of advising at hand along with the robust graduate school and university standard and policy which included knowledge, skills and expertise of the advisors in leading their doctoral advisees into intellectual growth, excellent research, and academic achievement, while less emphasis on personal matter and style.

Second, while the Advising Doctoral Advisee(s) category turned out to be the most salient and trendy, it is endorsed by several other doctoral advising policies that the main priority of the doctoral advisors was their responsibilities at hands as to provide guidance and direction to their doctoral advisee(s). Advising research with evaluation of progress as well as being a mentor and a role model for the student to become an academic researcher is viewed as more important (Stanford University Graduate Advise Policy, 2024). In a similar fashion, the University of Arizona (2024) confirmed that in being the best practice doctoral academic advisor, one must be able to ensure and realize the educational and career options of their students. Additionally, the Graduate School at Princeton University (2024) advocated the notions of advising the advisees with knowledge, skills, and experience for satisfactory progress on doctoral research and completion of the dissertation. That, the advisor's feedback through the dedicated meetings with their advisee(s) are expected.

Other than expected outstanding advising, it appeared that Rules and Regulations Involving Policy were closely related to Research and Academic Achievement in terms of the best practice in developing the advisee's success. This is because at the level of a Doctorate Degree, the same rules apply, especially for graduation. As the Graduate School of Massachusetts Institute of Technology suggested that the doctoral advisors must support and guide their advisee(s) to get familiar with all of the academic units to ensure their access to all degree requirements and procedures involving their academic deadlines, time limits for taking the degrees, departmental procedures for general and/or qualifying exams, guidelines for resolving concerns or conflicts within the department, or any individuals in charge of consultation regarding problems concerns (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). Similarly, at Yale University (2024), in terms of the best practice in research and achievement coupled with the Graduate School Policy, it is partly stated in their "Best Practices and Materials" that the doctoral advisers should understand and be up-to-date on the academic and nonacademic policies, including their advisees' responsibility to comply with all University policies pertaining to all important issues such as Guidance on Authorship in Scholarly or Scientific Publications, and Academic Integrity, to name a few. In addition, the advisees should be prepared and get some advice for their future employment, contributions to research presented at conferences, professional publications, professional meetings and, displaying their work in public settings, and finally, publish the results of their research and get or maintain their good jobs.

Lastly, the results revealed in this study are expected to be the encouragement in developing the best practice for doctoral advisors in the realm of doctoral advising.

## 6. Acknowledgements

This study has obviously met its main purpose of uncovering and obtaining the trend and guidelines of the role and characteristics of how to be the best practice in advising doctoral advisees as to be the preliminary information in furthering the research and/or applying into practice for effective doctoral advising. While the results found here were limited to some top universities in the US, future research should be performed and employed to pass more universities in other areas of the world. Moreover, the four categories of best practice in doctoral advising can be put to the test with quantitative and/or qualitative methods.

## 7. References (up to 30 references)

Baker, K., (2023). *What's a PhD Advisor?*. <https://www.uwslondon.ac.uk/phd/whats-a-phd-advisor/>  
Ball University, (2024). <https://www.bsu.edu/academics/advising>

[91]



- Collins, (2024). <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/best-practice>
- CSRC, (2024). [https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/best\\_practice](https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/best_practice)
- Curtin, N., Stewart, A. J., & Ostrove, J. M. (2013). Fostering academic self-concept: Advisor support and sense of belonging among international and domestic graduate students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(1), 108–137. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212446662>
- Dictionary.Com, (2024). <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/best-practice>
- DictionaryCambridge, (2024). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/best-practice>
- Hoover, K.B. & Lucas, K.T. (2023). Mentoring graduate students: A study on academic rejection, the pressure to publish, and career paths. *Journal of Criminal Justice education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2023.21737922>
- Ismail, A., Roslan, L., Balqis, Ismail, H., Azlina, & H., Salleh, M. Students' Satisfaction towards Academic Advising Service. *Asian Journal of University Education* 17(3):291  
DOI:10.24191/ajue.v17i3.14497 2021
- LinkedIn, (2024). <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-best-practice-behram-farooqh>
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, (2024). <https://oge.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Best-Practices-B.pdf>
- Merriam-webster, (2024). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/best%20practice>
- Omar, F., Mahone, J. P., Ngobia, J., & FitzSimons, J. (2016). Building rapport between international graduate students and their faculty advisors: Crosscultural mentoring relationships at the University of Guelph. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 7(2), 1–17.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2016.2.8>
- Oxford, (2024). [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/best-practice](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/best-practice)
- Princeton University, (2024). <https://gradmentoringandadvising.princeton.edu/resources-faculty/b-best-practices-and-materials> Graduate Mentoring and Advising
- Princeton University, (2024). <https://gradschool.princeton.edu/policies/frequency-advising-meetings-phd-students>
- Rice, K. G., Choi, C.-C., Zhang, Y., Villegas, J., Ye, H. J., Anderson, D., Nestic, A., & Bigler, M. (2009). International student perspectives on graduate advising relationships. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(3), 376–391. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015905>
- Srichandum, S. & Rujirayanyong, T. (2010). Production scheduling for dispatching ready mixed concrete trucks using bee colony optimization. *American Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences*, 3(1), 823-830.
- Stanford University, (2024). (<https://gap.stanford.edu/>)
- University of Arizona, (2024). <https://advising.arizona.edu/policies-procedures/advising-roles-responsibilities>
- University of Pennsylvania, (2024) <https://catalog.upenn.edu/graduate/academic-resources/advising-mentoring/expectations-responsibilities/>
- Yale University, (2024).  
[https://earth.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Academics/EPS\\_advising\\_guidelines.pdf](https://earth.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Academics/EPS_advising_guidelines.pdf)