

Forming Relationships with Harvard Faculty

The undergraduate years are probably the best or only time you will have open access to top minds in so many disciplines. Harvard faculty are a tremendous resource whether you are exploring courses, concentrations, research opportunities or career options.

It can be intimidating to reach out to Harvard faculty members. They might be a Nobel Prize winner, a world's leading authority, a groundbreaking researcher, a house-hold name...and there you are a green First Generation Harvard freshman trying your best to deal with your insecurities while navigating the seemingly endless opportunities, both academic and social.

In the process of forming relationships with faculty, start off by looking at that intimidating faculty member in other terms - as a potential teacher, advisor, mentor or friend. As a First Generation student you may not have had the mentoring support or access to advisors that other students at Harvard have had through their families, schools or extracurricular networks. This makes seizing the opportunities to connect with faculty even more important for you.

You are not "bothering" the faculty member by asking to meet with them. Faculty responsibilities include teaching, research, administrative duties and *meeting with students*. Imagine if you were a professor and most of the time no student came to your office hours. You would be excited when a student does show up. A faculty member is interested in those who show interest in them and their work.

So how does one start the process?

- If you are taking a course with a faculty member you would like to engage, simply introduce yourself to them after class. You may have a question on the material just discussed and you could discuss it briefly with the faculty member and then ask, "I am really interested in discussing this topic more with you. May I follow up with you during your office hours?" If you would like to meet with them to learn more about the concentration, a research position or career opportunities, simply state your intent when you meet them after class or when you meet them at office hours. At office hours, tell the faculty member about yourself, what you enjoy about his class and what your interests are. Also asking the faculty member about their

undergraduate experiences and career path can bring out elements that might resonate with you. Doing your homework before meeting the faculty is also helpful such as having an idea of the faculty member's current projects, publications or research before you meet with them.

- If you are not taking a course with a faculty member that you are interested in simply call or email to make an appointment for a time during office hours.

There are other ways to connect with faculty

- Some faculty are also House Masters. House Masters often dine in the dining halls of their respective house. If you happen to be interested in a faculty member who is also a House Master, meeting them for dinner is a great way to have a casual meeting.
- Once a term, the Freshman Dean's Office organizes a formal First-Year Faculty Dinner, where freshmen are encouraged to invite a professor. This is a nice event and you can invite faculty that you have already connected with or take the opportunity to invite someone you have not yet met but are interested in meeting.. If you miss this event, faculty, preceptors, and teaching fellows can join you for a meal in Annenberg any time at no cost to you.
- Faculty Luncheons organized by the Freshman Dean's Office are held each term in the residence of the Dean of Freshmen and are a great way meet a faculty members and hear them discuss their scholastic interests and research. The luncheons are often organized around a topic, and are meant to encourage conversation about shared interests between students and faculty
- For additional opportunities to connect with faculty
<http://fdo.fas.harvard.edu/pages/connecting-with-faculty>

To make the most of your meeting with faculty it is best if you prepare ahead of time. Have a clear idea of what you would like to discuss and what questions you would like to ask. Open ended questions help in starting the conversation. If you want to jot down a few notes on an index card to help you remember specific questions that is fine but do not read notes from a phone. To learn more about maximizing the faculty office hours experience, attend the "Making the Most of



Office Hours” session which is part of The Freshman Dean’s Office Residential Education Program.

Although the focus above has been on forming relationships with faculty members, you should also consider reaching out to teaching fellows and graduate students who can offer additional perspectives and knowledge of resources. The relationships you form with members of the Harvard academic community may be the most valuable and meaningful experiences of your undergraduate years. Faculty members, teaching fellows and graduate students may be your future colleagues, advisors, consultants or collaborators. Connecting within this rich academic community provides excellent opportunities for not only academic and career mentoring but for the chance to create lasting friendships.