

Tips on How to Approach a Professor

Whether it is the Research Opportunity Program (ROP) or a faculty member's research project, you should only consider approaching faculty members that you are genuinely interested in working with. You should avoid sending out mass generalized e-mail communications, but instead take the time to research faculty members' current projects and get a sense of their areas of specialization. Be as detailed as possible in your e-mail communications about where your own research interests lie and what you hope to achieve by working with them on their projects.

We provide below some tips on how to approach professors to discuss research opportunities and projects, community engaged learning experiences, internships, and other topics more generally:

- **Initial Contact**

When first approaching a professor, begin by sending them a professionally crafted e-mail introducing yourself. Let them know what you are looking to gain from meeting with them and be open to their schedules as they may not always be available on campus when you are. Office hours are usually the best time to arrange a meeting so be proactive in your request to meet.

- **Determine the Goals of the Meeting**

Regardless of what kind of experience you are interested in, develop a clear plan ahead of the meeting. Make sure that you know some talking points and be prepared to articulate what you are looking to do or wish to have happen through this meeting.

- **Do Your Homework**

Take the time to research the professor that you hope to work with on a particular opportunity. Familiarize yourself with the professor's most recent research, courses, publications, projects, and so on. Identify mutual interests and make note of what excites and inspires you about their research. You can also search their personal and departmental websites for this information. One way to make a great first impression is to show the professor that you are able to discuss their specific research projects and to explain why they interest you.

- **Identify Your Skills**

Reflect on your previous experiences and any skills relevant to the discussion. This can include research courses, lab and field experiences, work experience, and/or volunteer work. You can further mention courses that you are currently taking and anything additional that you believe would be beneficial to the discussion.

- **Be Prepared**

Preparation prior to meeting with the professor is key. You want to go into your meeting with a clear interest that you can easily express. Prepare questions in advance to guide the conversation and to show the professor that you have taken time to think about the discussion. You may wish to discuss your educational and career goals. The purpose is to leave your professor with a clear understanding of your enthusiasm, intent, and talent.

- **Get Some Feedback**

Ask your professor for feedback on the meeting and what some of the next steps might be. They may provide you with helpful reading materials on your topic, suggest colleagues who might be a better match for your interests, or recommend that you speak with the Experiential Education Unit for more details. Welcome all feedback, even negative.

- **Note of Thanks**

After your meeting, it is good practice to send your professor a thank-you email letting them know that you appreciated their taking the time to meet with you.