

MENTORING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCHERS: BEST PRACTICES

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

- Begin by undertaking a critical self-appraisal. Determine what you need to thrive during the research and writing process. What are your strengths? What skills do you need to develop? How much independent versus hand-in-hand work do you want to do? What kind of scholarly expertise do you need for the guidance of your project?
- Identify faculty who share your academic interests. Ask faculty members (or graduate students) you already know in your department or field for names of faculty with whom you might consider working.
- Schedule a meeting with the potential faculty mentor. Your goals at the meeting will be to assess whether the faculty member is a good fit for you, to make a positive impression, and to establish a working rapport. Areas into which you should attempt to gain insight include:
 - Availability: How often does the faculty member prefer to meet with students? What are the faculty member's other commitments? Will the faculty member be on leave during the coming year?
 - Communication: Are you able to understand the professor clearly? Do you feel comfortable communicating your ideas? Will you be able to accommodate her/his professional style?
 - Scholarly expertise: Does the professor have sufficient expertise in your area to provide you the guidance you seek? Can the professor point you to useful resources? Do you feel that you share intellectual interests?
- At the initial meeting, the faculty member will likely want to know the following about:
 - Mutual interests: Share how your prior academic and personal experiences relate to the professor's interests. Read the professor's recent publications and be prepared to discuss how they relate to your interests.
 - Motivation and Direction: State your goals and be prepared to talk about your timeline for progress on your project.
 - Skills and Strengths: Let the faculty member know what qualities you bring to the relationship (e.g., research or language skills, creativity, analytical techniques, enthusiasm, commitment, etc.).
- Remember that the initial conversation is simply the first step. Don't approach early meetings as if you are asking someone to be your mentor. Mentoring relationships evolve over time, often arising out of a particular need. If, after the initial meeting, you feel that the faculty member will be able to provide you with the guidance you seek, schedule a follow-up meeting and begin to build working agreements. If you determine that this faculty member is not the best fit for your needs, thank her or him for the time spent with you and ask for recommendations for other faculty members who might share your interests.