



WHO ARE YOUR INSTRUCTORS?

Your instructors will likely fall into one of three categories: professors, lecturers, and graduate teaching assistants. Professors are faculty (typically holding a terminal degree in their discipline) who teach undergraduate classes and do some type of research at the University. If they meet stringent performance criteria for these activities over a period of years, then they can be granted a form of academic freedom and job security known as tenure.

Lecturers are teaching faculty who may or may not hold the terminal degree in their field, and who are in temporary faculty positions not eligible for tenure. Graduate teaching assistants (commonly known as TAs) are graduate students currently working on a masters or doctoral degree who gain teaching experience and help pay for their education by assisting with undergraduate courses.

Most lecture and seminar courses that you take at the University are taught either by professors or lecturers. Lab and discussion sections are often taught by TAs, although lecturers and professors may teach them as well. Your instructor will indicate to you their academic status and how they would like to be addressed. Depending on the individual, Doctor is an appropriate title for those with the Ph.D. degree. Professor is a term typically reserved for faculty in tenure track positions.

The titles Mr., Mrs., or Ms. are appropriate for those without a doctorate who are in non-tenure track positions. Many instructors will be happy for you to address them on a first-name basis once they get to know you, but as a matter of professional etiquette, you should not do so until given permission by the specific instructor.

This can be done right before or after class, during office hours, or at chance meetings on campus. The important thing is to do it, since a prerequisite for developing a positive relationship with an instructor is for them to know who you are. In general, you will find that faculty are very interested in their students as people, not just as bodies in a classroom, and that they will be happy to get to know you better.

When you first meet the instructor, tell them a bit about your background, your interests, and your goals for a college education. Find out what the instructor likes to do beyond the course subject to see if you have common interests. Taking the time to establish such contact early on will often pay benefits later when you need help with course material, advice on future courses to take, letters of recommendation, etc.

Another good way to establish relationships with faculty is to become part of the many diverse student organizations for which faculty serve as sponsors. The Office of Student Affairs on campus can provide you with a listing of these organizations and their contact information.

Having built such relationships can be invaluable when applying for graduate school or jobs, because those applications typically require letters of recommendation from faculty. If an instructor knows you as more than just a student in one of his/her courses, then the letter they write will have much more impact on a reader. Like good friendships, such relationships take time to cultivate, so begin getting to know your faculty as soon as possible.

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