

## How to Communicate with your Professors and TAs (Teaching Assistants)

During summer orientation you probably heard some of the best advice you'll ever receive: "make sure you get to know your professors and T.A.'s." For many of us, this seems like a task much easier said than done. Students usually have a long list of reasons for not going to see their instructors such as: "they're too busy and important, they doesn't have time to talk to me" or "my class is so huge, there's no way my instructor will care about *my* progress." It's good to keep in mind that at a university as large as UT Austin, **making contact with professors and teaching assistants**, outside of class time, will benefit you both now and later. At some point in the near future, you will need to obtain letters of recommendation or references for job and graduate school applications, scholarships, or summer programs. Making contact with your instructors while you are in their class is the best way to ensure that they will remember you and have things to say about you.

### 1. Go see your instructor or teaching assistant...

- ...during her or his office hours. If you are not free during your posted office hours, set up an appointment. Remember that email is not a substitute for visiting your instructor or TA.
- ...if you need clarification on an issue discussed in class, are confused by something you've read for class, or you did poorly on an assignment and want suggestions for improvement.
- ...if you're interested in pursuing a major, graduate school degree, or research project in your instructor's or TA's area of expertise, or if you're interested in the course material and would like to know how you can learn more and where to find it.
- ...if you want advice about other courses to take here at UT that would follow up your current course material.

### 2. Before you go see your instructor or teaching assistant, you may want to...

- ...plan out your questions ahead of time; even better, write them down so you can make sure that you cover all of them when you sit down with your instructor or TA.
- ...take all of your previous graded work (papers, tests, assignments) with you, along with your notebook and texts. This way, you and your instructor or TA will be able to use these as references to determine what you could have included or done differently.
- ...if you are thinking about a major or graduate school program in your instructor's area of expertise, consider asking these types of questions:
  1. What led you to your interest in this field?
  2. What are your primary research interests?
  3. Are there internship or research opportunities that relate directly to this major?
  4. How should I begin to prepare for graduate school?
  5. I would like to find out more about our course's subject. What texts and/or authors do you recommend?

### 3. The Big Picture...

When you do visit your instructor or TA, relax and be friendly, honest, open, and respectful. Keep in mind that your instructor is teaching the course because s/he loves the subject and would like nothing more than to interest you in the material. Earn your grades, be open to your instructor's suggestions, and, if you have questions, ask. Make sure that you leave their office with your questions answered and/or a clear plan of how to improve your class performance. Keep in mind that most instructors consider contact with their students outside of the classroom to be both an enjoyable and rewarding part of their profession.