Dear First Year Student:

We hope that one of the many reasons you came to Brandeis is because our faculty are great teachers and researchers, but we also want you to know that they are great resources for you and your fellow students. To help you get the most from your relationships with professors, we’d like to offer some suggestions to assist you in building your connections with Brandeis faculty, this year and beyond. Developing connections with your instructors will help you do better academically, learn more about relevant academic, research, fellowship, and internship opportunities, and figure out your path and long-term goals for making a difference in the world.

As your peers, we Undergraduate Departmental Representatives (UDRs) and Roosevelt Fellows know that professors may come off as intimidating, with all their academic accomplishments, but remember that they also live their lives like regular people, with families to attend to, and passions for non-academic topics. We have put together a list of ideas to help you build relationships with professors right away:

- Asking questions and actively participating in class facilitates future discussions with the professor, both in and out of class. If it seems daunting to talk to a professor face-to-face, communicate via email. 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 in person.

- Help professors get to know your name by introducing yourself every time you meet with them, including after-class conversations. Don’t hesitate to approach a professor at the end of a lecture if an idea interests you or a concept confuses you. Doing so demonstrates that you have a passion for the subject. Don’t be offended if it takes a while for your name to stick in their memory, especially in a large class.

- Attend out of classroom activities, lectures or other events that your instructor announces s/he will be attending or leading. Once you become involved in clubs and organizations or performances or athletics, invite your instructors to attend a performance or event.

- When a professor invites you to meet during office hours, go! Attend office hours, even if you don’t receive a specific invitation. You can also ask via e-mail to schedule an appointment if you are not available during a professor’s regularly scheduled office hours. If it makes you feel more comfortable, go with another member of the class. Introduce yourself, and feel free to talk about things that may or may not be related to the course. Many professors have interesting life stories and career paths, which may surprise you. Even if you don’t have a question, attend recitation/office hours with a friend who might have questions so your professor can put a name to your face. If your first encounter with a professor in office hours or via e-mail feels awkward, don’t be discouraged. Try again.

- When meeting with faculty during office hours or in other settings (such as events organized by UDRs, or Roosevelt Fellows), 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 what other courses they teach (learn about their background by clicking on the Brandeis Faculty Guide). If you read something they have written, ask them questions about or discuss the ideas in the
Tell them about what you are doing on and off campus, and about your academic and career goals, even if you are still undecided or exploring different disciplines.

• If/when your professor invites students out for coffee or lunch, accept the invitation! If you miss this opportunity or it doesn't arise or you want to spend more time with him/her, take advantage of the Student Union sponsored "Take Your Professor to Lunch" biannual program or simply extend an invitation to 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.

• Make an effort to connect with the Undergraduate Advising Head (UAH) for your desired major. If you don't know who your UAH is, ask your UDR. 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 that can help you succeed at Brandeis.

• When signing up for classes, consider enrolling in classes with 25 students or less; the smaller class size will make it easier for you to get to know the instructor, and easier for the instructor to get to know you.

Establishing a connection with your professors is a valuable and enriching experience. 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 education. 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,

Undergraduates Departmental Representatives
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Roosevelt Fellows
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