

Stephenson School of Biomedical Engineering (SBME) PhD Student Advisor Pairing Policy

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This policy applies to the pairing of PhD students with eligible advisors. “Eligible advisor” is defined as a member of the BME graduate faculty whose privileges include chairing PhD committees.

A. General

- A.1. PhD student pairing is coordinated by the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC).
- A.2. The Pairing Form is required to document all student/faculty pairings. The signature of the Director is required to certify completed Pairing Forms.
- A.3. Each PhD student must pair with an eligible advisor. Students and prospective advisors shall follow the pairing process described below in Sections B and C.

B. Regular Pairing

- B.1. A rotation program is required for Regular Pairing. Admitted PhD students are required to rotate with at least three research labs led by an eligible advisor. A qualifying rotation must include documented interaction with the eligible advisor. Further interaction with laboratory team members, to pursue mutual interests, is strongly encouraged. These interactions must be documented on the Rotation Form. During rotations, PhD students can refer questions to the GSC.
- B.2. The Rotation Form must be completed and sent to the Graduate Program Coordinator at least 1 week prior to the Pairing Meeting.
- B.3. Stipends for Regular Pairing students for the fall semester before the Pairing Meeting will be covered by SBME.
- B.4. The Pairing Meeting is held ~ 6 weeks into the fall semester, subject to change based on available funding, as determined by the Director. The date of this meeting and the names of admitted PhD students that have not been Directly Paired shall be announced to the BME graduate faculty prior to the beginning of the fall semester.
- B.5. The GSC Chair coordinates the Pairing Meeting, which is attended by BME graduate faculty, the Director, and the Graduate Program Coordinator. At the conclusion of the meeting, the GSC Chair makes a recommendation for final student advisor/advisee pairing. The Director is responsible for approving the final pairing decisions.
- B.6. The Graduate Program Coordinator completes the Pairing Form with the signature from the advisor and then sends it to the student for signature no later than 1 week following the Pairing Meeting.
- B.7. If a student is employed by an eligible advisor at any time prior to August 16, the SBME Office must communicate to both the student and the advisor in writing (by letter or email) that the student must

follow the Regular Pairing process, and that while the student's choice of advisor is taken into account, pairing with their first choice of advisor is not guaranteed.

- B.8. A student who does not successfully pair with a faculty advisor at the Pairing Meeting will be asked to perform GA duties for the remainder of the first semester and may be asked to perform TA duties during the second semester if needed, at the discretion of the GSC chair and Director. The student will be expected to complete additional rotations, with the expectation of pairing no later than the end of their first academic year. If the student does not pair with a faculty member by the end of the first academic year, they must implement alternative plans in consultation with the GSC. Alternative plans include transferring to another program at OU, exiting PhD studies by completing a Master's degree (if a Master thesis advisor can be determined for the student), or termination of the PhD study with the department and/or University, in accordance with Graduate College policies and procedures.

C. Direct Pairing

- C.1. Direct Pairing allows eligible advisors to directly pair with an admitted PhD graduate student without the 3 required lab rotations in Regular Pairing.

A pairing arrangement is 'direct' only if it occurs after the offer of admission and the pairing is a condition of the student's acceptance of admission to the SBME PhD program.

- C.2. Direct Pairing happens only with mutual agreement between the eligible advisor and the student.
- C.3. The Direct Pairing request, along with the GAC review, will be evaluated by the GSC chair. Based on this request and review, the GSC chair may recommend Direct Pairing. In this case the GSC Chair must formally recommend the direct pairing to the Director.
- C.4. If approved by the Director, the Pairing Form will be sent to the student. After the student signs the form, the form will be signed by the eligible advisor, followed by the Director's signature, with a note of "Direct Pairing". The completed form will be added to the student's academic file by the Graduate Program Coordinator.
- C.5. Direct Pairing students are eligible for competitive graduate fellowships and SBME recruitment activities, consistent with their respective selection policies, as funding permits.

D. Unpairing

- D.1. The Pairing Form is required to document the unpairing of the student and faculty. The signature of the Director is required on the Pairing Form, with a note of "Unpairing." The student must unpair prior to formal selection of a new advisor.
- D.2. If an unpairing inquiry is initiated by the student with the GSC Chair and/or the Director, the advisable action is for the GSC Chair and/or Director to consult with the Graduate College.
- D.3. If an unpairing inquiry is initiated by the faculty advisor with the GSC Chair and/or the Director, one of the following two guidelines shall be followed:
- a. If the inquiry is unrelated to student performance (e.g., faculty advisor facing financial challenges, losing graduate faculty status, or leaving the university), the GSC Chair and/or Director shall consult with both the GCoE Dean's Office and the Graduate College.

- b. If the inquiry is related to unsatisfactory student performance, the faculty advisor must document unsatisfactory progress through progress reports and other written communications (such as emails, texts, and letters). The student must be given the opportunity to take corrective action. Additionally, the faculty advisor must consult the GSC Chair, the student's PhD Committee, the Director, and the Graduate College during this process.