CMSC 601: Advisors

Advisors

- Temporary advisors
- Research advisors
- Approaching a potential advisor
- Secondary/informal “advisors”
- Changing advisors

Sources


Questions to Ask Faculty

- Are you taking on new (M.S./Ph.D.) students?
- Do you have RA funding? For how long into the future?
- What research areas are you working in?
- Do you have specific open problems you are looking for students to work on?
- Do you generally suggest research topics to your students or expect them to find their own topics?
- Are you willing to advise a thesis/dissertation in an area not directly related to your current research projects?
- Are you willing to advise an interdisciplinary thesis/dissertation, or to co-advise?
- Have you (recently) graduated any (M.S./Ph.D.) students?
Questions to Ask Students

• Is Prof. X accessible?
  – How much time does Prof. X spend with you?
  – In what contexts (individual meetings, lab meetings, etc.)?
• Do Prof. X’s students finish quickly?
• Do Prof. X’s students publish in top conferences and journals?
• Does Prof. X give credit to students for their work?
• Is Prof. X consistent in expectations and directions?
• Is Prof. X reasonable in the amount of work expected?
• Do students respect Prof. X intellectually?

(From Peters, p. 46-47)

Expectations

You can reasonably expect your advisor to:

• Be available on a somewhat regular schedule
• Suggest courses and schedules
• Help you to select and solve research topics
• Suggest committee members
• Provide feedback on written work and work in progress
• Suggest possible solutions to research problems
• Encourage you to publish
• Write letters of reference

Your advisor may also:

• Provide financial support (stipends and travel money)
• Provide career advice
• Help you find a job

Expectations

Your advisor can reasonably expect you to:

• Develop ideas independently
• Do what you say you will do, in a reasonable timeframe
• Make (reasonably) continuous progress
• Go beyond the minimum amount of work
• Be pro-active in pursuing ideas and looking for resources
• Ask for help when you need it
• Meet relevant deadlines, even if heroic short-term effort is required

Expectations

Your advisor may also expect you to:

• Provide written progress reports
• Review papers, both theirs and others’
• Work with other students in the lab
• Publish and make presentations
• Contribute to grant proposals
**Not-so-Great Expectations**

- Your advisor should not expect you to:
  - Perform excessive administrative tasks or paperwork
  - Contribute to research without authorship
  - Consistently work unreasonably long hours
  - Have no life outside of the lab
- You should not expect your advisor to:
  - Constantly remind you what you need to be doing
  - Solve every problem you encounter
  - Be familiar with every aspect of your research problem
  - Provide unlimited resources (time, money, equipment...)

**In the Unlikely Event...**

- What if your advisor is seriously abusing or neglecting you?
  - Talk to the GPD
  - Talk to another faculty member you trust
  - Change advisors
  - Talk to the department chair
  - Talk to the Associate Dean
  - File a formal complaint