How Your Mentor Can Help You Outside of Research
Faculty members abound with advice and wisdom. A great research advisor will go beyond assisting and encouraging you while you complete a research project with them. At minimum, they can provide insight into their experience in graduate or professional school, which can help you to decide whether or not this career path aligns with your goals. At a maximum, they can advise you on course work to take, suggest graduate programs to look into, help you apply for research funding, and much more! Most mentors will be more than happy to advise you beyond your research and see to your success in your field of interest.

Here are some general ways that establishing a good relationship with your mentor can help you outside of research.

1. **Focusing your Interests**: As an undergraduate, it may seem as if it is impossible to study only one topic at Ohio State. You may have interests in varying fields or just do not know where to start. Your mentor—whether a professor, a researcher, or a graduate student—can help you focus your interests into a solid academic plan. They will be able to help you pinpoint strengths and weaknesses and how to use them in future career goals. They are able to help plan a course of action from here on out! Do keep in mind that it’s ok to realize that your interests have shifted during the course of your research. Discuss this change in research interests openly with your advisor. A mark of a great advisor is a willingness to help you succeed even beyond your research assistantship with them.

2. **Picking your Classes**: Once you have narrowed your focus, your mentor can offer suggestions on relevant classes to take. For example, if you want to pursue forensics, taking an Anthropology, Chemistry, or Criminology course may be beneficial. Mentors affiliated with graduate programs at Ohio State may even be able to help you enroll in graduate level course work in your field of interest, especially if they are the professor for the course in which you are interested. If your mentor’s research is not in the same field that you choose to pursue, they can often refer you to someone else who can answer your questions.

3. **Letters of Recommendation**: Whether your career plans include graduate school, medical school, getting an internship, or getting a job, you will need recommendation letters. You cannot start building relationships with academic and research mentors too early in order to ensure that you will have positive references for the future. Without solid relationships with your recommendation writers, your letters will not be very strong. By establishing these sources for letters early you will avoid the chaos caused by scrambling for letters at the last minute. Build these relationships *early* and *often* with research mentors and even class professors.

4. **Navigating Graduate School**: Your mentors have been in your position before. They have been through the process of choosing graduate schools, applying to programs, and completing interviews (as both an applicant and an applicant reviewer!). They know what a stressful time this can be. Building a good relationship with your mentor now means that you will be able to use them as a resource during the application process for graduate school, such as for an opinion on your personal statement, and even after being accepted!

5. **Networking**: Your mentor not only has connections here at Ohio State, but they likely have connections throughout the state, nation and even the world. They will want to share these
connections with you, especially if you make a positive lasting impression on them. Once your mentor knows that you are a hard worker they will be happy to refer you to colleagues or anyone else who they think will be able to help you.

6. **Potential Future Colleague:** Let this statement sink in a moment... Ok, it may seem like a stretch right now, but if you decide to pursue a research career, your research mentor will be a future colleague and maybe even collaborator! Anyone with whom you work (undergraduate students, graduate students, and full professors) may one day be your colleague. Despite the difficulties you might have during your research experience, it will always be to your benefit to act professionally. You may at times think to yourself, “It doesn’t matter how I act because I won’t ever have to see these people again!” Don’t fall into that trap. You should always treat your peers and your mentors with respect. They should do the same to you.

I hope you find these tips helpful as you conduct research this summer and as you develop a relationship with your advisor, fellow undergraduates, and graduate students.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

All the best,

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