

How to Find a Faculty Sponsor

This is an adaptation of a series of steps for finding a Faculty Mentor for research projects, by Haas Scholars Program Coordinator Leah Carrol provided on webpage http://research.berkeley.edu/haas_scholars/documents/findmentor.html. Undergraduate Course Facilitators looking for a faculty sponsor for their proposed Special Studies/DeCal class follow a nearly parallel procedure. Throughout, "mentor" has been switched to "sponsor, and "research proposal" has been switched to "course proposal." The few steps unique to course sponsorship are noted in *italics*.

STEP #1: Identifying Potential Sponsors

- > **Check the current and archival DeCal course listings** to find the course topics that are most analogous to yours, and which faculty sponsored them (currently or recently). *These faculty are most likely to (a) appreciate what DeCal course sponsorship entails, and (b) be interested in your own course proposal. If no obvious candidates emerge from this search, then...*
- > **List faculty members with whom you have taken courses** and whose work has inspired or influenced your intellectual interests.
- > **Attend lectures on campus to familiarize yourself with other faculty members** outside your courses. Check the Daily Cal and the Berkeleyan, visit the UC Calendar of Events website at <http://www.berkeley.edu/calendar/>, and check departmental postings for information on scheduled lectures and presentations.
- > **Consider the interdisciplinary implications** of your interests and identify all relevant departments—including professional schools—that may house potential sponsors. Don't just be limited to your major department!
- > **Check departmental websites** for up-to-date information on faculty research interests and publications.
- > **Visit departmental offices and request information from staff** on faculty research interests and availability. The departmental graduate assistant can often be an especially good source of information. *And the departmental Course Scheduler, or other staff contact for DeCal logistics, will know the faculty who have sponsored DeCals in the past or who may be likely candidates.*
- > **Look at recent course listings**—both undergrad and grad—in relevant departments to find out what faculty members are teaching. Many departments publish their own course listings.
- > **Ask other faculty members** which of their colleagues share your research interests.
- > **Talk to fellow students**—especially seniors involved in research and/or those active in the majors' association—to find out which faculty members specialize in areas relevant to your proposed research project. T.A.s or G.S.I.s or other graduate students are an especially good source of information about faculty research interests. *Other DeCal course facilitators, as well as folks on the board at DeCal, will be able to tell you about their experiences with sponsors.*

STEP #2: Approaching Potential Sponsors

- > **Find out when potential sponsors hold office hours** by consulting postings in the departments, on the web, or on faculty office doors. Avoid calling on the phone; let the faculty members manage their own time as they choose.
- > **Do your homework before you go to office hours**; inform yourself about the faculty member's research interests, areas of specialization and/or publications. Be able to state why you are seeking out this particular person's advice.

- > **Before speaking with a faculty member, know what you wish to get out of the meeting:** feedback on a research or creative project idea? Help defining the purpose or scope of a project? Suggestions for further background reading? Advice about designing a research instrument or plan? Information about laboratory facilities or equipment? You are running this meeting, so it's important to have an agenda, both to use time efficiently and to show that you are serious about your purpose.
- > **Don't go in empty handed:** have with you a paragraph summarizing your research project/interests, your transcript, your resume, and a list of specific questions/requests for guidance.
- > **Before leaving the meeting, think about what kind of follow-up you would like to have** with the faculty member. If you have established a good rapport and would like to develop an ongoing working relationship, ask if he/she would be willing to meet with you again to look at a draft of your research proposal, to answer additional questions about a topic you have discussed, or for some other specific purpose.
- > **If there isn't a good match between your interests and those of the faculty member, ask him/her to suggest other colleagues** you might approach. Even if this particular individual has been very helpful, it may be useful to ask for additional suggestions of people to speak with, since the more input you get in developing your proposal, the better.
- > **Be confident and assertive about asking for help, but keep the length of your meeting within the established time limit** (e.g. 15 minute or 10 minute "slots"). It's important to be considerate both of the faculty member, who faces many demands on his/her time, and your fellow students waiting outside the door.

STEP #3: Popping the Question

- > Once you have identified a faculty member whom you wish to have sponsor your course, you will need to ask that person to make a commitment to serve as your sponsor. **Clearly communicate what kind of time commitment you are asking for and what tasks will be entailed for him/her.** *Bring printed copies of the Faculty Checklist for Student-Facilitated 98 and 198 Courses, available as a PDF at http://education.berkeley.edu/specialstudies/faculty_checklist.pdf, and the webpage "What is involved in sponsoring a student-initiated course?" from the online Faculty Guide to Campus Life, available at http://facultyguide.berkeley.edu/teaching/faq_19.html.*
- > **Give your sponsor a copy of your course proposal, if appropriate, as well as any forms she/he will need to fill out to establish a formal sponsor relationship.** *Be aware that many departments ask for additional paperwork beyond the campus-wide Course Proposal Form, available at <http://education.berkeley.edu/specialstudies>. And be sure to allow plenty of lead time before deadlines and make sure your sponsor knows when forms are due. Remember that departmental deadlines can be earlier than the end-of-semester campus-wide deadline!*
- > **If a faculty member declines to serve as your sponsor, don't be discouraged!** A negative response likely says more about the professor's prior commitments than it does about the merits of your class. If you've done your homework and have a sound course proposal, return to Step #1 and begin the process again. With persistence, you will eventually succeed in finding a sponsor. If you're planning ahead now to do an interesting course later, you are by definition the kind of highly motivated student that makes the work of being a university professor worthwhile.