Communicating with Your Academic & Research Advisors

Graduate Student Workshop
August 2018
Presenters

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Workshop overview

- Identify your advisor(s)
- Emailing your advisor(s)
- Navigating cultural differences
- What to do when challenges arise
- Further resources
Schmoozing with your professor:

H-hey Dr. Smith.

I'm going to the lab after this.

Good.

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Identify Your Advisor(s)

Academic Advisor

- Usually assigned
- Navigate academic options and requirements
- May or may not be faculty
- Non-research related questions
Identify Your Advisor(s)

Research Advisor

- Primary research mentor
- Faculty member
- Research & professional development
- Primary vs. multiple advisors (for Ph.D)
Seeking Advisor(s)

- What are your academic and professional objectives?
  - e.g. getting a job in industry or academia, publishing, getting into PhD after Masters.
- What are your strengths? What skills do you need to develop? What are your research interests?
- What are the current projects and research interests of the available faculty?
- How many advisors do you need?
# Seeking Advisor(s) for Ph.D.

<p>| 01 | One advisor assigned | - Do your research at the time of Ph.D. applications |
| 02 | A PRIMARY &amp; a SECONDARY advisor assigned | - Consider secondary advisor if the primary is not a good fit |
| 03 | No advisor assigned | - Work with one or multiple advisors for one year before committing |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and degree completion advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switching degree programs and/or level (PhD to Master’s or Master’s to PhD)</td>
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<td>Earlier graduation or program extension</td>
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<td>Changing research advisor</td>
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<td>Job search advice</td>
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<td>Other…</td>
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AVERAGE TIME SPENT COMPOSING ONE E-MAIL

PROFESSORS: 1.3 SECONDS

YES.
(SEND)
DO IT.
(SEND)
SEE ATTACHED.
(SEND)
NO.
(SEND)

GRAD STUDENTS: 1.3 DAYS

DEAR (?) PROF. SMITH,
I was wondering if perhaps you might have possibly gotten the chance to potentially find the time to maybe look over the draft paper that I am attaching in just in case. I know you are very busy. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to.

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Example email #1

Dear Professor Smith,

My name is David International. I am a student pursuing Bachelors in Space System Engineering Program in the Atmospheric, Oceanic and Space Sciences Department at the University of Michigan.

I went through your work and admire the efforts put into the Solar Neutron Experiment and found that to be invaluable research.

I would like to meet up with you and work under your guidance as a research scholar so that I can learn and at the same time provide expertise from my program here. I have attached my resume to this email to show some of the project experience that I have gained.

If you would like a point of reference, Professor XXXX was my Program advisor and could provide more details about the program and projects I have taken part in. His contact email is xxxx@xxxx.com. I have also attached my resume and transcript from my previous year.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. I look forward to your reply.

Kind Regards,
David International
Example email #2

Hi Stephanie,

Hope you had a wonderful holiday break! Are you in Ann Arbor now? Weather here is very scary and I hope you are staying safe and warm wherever you are. :)

I am attaching two documents here. The first one is my draft for the XYZ conference presentation abstract. The due date for the submission is Friday, January 10. Could you take a look at it and give me some feedback before then? Thanks!

The second document is my updated draft for the ABC write-up. I tried to address most of your feedback in this version. This is less urgent than the XYZ thing (you can wait to review it when you have a chance).

Thanks so much for your help! I look forward to talking to you soon!

Warm wishes,
Olivia
Navigating cultural differences

Be mindful of cultural differences

- Differences in working culture (office hours, classroom participation)
- Formal vs. informal teacher-student relationship
- Avoid stereotyping
Third Option?

YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE. IT'S SIMPLE:
YOU EITHER DO WHAT I TELL YOU TO DO...

...OR YOU GIVE UP, DROP OUT, AND BECOME A FAILURE AND A DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE EYES OF YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

IS THERE A THIRD OPTION?

MAYBE. MAYBE NOT. I'M NOT TELLING.

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[Image: PhD Comics by Jorge Cham - Third Option? (2005)]
It has been a year since Josh and Ann joined the PhD program. They met at an annual school event after a long time and decided to grab lunch together. Over an hour, small talk turned into more meaningful conversations.

Ann: “My advisor is great. He lets me run with my own ideas, decide when to do what, and gives great feedback when I am stuck. He is so supportive of everything that I want to do.”

Josh: “Wow.. I’m glad it is going so well for you.”

Ann: “How has it been for you so far?”

Josh: “Well.. The projects I am working on are all my advisor’s ideas. I have very clear tasks and deadlines. It gets stressful at times but I guess I like it that way. Helps me get stuff done.”

Ann: “Its good if that works for you. But that would never work for me. Touchwood!”

Days after the lunch, Josh starts spiraling into of thoughts of self-pity like he was missing something in life.. “why am I here?”... “what am I doing with my life?”...
What should I know?

- What is my advisor’s advising style?
  - Different types - minimally engaged to extremely engaged

- How can I make it work for me?
  - Empathize
  - Communicate your needs and preferences
Scenario #2

Olivia is a student from South Korea who is pursuing her master’s degree. Her mother at home who has fought lung cancer always wished for Olivia to receive her degree in the U.S. However, three weeks before the end of the first semester, Olivia receives terrible news that her mother’s condition has worsened.
What should I do?

- Be proactive. Talk about your challenges sooner rather than later.

- Avoid feelings of isolation
  - Join student clubs or social events
  - Seek peer support: UMCSSA, ISA, etc.
  - Use on-campus resources
Further resources

Examples of U-M resources

- International Center
- Sweetland Center for Writing
- English Language Institute (ELI)
- Office of Student Conflict Resolution / Office of the Ombuds
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Further resources

✓ **IC orientation workshops**
  - Writing Effective Email
  - Stress Less for Success
  - Making Friends in the US
  - Creating your Elevator Pitch

✓ **How to Get the Mentoring You Want: A Guide for Graduate Students**
  
Workshop Evaluation

Your feedback is valuable to us and will help us to improve the experience of future participants. Thank you!