



## How to Establish and Manage the Advisor/Advisee Relationship

By Carla Trujillo, Ph.D.

- At first you may be unsure of what you're interested in studying and who you're interested in working with. This is normal. Things will clarify with time.
  - Lab rotations (for the science folks) can help you figure out what projects and professors match your interests.
- Focus on your intellectual passions, the topics you're really excited about. This is your driving force and will propel you toward greater happiness in grad school. Graduate school is tough. It's better to work on something that you're passionate about rather than something to please others.
- During the first semester begin speaking with professors and their graduate students about their research to see if you are interested in working with that particular professor for your research project. Look up the professor's work on the web and read a couple of their publications before you speak with them. Ask their graduate students for specific information regarding what it's like to work with that particular professor. Find out what the current research topics are.
- Approach faculty if you want to work with them. However, realize they may not know you and will want to know your skills and interests. They may ask you a variety of questions about your prepared area of research. Be prepared to answer basic questions about your topics.
- Not all faculty operate the same way, so you have to honestly ascertain whether being with someone famous will be worth the possible price, as they may not be available to you in the manner you seek.
  - Some faculty are more hands on, requiring weekly meetings, some may only see you semi-regularly, some only a couple times a semester. Most faculty are very busy so you have to be organized when you do go to see them.
  - New vs. Tenured vs. Near retirement. Newer faculty are under pressure since they are usually seeking tenure. They sometimes push students to work long hours, produce significant results, write grants, etc. Tenured faculty are usually busy keeping their research going, giving talks, etc. They are usually slightly easier to deal with regarding their expectations of you and your productivity. Faculty near retirement vary. Some remain active in research even after they retire. Some slow down considerably, so there may not be as strong a push from them to get you a job, publications, conference presentations, financial support. Try to politely inquire what their plans are if you're approaching a faculty member near retirement.
- The Faculty member's belief in you is very important. This is one of the most significant components to a successful advisor relationship. Try to find this in your advisor. (Your belief in them is equally important.)
- Be an active participant in pursuit of your education. Don't wait for your advisor to guide you. Observe what senior level students are doing. Ask questions, create goals, timelines, etc. Some advisors will be active in guiding you, some won't.
  - Find people you trust to give you advice & *see them regularly*. Your advisor may be too busy to give you all that you'll need.
- What if you are not getting what you need and it's impacting your progress, or your health? You could possibly stick with it, but will need to find a different faculty member to serve as a co-mentor. You may need to switch

advisors/labs, but this takes careful planning. Make sure you get some advice before doing this and while the changes are taking place.

10. • Set up meetings with your advisor with an agenda to discuss your goals, interests, exams, problems, interest in doing research talks, attending research conferences & doing collaborations.
11. • Keep your advisor up to date on your progress.
  - Set realistic goals regarding what encompasses enough work for the Ph.D. If you're confused, try to work it out with your advisor. Get advice from others if necessary.
12. • Learn to write well. Take extra writing classes if necessary. (Try UC Extension.) This will better enable you to accomplish things necessary for current and future success (presentations, publications, grant proposals, etc.).
13. • Don't isolate yourself from the department. Go to social functions, retreats, serve on committees, and so on. It's important to stay in the consciousness of faculty and other students in the department, etc. This may be difficult at times, but could help you in the long run.
14. • When doing a research project, make sure you put in the time required (or more), work hard, consistently, independently, but also as a team player. Don't be afraid to be innovative and creative in your thoughts. Sometimes the best innovations occur by accident. Learn new data or language programs as necessary. Do supplemental reading if you think it will help you. Don't be afraid to make a mistake or take a risk. Some of the best innovations occur from people taking risks, making errors, and learning from them. Take your work seriously. Take yourself seriously.
15. • How do you manage if you have two advisors (like a research scientist who directs your day-to-day work at LBL and an official UC Faculty advisor who oversees your progress)? This takes extra coordination and communication by you to make sure everyone agrees with your project, methodology, details, etc.
16. • Go to conferences and present your research. Have your advisor see your work before you present it. Do as good a job as possible when presenting your work at a conference. People will get to know you and associate your work with the faculty member you're working with. This will help later with getting a job.
17. Learn how to write grant proposals for funding your work or the work in the lab. This can help support your graduate studies and is good preparation for funding your work in the future--very important for pursuing life in academia.
18. Plan more than a year in advance to apply for dissertation fellowships. These fellowships will greatly enhance your progress toward finishing.
19. If applicable, begin writing up your results in conjunction with your advisor for publication in research journals. It is very impressive to have publications as a graduate student. These are looked upon as an indicator of your future potential.
20. • Put yourself on a timeline to finish. Get buy-in from your advisor regarding this so that you both agree on the timeline. Work one day at a time. Try not to look too far ahead. Tell yourself to do the work today for today. As long as you accomplish something each day, you'll make progress.
21. • A little before your last year, think about what kind of job you want or where you'd like to teach so that you can begin preparing for the job market.
  - Some advisors will give you good career advice. Some won't give you any or will give you partial advice. The Graduate Division sponsors a 5 week summer course to prepare you for pursuing an academic career. Also Career Services & the Graduate Diversity Program can help with career advice.
22. • If you'd like to improve your public speaking skills (good for passing orals, and also for job interviews), consider joining Toastmasters. Make sure you practice with friends, colleagues in mock orals before taking the actual exam.
23. • Have friends/allies in your department and outside your department for advice, mentoring or fun. These contacts are important for dealing with an absent or difficult advisor and will make your graduate school experience more fulfilling.