

Dear First Year Student:

We hope that one of the reasons you came to Brandeis is because our faculty are great teachers and researchers, but we also want to tell you that they are great resources for you and your fellow students. In order to help you get the most from your relationships with professors, we'd like to offer some suggestions for maximizing your connections to faculty, this year and beyond. **Developing connections with your instructors will help you do better academically**, and will also help faculty guide you to the most appropriate academic, research, fellowship and internship opportunities.

Since we are also students, we know that some professors come off as intimidating, with all those books, awards and grants, but remember that they also have families, are passionate about non-academic topics and are skilled in various and diverse activities. Here is a list of ideas we came up with to help professors get to know you better:

- Help professors get to know your name by **introducing yourself every time** you meet with them, including during after-class conversations. Don't be offended if it takes a while for your name to stick in their memory, especially in a large class.
- When a professor invites you to meet during office hours, go! **Attend office hours**, even if you don't receive a specific invitation. If it makes you feel more comfortable, go with another member of the class. Introduce yourself, and **don't feel that you need to only talk about the course**. Even if you don't have a question to ask, attend recitation/office hours with a friend who might have questions so that you can initiate a relationship with your professor.
- If it seems intimidating at first to talk to a professor face-to-face, **take advantage of email communications**. Write an email with questions, or to say that you'll be dropping by during office hours. Once you have conversed via email, it may be easier to "break the ice" when you meet.
- When meeting with faculty during office hours or on other occasions (such as events organized by Undergraduate Departmental Representatives or Community Advisors), **feel free to ask about the professor's** research interests, what universities they've attended, other jobs they've had, what opportunities exist within the department/major, and next term's course options. **Tell them about what you are doing on and off campus**, and something about your academic and career goals, even if you are still undecided or exploring different disciplines.
- If your first encounter with a professor in office hours feels awkward, **don't be discouraged**. Try again.
- **Ask a sophomore, junior or senior** (for example, an Undergraduate Departmental Representative or Roosevelt Fellow) **to recommend or introduce you to a favorite professor**, during office hours. Watch how the two of them interact and join in the discussion. If you are a member of a club, ask the club leaders if they have collaborated with professors who have shown interest in the club's aims, so that you can also seek them out as individuals with a common interest.

- Make an effort to **connect with the Undergraduate Advising Head for your desired major**. Since UAHs advise many first-years on a regular basis, they are especially attuned to students' needs and are very open to talking with undergrads about everything. Advising heads can give you valuable insights about classes and majors to help you succeed at Brandeis.
- When signing up for spring classes, **consider enrolling in a class of 25 students or less**, which will make it easier for you to get to know the instructor, and easier for the instructor to get to know you.
- **Attend out of classroom activities**, lectures or other events that your instructor announces s/he will be attending. Once you become involved in clubs and organizations or performances or athletics, invite your instructors to attend a performance or event.
- If/when your professor tells you that they are available to meet for breakfast or lunch in Sherman or Usdan, and asks you sign up to do so, **sign up!** However, if you miss this opportunity or it doesn't arise or you want to spend more time with him/her, then **take advantage of the Student Union sponsored "Take Your Professor to Lunch" biannual program**, and have lunch together in the Faculty Club. If you think it would be more comfortable to meet the professor in a group, find one or two other classmates to join you.

Establishing a connection with your professors is a valuable and enriching skill to learn. It won't happen without a little effort on your part, but you'll find that sending that email, or asking that question, or staying behind those few extra minutes after class will greatly contribute to your Brandeis experience. Relationships with professors can last long after graduation, and are one of the sustainable, long term results of a college education.

Remember, we are here to help you navigate through this first year and through the rest of your college experience. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

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