

## FAQs on Switching Advisors for MechE Graduate Students

Below is a list of FAQs that the Advising Working Group (AWG) has brainstormed. We believe that these questions are often encountered by students thinking about switching advisors during their graduate studies. Having answers to these questions in an official capacity might simplify the process of navigating through these tough situations.

### Transition Period (i.e. Period without a new advisor):

*What happens if I can't find a new advisor before leaving my old advisor? What if there is a period of time that I do not have an advisor?*

1. Is there transitional funding available for me from MechE or MIT?
2. If my funding is not yet finalized with my new advisor, can I TA MechE classes?
3. Beyond TA'ing, what are my other funding options?
4. I am applying to fellowships, is there someone besides my past advisor that can write a letter for me?
5. If I have a period without an advisor, who approves my registration?
6. If I have a period without an advisor, who "advocates" for me at the qualifying exam if I do not have an advisor?

### Guaranteed Transitional Funding:

7. Who should a student contact to get transitional funding? What does the process look like?
8. How many semesters of funding is provided/available through this?
9. Under what circumstances would a request for funding be denied? (e.g. limit on number of switches, reason for leaving advisor)
10. When should a student apply for funding? Before leaving an advisor? After?
11. Is my advisor notified of my request for funding? If so, when?
12. What if I find a new advisor but they do not have an RAship available, can I get transitional funding?

### Finding New Advisor:

13. Can I choose a new advisor in any given department? If my (new) advisor is from outside the department, what MechE policies must I satisfy?
14. How do I talk to new advisors without letting my old advisor know? Or should I let them know?
15. If I am reaching out to new professors while still under my old advisor's supervisions, will they tell my current/old advisor? Are there confidentiality protections?
16. What if a potential new advisor does not have an RA-ship for me? Can I TA MechE classes?

### Retaliation:

17. Should I be worried about retaliation from my old advisor?
18. I'm finishing up my Master's thesis and I'm afraid that if I tell my advisor I'm leaving, they will not sign my thesis. Is there any protection from this?

### Timing (or Logistics or Deciding to Switch):

19. When do I need to tell my advisor that I am leaving? When should I tell my advisor?
20. If I take the quals after switching advisors, can/will I present research from my old advisor?
21. If I take quals after switching advisors, can/will my old advisor be present during the quals presentation? During the faculty deliberation?
22. If I take quals without a new advisor, who will "advocate" for me?
23. Should I wait to take the quals until I have an advisor?
24. I'm worried switching labs will make it take too long for me to graduate. Is it too late for me to switch? [When does it make sense to just finish and leave vs switch to a new lab and start fresh?]
25. Does my PhD timeline get affected by switching advisors?
  - a. Will my previous research with my old advisor count towards my progress towards my degree/thesis?

- b. Is there a minimum amount of time you need to spend with a new advisor before defending/getting your PhD?
  - c. How do I communicate my desirable timeline with my new advisor? Or understand their expectations?
26. I want to switch labs, but I'm still considering staying in my original lab. Is there help for me to discuss this option with my advisor?
27. Are there any departmental requirements/logistics that I should be aware of when switching advisors?

Department

28. Who can I contact if I have questions not on this list?

