

## **TIPS FROM THE DEAN:** **How to Use Office Hours Effectively: A Guide**

A Guest Column by Prof. Ayesha Ramachandran, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature

Office hours are a supplement to time in class and can be an important part of your experience in a course because they support learning and develop skills that can't always be addressed in a classroom setting. Office hours can include supplemental advice, coaching and clarification of the course materials, but they also involve crucial professional inter-personal skills such as formulating precise questions, asking for and learning to use feedback, identifying your own strengths and struggles as a learner, and finding workable solutions. Office hours are another pedagogical space—not as formal as the classroom but governed by a similar etiquette—that offer an alternate learning environment which different students will use in different ways. Of course, visiting a professor during office hours does not automatically improve your grade. You will need to transfer the feedback you have received into your assignments in order to see an improvement in your grade. Here are some things to keep in mind when you plan to stop by during office hours so that you can use your time effectively:

“Office hours” are a special time set aside each week by the professor to help students who are enrolled in a course in various supplemental ways. This can include additional coaching on an aspect of the course that a student is struggling with, clarification of something said/discussed in class, help with developing a paper topic/argument etc.

Office hours appointments typically last 10-30 minutes. If you have a question that you think requires more time than this, you should email ahead of time to explain your question/concern and discuss an appropriate time to meet. Remember that a professor often only holds 2 office hours a week for all the students enrolled in the course. Be mindful of students who may be waiting outside.

Sign up for office hours. Many professors have a sign-up sheet on their door and ask that you sign up for a 10-15-minute appointment. This helps prevent people waiting for a long time and helps everyone have a more efficient use of time.

Come with a specific question. Come to your appointment with a specific question or concern. This will help us to get the most out of our time together. Also: learning to formulate a clear question or problem is an important skill that will help you

understand your own strengths and challenges better; it will also teach you how to make the most of work-related meetings and discussions.

Know when to use email and when to use office hours. Questions that are short, pointed and focused can frequently be answered via email. Office hours should be saved for conversations, discussions or coaching sessions.