ESTABLISHING POSITIVE WORKING AGREEMENTS

Advice for Interns

Organizing Meetings

• Take responsibility for running meetings with your advisor. You should come with an agenda of issues and questions you want to raise and should prioritize them so that you are asking the most important questions first.
• Keep track of time during the meeting to assure that your most important concerns are addressed. At the same time, respect your mentor’s time by knowing how much time she has available and agreeing to schedule another meeting to discuss topics that remain at the end of the hour.
• At the conclusion of a meeting or through e-mail, summarize any agreements that have been reached. Restate what you will be doing and what your mentor has agreed to do for you. Ask your mentor to respond if she disagrees with anything you have stated.

Setting Expectations

• In one of your early meetings with your advisor, your meeting agenda should include developing a work plan with short-term and long-term goals and a timeframe for reaching your goals. If you need to modify your work plan later, inform your mentor and agree upon a new timeframe.
• Discuss how often you and your mentor will meet face to face and whether email is acceptable for certain issues or questions. Find out under what circumstances, if any, the faculty member feels it is appropriate to be called at home.
• Always read the books or articles your mentor suggests and let them know what you thought about those suggestions. Faculty want to know that the time they spend with you goes to good use.
• Rather than relying on one person--your thesis advisor--for all your guidance and support, try to build yourself a mentoring community. This might include other faculty members, graduate students, librarians, staff, and other undergraduates. These people probably won’t see themselves as operating as a part of a mentoring group, but for you they will represent a means to getting more of your mentoring needs met without relying solely on the resources of one person.

Turning in Your Work

• Find out how rough or polished of a draft your mentor is willing to read. Some faculty are willing to read a draft that is a combination of polished prose and rough outlines of arguments; others will only read a well-polished and edited paper. In either case, you should always proofread meticulously for typographical errors.
• When you turn in a draft for your mentor to read, consider submitting a list of your questions or concerns along with it. In which areas or sections would you like detailed feedback? Do you have any methodological, argumentation or theoretical concerns you would like your mentor to address in detail?

• Ask your mentor what is the best way to remind her about getting your work back to you within an agreed upon timeframe. “When you are very busy, how should I remind you about a paper you have of mine? Should I email you, call you, or come by your office?” “How much in advance should I remind you; is one week enough or would you prefer two?”

• Find out how long it typically takes your mentor to return papers or drafts. Ask how much in advance they must receive a draft to read and comment upon it before a fixed deadline.