ECE Graduate Program Conflict Management Guideline

1. What is this Guideline?

This document outlines how mentees (ECEGP graduate students and post-docs) and mentors (faculty PIs) can recognize, address, seek help with, and solve conflicts either internally within ECEGP or with external resources such as College of Engineering (COE), Graduate Studies (GS), and the Ombuds office etc. It addresses minor communication conflicts and provides guidance and resources for formal conflicts such as sexual harassment.

2. General Mentoring Resources

Graduate Studies offers a range of mentor resources, tools, professional development, and support that is helpful for both graduate students and faculty. We highly recommend you review and use the resources compiled by Graduate Studies:

[UC Davis Graduate Council Mentoring Guidelines](#)

[Graduate Studies Mentor Resources](#)

[Graduate Studies Mentee Resources](#)

3. Steps to Reduce Risks of Conflicts

Conflict is a natural aspect of human interaction, but there are steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of conflicts from happening.

3.1 Set Up Expectations and Provide Timely Feedback

By setting up expectations and communicating clearly with mentees about these expectations could significantly reduce the risk of misunderstanding and conflict. It is also important to provide timely feedback to mentees. In ECEGP, mentors will

1) For each academic quarter, clearly articulate and communicate the quarterly academic expectation by [EEC299 form](#).

2) For each quarter, if a faculty hires a student as GSR, clearly articulates the expectations and duties in the GSR contract.

3) For each academic year, provide detailed feedback via [Student Progress Assessment (SPA)](#).

3.2 Communicate Frequently and Address Issues Early

Be proactive and remember that every Mentor/Mentee relationship can be very different. Many conflicts stem from miscommunication. ECEGP encourages students and faculty to start their mentorship relationship with an intentional conversation about communication style, preferences, and expectations. Faculty members are encouraged to initiate the conversation about communication style, preferences, and expectations as a part of the onboarding of students into their groups. Address the issue early. Misunderstandings or misalignment of expectations can be minor at first, and grow into larger issues if left unaddressed.

4. Potential Conflicts

Conflict between mentors and mentees can happen at any time. Signs of conflict are unique to each person and mentor-mentee relationship. Generally speaking, if communication is poor, unproductive, or difficult to arrange, and/or one party is consistently feeling isolated, unhappy, ignored, or taken advantage of by the other, there is some sort of conflict present. It is not uncommon for one party to perceive a conflict and the other to not consider the situation a conflict. Examples of conflicts and signs (not a complete list):

Communication problem:
○ Avoidance - not responding to emails, not meeting, not communicating
○ Different, unmet, or inconsistent expectations
○ Issues with delivering or receiving feedback
○ Distrust

Well-being:
○ Financial issues
○ Stress/anxiety
○ Health-related issues
○ Family or care-taking responsibilities
○ Work/life balance issues
○ Resources available through [Aggie Compass Basic Needs Center](#)

Work and learning environment:
○ Bullying or abusive behavior
○ Distrust
○ Clashing work styles

Sexual harassment or discrimination:
○ [Discrimination](#)
○ [Hate and Bias](#)
○ [Sexual Harassment](#)
○ [Sexual Violence](#)
○ [Other Prohibited Behavior](#)

5. What to Do When Conflict Arises?

There is no one size fits all solution for addressing conflicts. Each conflict is different in nature. It is important to know that you can seek support and know where to seek support. The aim of this resource guide is to help our students understand the people they can talk to and resources they can use when conflict arises. Below, we outline a typical progression of elevating the conflict management to various levels. If you first contact the graduate program coordinator, the coordinator may refer you to the most appropriate person in the program or the campus. Typically, graduate faculty advisor (for PhD students) or MS program director (for MS students) are the main person in charge of conflict resolution in the program. **However, please note that the student has the right to decide who they feel comfortable talking to, and may choose to escalate their concerns with the department and other campus resources at their discretion**.

The following diagram illustrates a typical decision tree.
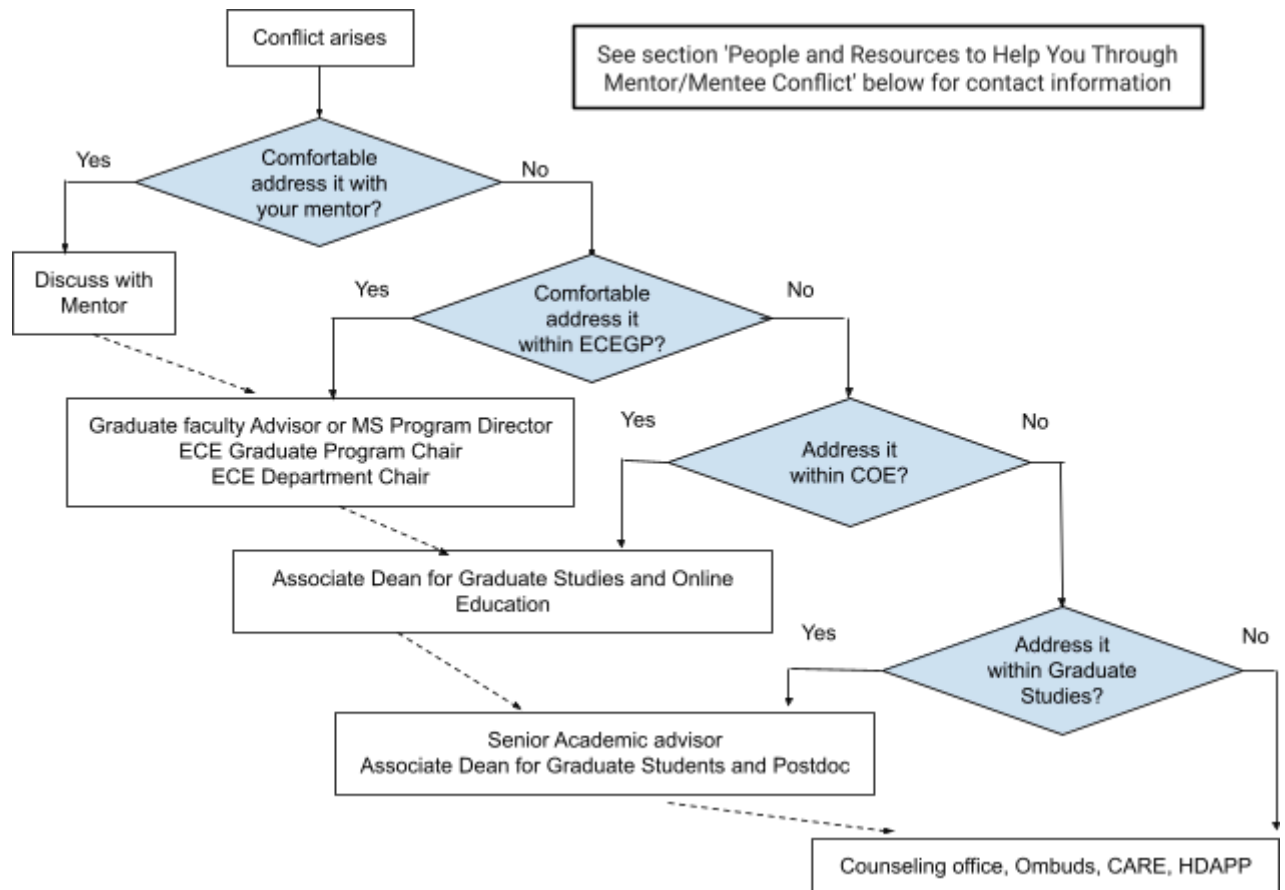
1) **Resolve the issue with mentor**: Address the issue early and communicate with mentor: Misunderstandings or misalignment of expectations can be minor at first, and grow into larger issues if left unaddressed. If you feel comfortable, we highly encourage open and honest dialogue between the mentee and the mentor.
2) **Seek support from the department**: Depending on individual concerns and comfort level, students may want to seek additional support from the department. We encourage students to utilize the people in the Electrical and Engineering Department as their first step in finding support.
3) **Seek support from College of Engineering**: There may be cases students are not comfortable in addressing the issue within ECEGP. In these cases, students may seek support from the College of Engineering.
4) **Seek support from Graduate Studies**: There may be cases students are not comfortable in addressing the issue within the College of Engineering. In these cases, students can seek support from Graduate Studies.
5) **Seek support from additional campus offices**: For issues that are very serious (such as sexual harassment, racial discriminations etc), mentee may seek support from additional campus offices such as Ombuds, student health and conselling services, CARE, which are confidential resources, and HDAPP, which is not confidential and requires mandatory resolution.

People and Resources to Help You Through Mentor/Mentee Conflict

Electrical and Computer Engineering Department (See [Directory](#) for most updated contact information**)**

- **Graduate Program Coordinator**: Michelle Walker (mtwalker@ucdavis.edu)
- **Graduate Program Chair**: Lifeng Lai (lflai@ucdavis.edu)
- **Graduate Faculty Advisor**: Weijian Yang (wejyang@ucdavis.edu)
- **Master Program Director**: Juan Sebastian Gomez-Diaz (jsgomez@ucdavis.edu)
- **Your dissertation committee**
- **Department Chair**: Andre Knoesen (ecechair@ucdavis.edu)

College of Engineering (See [Directory](#) for most updated contact information**)**

- **Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Online Education**:
Chris Cappa (cdcappa@ucdavis.edu)

Graduate Studies (See [Directory](#) for most updated contact information)

- **Senior Academic Advisor for Electrical and Computer Engineering**:
Samantha Duesdieker (samdues@ucdavis.edu)
- **Director of Advising and Mentoring**: Elizabeth Sturdy (ejsturdy@ucdavis.edu)
- **Associate Dean for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars**:
Ellen Hartigan‑O'Connor (eoconnor@ucdavis.edu)

Additional Campus Resources:
- [Counseling Services](#)
- [Ombuds Office](#)
- [Center for Advocacy Resources and Education (CARE)](#)
- [Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP)](#)
- [The Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Resource Center (LGBTQIA+ Resource Center)](#)
- [The Women's Resources and Research Center (WRRC)](#)
- [Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs - Student Rights and Grievances](#)

6. Confidentiality

Please note that there are some offices on campus that are confidential, and other offices/people who are mandated to report claims brought to them and/or take action regarding certain claims and transgressions. There are different individuals on campus who are deemed "Responsible Employees". Any university employee who is not a confidential resource is a responsible employee. Responsible employees are required to report certain concerns to HDAPP, including but not limited to:

1) All employees must promptly forward student reports of concerns of **discrimination or harassment** to [Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP)](#).
2) Responsible employees are required to notify HDAPP of **any potential violation of the [University's Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (SVSH) Policy](#)**.

More information about responsible employee:

https://hdapp.ucdavis.edu/responsible-employee

[Click here for a printable document for Responsible Employees](#)

[Click here for a reporting flowchart for Responsible Employees](#)