

Tips for Working with Faculty

Whether you are meeting with your freshman academic advisor to talk about your intellectual interests or looking for an advisor for a research project or honors thesis, you can take a variety of steps to both facilitate and deepen your working relationship:

- Go to office hours. Ask questions. Listen. Take notes. If you're looking for an advisor for your research, make an appointment, map out a strategy for the first meeting (see below), and plan for a second meeting to follow up the first.
- Before meeting with your professor, find out about his or her research interests. Check the department's web pages for faculty biographies, read the professor's personal web pages, search the library's online catalogues and databases for the professor's published work. You want to identify intellectual interests that you both may share.
- Assess yourself, particularly if you are taking on a substantial research/honors project. What skills do you need to develop? What are your strengths? How much independent work do you want to do?
- In the first meeting to identify a faculty member with whom you can do research, have some topics to guide the discussion, ask for advice or an assignment that you can pursue further – an article to read, an appointment to tour the lab, a graduate student with whom you could talk. Be prepared to talk about the professor's research. You don't need to be an expert. Be yourself – a student with intellectual curiosity.
- If you think there's a good fit between your interests and the professor's, make a second appointment, talk about your assignment, let her know you're engaged with the topic, ask how you can get more involved. If she doesn't have the time, or isn't engaged with your topic, ask for a reference to another faculty member with similar areas of interest whom you might approach.
- Once you've identified a faculty member with whom you are going to work, ensure that you both are clear about expectations: How frequently will you meet? What are the faculty member's other commitments? How closely will you work with a graduate student or postdoctoral fellow? How will you be trained? What kind of final product will you produce?
- For an honors thesis, does the professor have sufficient expertise in your area to provide you the guidance you seek? Can he point you to useful resources?
- Be the active, responsible party in initiating and organizing communication: set meeting agendas, prioritize issues you want to discuss, be a leader in discussions, work with your professor to set short and long term goals and deadlines for your project.

- Consider sending summaries of meetings (agreements, assignments), restating tasks and the division of labor.
- Rather than relying on one person – your thesis or research advisor – for all your guidance and support, build yourself a mentoring community of other faculty members, graduate students, librarians, staff, and other undergraduates.