Questions and Suggestions about Choosing & Working with an Advisor
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This document was originally designed for the Women's and Gender Studies Graduate Minors by Cara Jones, in consultation with Michelle Massé, and meant to serve as suggestions for students in departments across the campus. Current revisions of the document focus more specifically upon issues specific to the Department of English. Please contact Jordan Von Cannon (jvonca1@lsu.edu) if you have suggestions.

Choosing an Advisor:
As you begin the process of selecting your advisor, you first need to take the time to research potential advisors on your own. You want to gain a better understanding of the professor’s current research interests, work load, commitments within the department/university/profession, etc. You can gather this information by talking to fellow graduate students, the first-year faculty advisor, and through information on the English department web page. By knowing this information, you will be better prepared when meeting with this professor for the first time to talk about your own research interests and plans.

Things to find out about potential advisors:
1. What reputations do they have as advisors?
   a. It’s a good idea to talk to several faculty members early in the game, to get a variety of perspectives on advisors. They might have knowledge of faculty members’ interests of which you’re not aware.
2. How many advisees do they have?
3. What stage of the degree are their other advisees currently at? Will you be preparing for your general exams or writing your dissertation alongside another student with the same advisor?
4. How many students have they graduated?
5. How do they treat their advisees?
6. Why do you want to work with this person? (If it’s not because of research, rethink your selection).
7. Do they still work on the topic you’re interested in? Even if they’ve published on the topic, it’s always possible that they’ve moved on to very different research areas since.
8. Have you taken a course with them, attended their lectures, or read their work?
9. What percentage of their students finish?
10. How long do their students take to finish?
11. Where do their students get jobs in academic or alt-academic fields?
12. Do faculty members' other commitments negatively affect the time/energy they give to advising, or do their other commitments provide access to valuable resources?
13. Will your advisor be on campus or on leave/sabbatical?
14. Is the advisor you are interested in working with also interested in working with you?
15. Is your potential advisor active in professional organizations and up on contemporary debate in the field?
16. Does your advisor help you with your research beyond the classroom?
**IMPORTANT** If you choose not to work with someone with whom you’ve met to discuss directing the thesis or dissertation, courteously tell him or her so that other students can have the opportunity.

Remember that, because of increasingly inter- or multi-disciplinary final projects, many projects now have co-directors. Your needs may be best served by having two faculty members co-direct. If you think that this makes sense for you, discuss this with potential advisors/directors early in the process.

Once You’ve Chosen an Advisor:

1. **General Exams**
   a. How does the exam process work in your department?
   b. Are all of your committee members on the same page about these processes?
   c. What are the guidelines for scheduling exams?

2. **Prospectus & Dissertation**
   a. Expectations about roles:
      i. What do you expect or want to know as a student?
      ii. What does your advisor expect or want to know?
   b. Knowing yourself as a writer: articulating needs:
      i. How do you work as a writer? Do you want to send a set number of pages, sizeable sections or whole chapters to your advisor? How often?
      ii. How does your advisor work as a reader? Is he or she willing to read small sections? Multiple revisions?
      iii. What expectations do the rest of your committee members have about your writing? At what points do they wish to see your writing?
   c. Ground rules:
      i. How often will you communicate? By phone/email/in person?
      ii. How will you keep track of decisions made about your dissertation?
      iii. How much in advance does your advisor need to know you’ll send writing to him or her?
      iv. How quickly do you want things read?
      v. In what format does your advisor want to receive your pages (electronic and/or hard copy)?
      vii. Will your advisor have specific requirements for you to earn an "S" for your 8000 or 9000 hours?
      viii. Will your advisor read and approve all chapters before your committee members see them, or do the committee members read drafts along with your advisor?
   d. Information about the prospectus
      i. What goes into the prospectus?
      ii. Is it expected to become part of the dissertation itself?
      iii. How long should you spend on the prospectus including first and second drafts before circulating it to your committee?
      iv. How long is the proposal/dissertation expected to be?
      v. Ask for models of both prospectuses as well as dissertations.
c. Resolving Conflict: (Keep in mind that you can change advisors after general exams and that most conflicts stem from poor communication of expectations and timelines.
   i. What is the source of the conflict? Is it something that can be resolved with discussion and accommodation from both/either of you?
   ii. Is there an outside mentor (someone not on your committee—or in another department, even) you can ask for advice?

Job Market
1. What does a job portfolio look like in your department? What services do you need to register for? What assistance does your department offer?
2. What professional organizations should you join in your department?
3. Should you try to publish anything in your field? If so, what journals are in your field? How much time should you devote to publishing vs. working on generals/prospectus/dissertation?
4. What kind of timeline do each of you see for completion of your degree?
6. Should you look for non-academic employment? How?
7. What does your department do to help you prepare for the job market? What should you expect from your advisor?
8. It’s important that your committee members be willing to write you letters of recommendation for the job market—make sure that they’re on board with your timeline.
9. Also, for them to be able to write you thorough letters addressing all of your talents, they must be able to observe your teaching. Make sure to be aware of this early enough so that they’re able to observe you in the best teaching situation—while you’re teaching a literature course themed in your research area, for example. Or ask if they’re willing to let you guest lecture for them.

After Graduation
Remember to keep in touch with your advisor about your talks, publications, teaching, job prospects, and grant proposals. Although he or she usually can’t be a recommender, many will continue to advise you and read material.

Bibliography/Resources