

## Tips on Making the Most of Office Hours

Going to your professors' office hours will help you make the most of your college education. Although many students find the idea of talking to their professors intimidating, professors enjoy office hours. Professors want to hear from their students! Here are some tips from active and retired UC Berkeley professors, designed to boost your confidence about going to office hours.

### Why should I go to office hours?

Office hours are an opportunity to ask your professors or teaching assistants about class content, seek clarification or talk in-depth about homework or readings, or review a paper or exam. They are a valuable resource for better understanding your professors' expectations. Office hours are a great opportunity to get to know your professor or teaching assistant, and for them to get to know you, especially in online courses and larger classes.

### But I am intimidated by the idea of talking to my professor and not sure what to say!

- Make it a routine. Each semester, make it a goal to attend at least one office hour for each of your classes.
- Think of office hours as a 3-step process: 1) deciding what you want to talk about (*before*), 2) talking with your professor (*during*), and 3) the takeaway (*after*).
- Get to know a little about your professor before you meet: look up their academic background and current research. This can generate questions to ask.
- Most professors want to know about you! You can share what draws you to your field of study, what are you excited about, what challenges you are struggling with, what you hope to gain from a class or from being at Berkeley.
- If you have fallen behind or are struggling, your professors *want* to hear from you early in the semester to help you and come up with a plan. It actually helps them to find out where students are struggling and what's not clear.

### Do I need to prepare?

Here are some more tips that will help you make the most of your time with faculty:

- Faculty can be most helpful if you ask specific questions. "Do you take students on archaeological excavations?" is easier to answer than, "Are archaeological excavations important?"
- You don't have to bring a concrete question or problem. It's enough to tell your professor "I can't shape my question but here's what's going on."
- If you plan to talk about a course you are in, be sure to review the syllabus beforehand.
- If possible, let your professor know in advance what you'd like to talk about and how much time you'd like (it is reasonable to request 20-30 minutes).

### **When should I see my Graduate Student Instructor or TA, and when should I see my professor?**

- Contact the person who graded your assignment or test first. They will be able to answer your questions or speak to your concerns.
- If you are confused about what a professor said in class, sign up for the professor's office hours or make an appointment.

### **Can I email my concerns instead of meeting in person?**

- Most professors prefer to discuss complex issues in person rather than through lengthy email exchanges.
- You can send a brief email to a professor and ask about meeting in person or speaking by Zoom or phone.

### **Is it okay to ask for help with my writing?**

- Office hours are an excellent way to get feedback on your writing. Bring a rough draft and ask your professor how you can improve it.
- For feedback after your writing has been graded, make an appointment with the person who graded it.

### **Is it okay to use office hours to talk about internships and career advice?**

- Office hours are an excellent way to ask about internships or careers. This can be particularly fruitful once your professor has gotten to know you better.
- You may want to schedule a specific meeting to address internships or career questions outside of office hours.
- If you are interested in pursuing a career in a field outside your major, you can schedule a meeting with a faculty member in the area you're interested in.

### **Is it okay to sign up for office hours as a group?**

- Most faculty are okay with groups in office hours. Ask ahead of time to make sure.
- Discuss with your group in advance what you'd like to talk about.
- Attending as a group can be helpful if you prefer to listen to and learn from what others are asking.

### **Is it okay to ask for a letter of recommendation during office hours?**

- If you'd like your professor to write a letter of recommendation for you, it's important that you attend their office hours. They want to get to know you first.
- Some faculty have a letter-writing process. Don't wait until the last minute to ask. Plan ahead!
- It is part of a professor's job to write a letter of recommendation and faculty are used to it. Don't hesitate to ask and be persistent.
- You can approach your GSI instead of your professor if you have most of your one-on-one interactions with the GSI and they have gotten to know you better. You could also ask if your professor is willing to cosign the letter together with the GSI.