

College students are sometimes surprised to discover that instructors like students and enjoy getting to know them. After all, they want to feel they're doing something more meaningful than talking to an empty room. The human dimension of college really matters, and as a student you are an important part of your instructor's world. Most instructors are happy to see you during their office hours, or to talk a few minutes after class. Here are some benefits of building relationships with your instructors and tips for communicating with them:

## Communicating with your instructors can lead to benefits beyond simply doing well in that class:

- Talking with instructors helps you feel more comfortable in college and more connected to the campus. Students who talk to their instructors are less likely to become disillusioned and drop out.
- Talking with instructors is a valuable way to learn about an academic field or a career. Don't know for sure what you want to major in, or what people with a degree in your chosen major actually *do* after college? Most instructors will share information and insights with you.
- You may need a reference or letter of recommendation for a job. Getting to know some of your instructors puts you in an ideal position to ask for a letter of recommendation or a reference in the future when you need one.
- Instructors are often well connected within their field and they may know of a job or internship possibility you otherwise may not learn about. An instructor who knows you is a valuable part of your network. Networking is very important for future job searches and other opportunities. In fact, most jobs are found through networking, not through classified ads or online job postings.

## Guidelines for Communicating with Instructors:

- **Introduce yourself early.** Step out of your comfort zone and get connected with your instructors early in the semester. Take the time to introduce yourself and pay attention to how the instructor would like to be addressed and respect their request.
- **Respect the instructor's time.** In addition to teaching, college instructors sit on committees, do research and other professional work, and have personal lives. Learn when your instructor has office hours and make a request for time outside of those hours if you have a conflict in your schedule.
- **Email Etiquette:**
  - Use your school email account when emailing instructors
  - Include an informative subject line
  - Address your instructor professionally and how they have asked to be addressed
  - Briefly and politely inform the instructor why you are messaging them
  - Take responsibility, suggest a solution and make requests if necessary
  - Sign with your name and student ID number.
- **Prepare before going to the instructor's office.** Go over your notes, readings and lectures and write down your specific questions. You'll feel more comfortable, and the instructor will appreciate you being organized.
- **Be accountable and honest.** To earn your instructor's respect, come to class prepared, do the work and participate genuinely in class. If you have missed lectures or assignments, be accountable and honest and the instructor will likely be happy to help.
- **Communicate assertively.** Consider the 3 C's of assertive communication when approaching instructors:
  - **Confidence** –when approaching your instructors, believe in your ability to handle the situation at hand. Get that instructors are human too and are willing to help students who are organized and accountable.
  - **Clarity** – be sure the message or request you have is clear and easy to understand. Prepare ahead of time with your questions, what you have done and what your request is.
  - **Controlled** – deliver information in a calm and controlled manner. Ask questions, don't make assumptions and listen carefully while exploring your options. Use an appreciative tone ask for clarification if you don't understand. **Make reasonable requests, not demands.**