

Some Guidelines for PhD students working with Professor Kevin J. Krizek

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Active Communities / Transportation
Research Group

In search of a standard template?

You are entering our PhD program. Congratulations! Your intellectual journey will be shaped, informed, and excited by several individuals—primary among them is the faculty member you agree will serve as your PhD advisor. The PhD student / PhD advisor relationship is an interesting one. There are no formal rules, guidelines or other signposts to follow. There are nothing but relatively ambiguous expectations usually defined by tradition, informal observations or personalities.

In an effort to explicate some expectations of PhD students who I advise, I offer the below guidelines. They are intended to serve several purposes including, but not limited to: helping to set expectations and knowing how to get the most from me. Following these guidelines means we spend more of our time together making your work of a higher quality. Your work will also, hopefully, progress more smoothly and quickly.

Setting the stage (some overarching considerations)

- There is nothing better (or more rewarding) than a PhD advisor being excited and impressed by the work and research that a student is performing. This is our endeavor.
- In this light, I believe that an exemplary PhD student is one who drags their advisor (and committee for that matter) kicking and screaming in their wake.
- I view my job in working together as one to help steer and guide the ship—to ensure quality control—and help to effectively distribute the fruits of our labor to those who best need it. The power and motivation needs to come from you.
- Graduate school is tough. It should be it is not a walk in the park. I expect you to work on average 40 or so hours / week advancing your studies. Sure, there are breaks and lulls here and there; but this should be considered a full-time job and not a side endeavor aimed to gain increased credibility.

Working together

- Pedagogically speaking, I find it extremely effective to run research projects, ideas, ambitions through a relatively smaller group of similarly minded individuals. I refer to such as the “Active Communities / Transportation (ACT) Research Group which consists of other PhD students, graduate students, and faculty who are interested in related topics.
- The research group (ACT) meets, on average, twice a month to discuss different ideas and set deadlines. I expect my students to participate in this group, help lead it (e.g., by helping set the agenda, distributing minutes) and being sure to present a topic, issue, or research finding every third or so meeting.
- I expect you to be making visible progress through the program each semester. Visible progress would usually be demonstrated by completing two or so milestones or hurdles each semester. These may include: completing your preliminary review or comprehensive exams, taking a full load of coursework, submitting a paper to a journal, working to refine a breakthrough in the conceptualization or execution of some analysis, or presenting at a highly regarded conference.
- In terms of interaction, I am happy to set up a schedule of meetings, preferably during office hours. Though, if we see each other at ACT meetings twice per month and in other venues, this usually suffices. If I don’t see you over the course of 3 or so months, something is not quite working the way it should be, right?
- I strongly believe that powerful things happen when thoughts are transferred into written word. Sure, we can discuss various ideas, but more concrete progress is made when we can both look at a hard copy of progress and edit such.
- I am pretty responsive on email when it comes to quick responses. FYI emails are welcome. If you have a question, please be clear in what you are asking. For issues requiring more thorough feedback, I react best to hard copies and prefer to mark up (rather than using track changes).

Things to be aware of:

- Please be aware of my repertoire; my past experience invariably affects the advice I can offer. Please be conversant with the bulk of my publications—all/most of which are available on my website. (You certainly do not need to know all the variables in all of the models, but the general flavor or key articles would be helpful).

- Based on a quick read of my publications, get a flavor for my approach toward things (e.g., methods, approaches, literature). Tap into that knowledge when appropriate. Going outside of my expertise is fine and sometimes expected, but we need to be aware, that leads to a different type of conversation.
- Other considerations that will help us make better progress, quicker:
 - Know about information that is easily available on the Internet prior to meetings. It is best to come to meetings asking for clarification or points to emphasize rather than where to look for information.
 - Don't expect me to repeat things or remind you of things.
 - If I suggest that you read something, THEN READ IT, prior to meeting again. Better yet, incorporate it into future discussions and/or writings.
 - It is always best to prepare a plan of attack and then ask for feedback, rather than waiting for me to give you direction.
 - Please do your best to honor deadlines and priorities we put forth.
 - Do supplemental reading if you think it will help you. This is often expected.

How to do all of this

- Please do not isolate yourself. Increased presence at social functions, retreats, representation on various student committees, is important.
- Please be a self-starter; please do not rely on me to trigger various courses of action.
- Always strive to “put your name out there”—to other faculty within our Program, our university as well as other faculty at other programs—and aim to impress them. At the end of the day, assuming that you are endeavoring to locate employment in academia or other, reference letters are extremely important. As an example, if you were a hiring authority, what would be your reaction to excerpts drawn from the following two different reference letters:

“During her PhD studies, Laurie did what was necessary to satisfy all phases of the program. When she could fit it into her schedule, she was able to do what was asked of her. Laurie was receptive to continued suggestions to strengthen her work—always a good condition for PhD students; she was, however, a bit reluctant to seek out opportunities to continually strengthen her work. The research she did was solid, but sometimes lacked the level of detail that is often necessary. She is a good soldier, but often sought out the path of least resistance during her educational program.”

...versus...

“Diane was undoubtedly one of the top PhD students I have advised in my 25 plus career in academia. Her presence was always upbeat, eager to learn, and always willing to go the extra mile. Completing our research project together in preparation for her dissertation work was one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. Her tenacity, ability to always find a way to get things completed (no matter what logs are rolled in front of her), and attention to detail are undoubtedly going to be tremendous assets on her ascent to becoming one of the most sought after scholars in our research area. Your department would be exceptionally fortunate to have Diane as a colleague.”

- Please set up a schedule for yourself and stick to it. For example, unless exceptional circumstances arise, I expect my PhD advisees to complete their preliminary review at the end of the first year and comprehensive exams (almost definitely) prior to Thanksgiving in their third year. Depending on the complexity and data availability for your dissertation (as well as other things), a total timeline to completion of 4 to five years sounds about right.
- I am happy to help you make contacts, help reel in other committee members and the sort. However, it is your responsibility to track down other committee members, solicit their feedback, and ensure they know they are on your committee and where to be when.

Other

- If we are co-authoring a paper, please refer to the guidelines available on my website for this.
- If you are seeking a reference letter, please refer to the guidelines available on my website for this.
- In terms of gleaning insights other aspects of progressing through a Planning PhD, please take advantage of available blogs, namely:
 - <http://www.planetizen.com/blog/10386> and other related ones, and
 - <http://blogs.usc.edu/sppd/krieger/>