**FINDING A MENTOR**

**Mentors must be Elon full-time faculty on long-term contracts in the department of the student’s major.**

**PROCESS FOR FINDING A MENTOR**

**SELF-ANALYSIS**

Before beginning this process, it is extremely helpful to sit and think carefully about your own interests, goals, and needs in conducting undergraduate research. Write them out. They will no doubt change, but it’s useful to have a concrete list in front of you. Sometimes what ends up there may surprise you.

If you approach a faculty member without having gone through this process, you may find you hit some serious obstacles later on. Some areas you should consider include:

* **General Interests**: What are most interested in? These topics may emerge from your general intellectual interests, disciplinary study, class readings and discussion, contemporary events, or personal interests. Don't worry about brainstorming actual research questions at this point. Instead, focus on identifying those things that you are most passionate about knowing more about.
* **Research Interests**: Consider your general interests in light of your specific discipline and the training that you have received so far. How might your discipline (or disciplines if you are double majoring) guide you towards a particular area of research? You may want to do some reading and preliminary research to help clarify some of the areas you initially think you are interested in. You do not need a specific research question before seeking out a mentor. In fact, you should work with your mentor to develop and finalize a research question that addresses your interests and goals and that intersects with their research agendas, methods, and questions. You will need to be flexible when articulating your interests, so that you can work with your mentor. But you should inform yourself of the general areas of research you are most interested in.
* **Goals**: What do you hope to get out of your undergraduate research experience? You should consider both tangible and intangible products as you consider this question. As with all of these prompts, be honest with your self. If your primary goal is to publish a journal article or stage a play, write that down. If your primary goal is to stay in a Fellows program, write that as well (and then consider whether this is sufficient for you and your mentor).
* **Needs**: What do you think you will need the most help with? Becoming familiar with the literature? Scaffolding the work? Identifying appropriate methods? Setting deadlines? Making connections to other scholars doing similar work? Consider what you need most out of a mentor and consider how you might rank the various criteria listed in the section below.

**FACULTY EXPLORATION**

Once you have thought carefully about your own interests, goals and needs, you should begin to search for faculty mentors who might have the interests and skills to be able to mentor you. Remember: there are many different models for how a student and a faculty mentor develop and carry out a project together.

* Begin by learning as much about the faculty in your discipline as possible. The kinds of things you will want to consider are listed in the section below titled “Criteria: What to Look For.” Also, talk to other Honors Fellows to get a sense of how different faculty mentor undergraduate research.
* Read the scholarship of the faculty members you think align most closely with your own interests.
* Set up a meeting with these faculty members to *discuss their scholarship as well as your own interests, to see if there are shared interests*. This should not be approached as an “interview” where you decide whether or not to “hire” a faculty member. Rather, mentoring relationships often grow out of a sense of shared interests and goals.
* Continue to talk with possible faculty members, clarifying the answers to the criteria below and revisiting your own self-assessment, so that you can make the most informed decision.
* Finally, keep in mind that just because you have identified someone you want to be your mentor does not mean that the faculty member will a) have the time or availability to mentor you, b) be convinced that their expertise in your research topic is sufficient to mentor you successfully, or c) be convinced that your goals and theirs line up sufficiently to invest the significant amount of time it takes to mentor solid undergraduate research.

**CRITERIA: WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

Because different disciplines have different expectations, and because different students require different kinds of help in the research process, each student may weigh these criteria differently in terms of what is most important for their own growth and to ensure their success in their research experience.

**ACADEMIC OVERLAP**

Consider the areas of research that you are most interested and passionate about. Identify as many areas, topics, themes, theories and methodologies that apply since the one specific project you initially find interesting may not be an area in which a faculty member at Elon can successfully mentor you. Most Fellows programs require that your mentor be in the department in which you are majoring. **You and your mentor should find overlap in at least two if not more of the following categories**:

* **Topical Overlap**
* **Thematic Overlap**
* **Methodological Overlap**
* **Theoretical Overlap**

**RESEARCH AGENDA**

Consider the nature and degree to which a faculty member is actively engaged in the kind of research you are interested in. Some of this information may be online under the faculty’s profile or in a departmental notebook. Faculty CVs will also include much of this information. You should also have conversations with your potential faculty members, ideally after you have read some of their scholarship to see if there might be a good fit.

* **Active research agenda**: Consider the degree to which the faculty member is involved in on-going research, whether just beginning a new project, knee deep in a project or series of projects, or wrapping up a project. Is there a pattern of consistent research over the faculty member’s time as a professor?
* **Coherent research agenda:** Consider the patterns that connect the faculty member’s various research projects. Identifying the common elements of various projects will give you a better idea of where the faculty member’s expertise and interests are grounded.
* **Engagement with scholarly community**: Is the faculty member engaged with scholars outside of Elon as well as within Elon? Has the faculty member published his or her research in appropriate venues to encourage dialogue among fellow scholars? In many cases, you might also ask whether the faculty member has engaged with other relevant communities including the larger public, whether through publications, public talks, blogs, etc.

**PAST MENTORING**

Consider the past mentoring of faculty, both in terms of quantity and quality. You can look at previous mentored work submitted for Fellows requirements that are available online or through the various Fellows program directors, talk to current students who are being mentored, and talk with faculty directly, particularly in terms of projects that may not have been developed as part of a Fellows program. Attending SURF presentations mentored by faculty who might be a good mentor for you can also be useful.

* **Degree of Previous Experience with Mentoring:** What topics covered? How many students mentored? (Remember, new faculty should not be expected to have much past experience mentoring, but will often have recently been on the other side of the mentoring process as they earned their Ph.D.s, giving them a useful perspective on the process).
* **Quality of Past Mentoring Experiences**: Read through past research projects for an idea of the topic, scope, and quality of the work produced by past mentees. Keep in mind that not all projects may have been “A” work.

**COMPATABILITY**

* **Shared Vision**: Have you talked with the prospective mentor and discussed goals for the research? Do you both share a vision for what you want to accomplish? How about scope? Are you hoping to apply your research to some contemporary issue? Do you want to focus on the theoretical dimensions of the issue?
* **Shared process and expectations**: What your expectations for the research process. Consider them carefully and be sure to discuss these with the faculty.
* **Personality compatibility**: How well do you know the faculty member? In what contexts? Do you find conversations with the faculty member interesting, insightful, engaging, and useful? Can you see yourself working closely with this person for the next 2 years? (Note: When both students and faculty discuss this criteria for choosing a mentor, *beginning* students often value it very highly while faculty tend to focus more heavily on other criteria, particularly academic overlap.)