

Choosing
(and Managing the Relationship with)
Your Advisor

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Agenda

- Qualities of a Good Advisor (your thoughts)
- From the Advisor's Perspective
- Advisor vs. Mentor
- Choosing an Advisor
- Qualities of a Good Advisor (any changes?)
- Managing the Advisor Relationship

Qualities of a Good Advisor

?

From the Advisor's Perspective

- Any relationship stands to gain from mentally reversing roles – true with advisor-advisee relationship as well.
- Think about your advisor's priorities
 - Where does advising fall?

From the Advisor's Perspective

- At most institutions advising doesn't directly impact:
 - Salary increases
 - Promotions
 - Prestige
- Does practicality limit an advisors ability to advise?

From the Advisor's Perspective

- How does an advisor know how best to advise?
 - Formal training? Probably not
 - School guidelines? Maybe, but high level
 - Past experience? Probably.

From the Advisor's Perspective

- Use this experience (looking at the relationship from the other side) to guide you:
 - Take ownership of maintaining the relationship. Remember that through no fault of their own, advising you may not be the top of your advisors priority list.
 - Send updates, communicate, foster the relationship.

Advisor vs Mentor

- Faculty's roles influence your education and progress toward the degree
 - In-class: obvious
 - Out-of-class: Research, publishing, grant-writing
- Advisor
 - Often assigned by graduate program
 - Help you select courses, direct your thesis
 - May not become a mentor

Advisor vs Mentor

- Mentor (much more)
 - Facilitates your growth and development, a trusted ally who guides you
 - Relationship often takes the form of apprenticeship (deeper, more personal)
 - Socializes students to norms of scientific community
 - The guidance may not be directly observable but intangible

Choosing an Advisor

- A few tips for selecting an advisor:
 - For each of these ask yourself, does the answer fit my style, needs, and interests?
 - Ask students, postdocs working with the advisor about their experiences
 - What is their professional reputation?
 - What is the content and type of work they do?

Choosing an Advisor

- How does the advisor view their own role?
 - As a mentor who will help you along the way?
 - As someone who will answer questions when asked?
 - Which style suits you? Do you like:
 - Regular meetings?
 - To give updates in person or email?
 - To work independently or in close collaboration?

Choosing an Advisor

- What are the advisor's expectations? (ask them)
 - A few publications in the best journals/conferences?
 - Lots of publications regardless of where?
 - Completed publications regardless of their results being published?
- What other questions should you ask?

Qualities of a Good Advisor (revisited)

- Anything that has changed?

Qualities of a Good Advisor (revisited)

- From Stan (Kun's advisor)
 - Give you adequate research training
 - Give you freedom to pursue your own interests
 - Help you find strength and identify research problems
 - Help you become independent (magical process)

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- Tips from The Graduate Student Survival Guide (by Wanda Pratt at Stanford)
- A common theme through all of these tips: **communication**
 - Meet regularly
 - Among other benefits, this keeps you motivated to make progress

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- Prepare for your meetings - come to each meeting with:
 - List of topics to discuss
 - Plan for what you hope to get out of the meeting
 - Summary of what you have done since your last meeting
 - List of any upcoming deadlines
 - Notes from your previous meeting

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- **Email a brief summary** of all meetings - this helps avoid misunderstandings and provides a great record of your research progress.
 - Time and plan for next meeting
 - New summary of what you think you are doing
 - To do list for yourself
 - To do list for your advisor
 - List of related work to read
 - List of major topics discussed
 - List of what you agreed on
 - List of advice that you may not follow

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- **Show your advisor the results of your work as soon as possible** - this will help your advisor understand your research and identify potential points of conflict early in the process.
 - Summaries of related work
 - Anything you write about your research
 - Experimental results

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- **Communicate clearly** - if you disagree with your advisor, state your objections or concerns **clearly** and **calmly**. If you feel something about your relationship is not working well, discuss it with him or her. Whenever possible, **suggest steps** they could take to address your concerns.
- **Take the initiative** - you do not need to clear every activity with your advisor. He/she has a lot of work to do too. You must be responsible for your own research ideas and progress.

Managing the Advisor Relationship

- From Stan (Kun's advisor)
- Come prepared to your advisor
 - Make a list of things to talk about
 - Email material before meeting
 - Bring results
- Don't be afraid to say NO
 - Your advisor may not always be right, and there are multiple ways to do one thing
 - But you need to have good reasons