

## **Tips for Building Mentor/Mentee Relationships**

No matter how much you read and research nothing beats the practical knowledge of a scholar in your field. Finding a mentor in graduate school is a necessity; it is also intimidating. That's especially true considering you are putting together a committee of scholars whose names will be attached to yours. So, how do you find the "perfect" mentor? Well, for starters, you don't find "perfect." But you are likely to find a solid match with a professional who cares about helping you grow.

When searching for a mentor, do:

### **1. Determine your goals**

How do you want to academically grow in a year? Is there any specific research field you would like to experience more of? Where would you like to move to after your time here? A MFA program? The job market? A PhD program? Unsure? Any answer is accepted so long as you know your end goal. When you know your plan, you can share that with a mentor and when a mentor knows your plan (or at least what you are open to), they are able to help you more effectively.

### **2. Take initiative**

Introduce yourself to professors and faculty in the department. With research leaves and fellowships, it may mean that the professor you most wish to talk to is often off campus for the semester. In that case, start by sending an email to introduce yourself. This email may lead to a second one asking if there is a possibility to meet in person, asking for research tips for a current project, and/or asking for feedback on an idea that may fall into their field.

### **3. Be prepared**

If you do meet with a possible mentor, have a plan for what you would like to ask—write a list. What topics would you like to research more? What about your present research/project has stumped you? Knowing what you need from the meeting helps ensure that the meeting feels productive for everyone involved.

### **4. Have a back-up plan**

Don't presume that a faculty member will be able to join your committee. They may be on leave soon, overburdened with service, or working on something completely different than what interests you. Ask for recommendations of other faculty who might be a better fit. (However, that does not mean you can't still benefit from their professional knowledge. Just because a faculty member is not on your committee that does not mean they can't discuss ideas with you or share reading suggestions.)

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### **5. Think long term**

Sometimes the mentor who is going to help you grow the most is the one with high expectations. And that is often intimidating. But, take a look in the proverbial mirror. If the goal is to become better in your field, who is going to push you? Think of character traits shared by mentors who've helped you in the past. What kind of motivation do you respond to? Who will be the one to push you?

### **6. Be appreciative**

Professors are human. They are here to help you grow but they are also busy, too. Show your thanks by being respectful of their time and voicing your appreciation.

These tips are based on research from the human resource consulting firm Robert Half, *Inc. Magazine*, and peer commentary. Though research based, take these tips as a guideline, as best practices that are the basis for your interactions. Finding mentors is necessary for your MA portfolio defense committee but, beyond that, it is in your best interest. This is about taking opportunities for growth for yourself and making the most of you two years in Auburn. Keep these tips in mind and remember, there is no substitute for passion and sincerity.