

Notes for potential PhD advisees

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I am happy to advise students who demonstrate seriousness and commitment to research in areas in which I am qualified to advise them. Although the meaning of that sentence may be clear, I have found in the past that it is worth emphasizing what I expect, concretely, of advisees (or potential advisees).

1. Come prepared to meetings. The best approach is to write up a page or two on the ideas you would like to discuss. The notes need not be exhaustive, but they often help to keep the meeting focused.
2. Attend the development seminar and the development colloquium. Although it may not be obvious, I notice who attends the seminar and colloquium, as do my colleagues who teach development. If you are doing research in development-related areas, you should be attending the development seminar on a regular basis. You should also be a regular attendee of other seminars that are related to your work (i.e. the Applied Micro seminar for students doing development and labor, or the International seminar for students doing development and trade.)
3. Set up an appointment ahead of time. I prefer that you not “drop in” to meet with me. Send me an email to request an appointment. If I have scheduled office hours, then it is ok to drop in, but my office hours will often be taken up by SIPA students. The best thing for PhD students to do is send an email ahead of time. I will typically schedule you for 20 minutes; that should be enough time if you come prepared (see point 1 above).
4. Work hard between meetings. If I make a concrete suggestion about something to do, then you should do it, or at least attempt to do it (I realize that not all of my suggestions will be feasible), before requesting another meeting.
5. Take my PhD class. If you think that you may want me to be a formal advisor of yours – i.e. to be on your dissertation committee or write letters for recommendation for you – then you should take my class. When advising students who have not taken my class, I find that I often spend time explaining material that I have covered there, which is not efficient. I understand that it is not always possible to take my class in a given year, either because of scheduling conflicts or because I am on leave, but in such cases you should make an effort to take or sit in on the class in a subsequent year. Note that this rule applies to those who would like to have me as a formal advisor; you do not have to have taken my class in order to request a meeting.
6. Be judicious in asking me to read drafts of your papers. Reading drafts is time-consuming. I consider it part of the responsibility of a formal advisor (see point 5 above) to read drafts of job market papers and dissertation chapters, but I ask that you be respectful of my time. I will not be enthusiastic about reading a paper that a student has clearly put little time into, or the third or fourth draft of a paper that has only changed marginally since the last time I read it.

These notes are not to scare you off. It is just that I find advising relationships work more smoothly if the expectations are established at the outset. Happy researching!