

UVA School of Data Science (SDS) Doctoral Advising, Mentorship, and Supervision Policy

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Policy Type: School

Contact Office: Office of the Dean, UVA School of Data Science (SDS)

Oversight Executive: Associate Dean of Academic and Faculty Affairs, UVA School of Data Science

Applies To: UVA School of Data Science Tenured or Tenure-Track (T3), and Academic General Faculty (AGF) on a contract of one year or longer; faculty members from other schools at UVA.

I. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear guidelines and expectations for the supervision and mentorship of doctoral students within the UVA School of Data Science (SDS). This document addresses:

- (a) who among the active, joint, and courtesy SDS faculty may serve as doctoral advisors or co-advisors,
- (b) the mechanisms for mentoring doctoral students, and
- (c) exceptions that may come about when a student's funding originates from faculty in other UVA schools.

This policy applies to all faculty holding appointments in SDS and outlines the conditions under which advising rights are conferred.

II. Definitions

1. **SDS-Based Faculty:** Faculty holding an active sole or formal joint appointment in SDS and who hold a research doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, ScD, or an equivalent research degree).
2. **Joint Appointment:** A formal affiliation in which faculty maintain significant academic responsibilities in both SDS and another UVA school.
3. **(Sole) Primary Advisor:** The faculty member designated as the lead mentor/supervisor who oversees a doctoral student's research trajectory and academic progress.
4. **Co-Advisors:** Multiple faculty members who share the leadership responsibilities of overseeing a doctoral student's research and academic progress, ensuring the student benefits from a diverse range of expertise.
5. **Courtesy Faculty:** Faculty with an affiliated appointment in SDS who may serve on doctoral committees but are not eligible for primary advising unless determined otherwise under Section VI.
6. **Committee Chair:** The faculty member designated by the school to administer milestone exams (qualifying exam, dissertation proposal, dissertation defense). The committee chair is typically not the primary advisor or co-advisor.

III. Eligibility for Doctoral Supervision

A. Advising Rights:

Faculty Appointment	Degree	Sole advising rights	Co-advising rights	Committee membership
Data science (≥10%)	PhD, ScD	Yes	Yes	Yes
	MD, JD	No	Yes ^a	Yes
External to SDS or Data science (< 10%)	PhD, ScD, MD, JD	No	With Associate Dean approval ^a , student must be funded by faculty member	Yes
^a Provided that a Data Science (≥10%) faculty member with PhD/ScD is also a co-advisor				

1. To serve as a sole primary advisor, faculty must hold a primary or joint appointment (at 10% effort or greater) in SDS and possess a research doctoral degree (PhD, ScD, or an equivalent research-based credential)
2. Faculty without a research doctorate (e.g., MD, JD) who hold an appointment in SDS (primary or joint) may serve as co-advisors in a partnership with a qualifying SDS-based faculty member as defined in A.1.
3. Faculty external to SDS may serve as co-advisors in partnership with a qualifying SDS-based faculty member for students whose funding originates from that external faculty member's grants or unit with the approval of the Associate Dean (See V.B)
4. All UVA faculty, especially courtesy faculty, are welcome to serve as members of doctoral committees.

B. Minimum Effort Requirement:

Faculty designated as primary advisors are expected to demonstrate a substantive commitment to SDS's academic mission. As a baseline, primary faculty advisors should be full-time UVA faculty and allocate substantive professional effort to SDS-related teaching, research, or service. Exceptions to this guideline may be considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to review by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

IV. Advising

A. Advising Timeline:

Every student admitted to the formal SDS doctoral program will have an SDS-based primary advisor. Students are initially assigned an SDS-based academic advisor when they first arrive; this advisor serves as the primary advisor until the student chooses, or is assigned, an eligible primary advisor or co-advisors.

B. Advising expectations:

The primary advisor or co-advisor team is responsible for overall academic and research guidance, including the coordination of periodic reviews and assessments. A different full-time SDS faculty typically serves as the committee chair for milestone exams to avoid the appearance of bias and conflict of interest.

C. Considerations for Co-Advisor Roles:

- Co-advisors must collaborate in curriculum planning, research mentorship, and in meeting periodic programmatic milestones.

- The roles and responsibilities of each co-advisor should be explicitly documented with the Director of the SDS Doctoral Program, including an agreement for how travel and publication costs resulting from the student's research will be shared.
- The SDS-based co-advisor(s) are required to ensure that the student benefits from the SDS's research environment, expertise, and community.

V. Determination and Administration of Advising Rights

A. For Faculty with a Full or Joint Appointment in SDS:

- Eligibility is contingent upon maintaining a full or joint appointment with SDS and a recognized research doctoral degree.
- SDS faculty with advising rights are expected to demonstrate both a commitment to SDS's academic objectives and the capacity to provide effective mentorship to doctoral students.
- Periodic reviews of advising effectiveness will be incorporated into the faculty evaluation process.

B. For Faculty Fully External to SDS :

- SDS students whose funding originates from non-SDS units may be co-advised by faculty fully external to SDS (i.e., no formal % effort in SDS) only if the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs determines that such supervision is consistent with SDS academic standards and mission.
- In these instances, the external co-advisor must work collaboratively with an SDS-based co-advisor to share the oversight and mentorship responsibilities.

VI. Review, Implementation, and Amendments

A. Administrative Oversight:

- The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs is charged with the oversight of this policy's implementation, including the adjudication of any exceptions or disputes that arise concerning advising rights.
- Annual reviews of advising arrangements will be conducted to ensure compliance and to address any evolving needs of the SDS doctoral community.

B. Policy Revisions:

- This document is subject to periodic revision. Any amendments must be approved by the SDS faculty.
- Feedback from students, faculty, and other stakeholders will be actively solicited to guide future revisions.

VII. Conclusion

The UVA School of Data Science is committed to fostering an environment of rigorous research, collaborative mentorship, and academic excellence. By establishing clear guidelines for doctoral student supervision and mentorship, SDS aims to ensure that every student receives comprehensive and high-quality guidance throughout their academic journey. This policy reinforces the principle that students enrolled in the formal SDS doctoral program must be supervised by SDS-based faculty, while SDS-funded students collaborating with external faculty are subject to oversight by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs to maintain consistency with SDS standards.

For questions or clarifications regarding this policy, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at SDS.

Next Scheduled Review: Fall 2027

Approved by, Date: Approved by SDS Faculty 11/5/25; Approved by Dean 11/13/25

Supersedes (previous policy date): N/A