

Three Things About Office Hours, Advising, Recommendations



Office Hours

Visit faculty office hours regularly for guidance and feedback. They are ideal for discussing research, brainstorming projects, and tracking academic progress.



Advising

ICEP support is a partnership: Faculty guide your academic vision, Peer Advisors share practical student insights, and staff manage essential logistics.



Letters of Recommendation

Secure strong recommendations by choosing mentors familiar with your work. Provide them with ample time, context, and updated materials early.



THREE Things You Should Know about Office Hours, Advising, Requests for Letters of Recommendation

1. Office Hours

Make regular use of faculty office hours as a space for conversation, guidance, and academic support. Office hours are ideal for quick questions, feedback on work in progress, course planning, research ideas, Integrative Project (IP) brainstorming, and general check-ins about your progress in the program. You don't need to wait for a problem to arise—many students use office hours to explore ideas, clarify expectations, or think through next steps. You can find faculty office hours and scheduling information in the weekly *Grace Dodge Notes*, on course syllabi, faculty webpages, and in faculty email signatures.

How to prepare

- Bring 1–3 concrete questions or goals (e.g., “how can I narrow my IP topic?” “Which 2 electives best fit my interests?”)
- Have relevant documents available and/or open on your laptop: degree audit/plan, CV, paper/assignment draft, or reading notes
- If you're discussing a draft, email it 24–48 hours ahead with 2–3 questions or points for feedback
- When you attend office hours, come with specific questions or topics (course selection, research ideas, integrative project, etc.)

Etiquette:

- Arrive on time or a minute early;
- Be respectful of the time slot; if you need more time, ask to schedule a follow-up; always ask for permission in advance before booking back-to-back timeslots for longer conversations. If you can't make it, cancel/reschedule at least 12 hours beforehand.

Pro tip: Keep a running “Faculty Notes” document (date, topics, decisions, next steps). It speeds up future meetings and LOR requests.

2. Advising

Advising in ICEP is a shared effort, and students benefit most when they use each layer of support intentionally. Your **Faculty Advisor** is your primary guide for degree planning, course selection or changes, choosing electives that fit your goals, shaping your Integrative Project (IP), and thinking through academic, professional, and research pathways. **Peer Advisors** are a great resource for informal, practical advice—such as navigating registration, understanding the “vibe” and workload of different courses, sequencing your classes, and finding useful campus resources. The **Program Assistant** and staff support the logistical side of your studies, including PINs, forms, deadlines, graduation audits, and program events. Knowing who to contact for what will save you time and help you get better, more targeted support.

What you should do and when

- Before registration each term: prepare a draft of 3–5 course options and backup courses; share with Peer Advisor (optional) and meet with Faculty Advisor for suggestions and advice.
- If you plan to change clusters (for instance after your second semester) you must discuss it with your Faculty Advisor.
- When considering courses outside ICEP (e.g., cross-registration), always check with your Faculty Advisor about how those credits will fit your degree plan.
- Integrative Project (IP): For Master’s students, start thinking at least one semester before intended graduation; consult with your Faculty Advisor about your IP options.
- Stay proactive: Don’t wait until problems arise (registration issues, full courses, credit applicability). Use the advising structure early and often.

Pro tip: keep your Course Planning Worksheet updated and bring it with you to advising meetings.

3. Requests for Letters of Recommendation

Strong letters of recommendation are an important part of applications for doctoral programs, fellowships, internships, and other professional opportunities, and **the goal is to secure a tailored, thoughtful letter that speaks to your academic abilities, professional potential, and fit for the specific opportunity.** Choose recommenders who know your work well and can comment on it in concrete ways. Reach out early, and share relevant materials (e.g., your CV, draft statement, and a brief description of what you’re applying for and why). The more context and time you give your recommender, the stronger and more specific the letter is likely to be.

When to ask

- Plan ahead and ask 2-4 weeks before the deadline (earlier in busy seasons: Oct–Dec, Feb–Mar).
- For multiple deadlines or schools, bundle them in one ask with a table.

Whom to ask

- Faculty who know your work well - the instructor(s) whose course(s) you excelled in, research, interaction in office hours, etc.
 - Ideally, you should ask faculty that you have taken *at least 2* courses with and/or worked as an RA, etc (especially for recommendations for doctoral programs).
- Don’t ask faculty who barely know you or your work or if you have not taken a class with them.

What to provide (*but first check with faculty if they have specific requirements that you can follow*):

- **LOR cover sheet** (or email body) with: purpose, deadlines, how to submit, waiver status.
- **Your materials:** CV/resume, unofficial transcript, draft statement of purpose, select paper/project with a 2–3 sentence summary.
- **Talking points (bullet list):** 3–5 highlights they might cite (e.g., “top 5% in X course,” “led team on Y project,” “bilingual data collection”).
- **Name consistency:** ensure your name matches application systems.

Afterwards

- Send a polite reminder: 1 week before the deadline (if they haven’t confirmed).

- After the letter is submitted, send a thank-you note (email or handwritten).
- Keep the recommender updated on the result/outcome — maintaining the relationship matters.

Quick dos & don'ts

- **Do** waive your right to view the letter (signals candor), unless you have a reason not to.
- **Don't** send last-minute requests.

Pro tip: Having good grades on written assignments is not sufficient for receiving strong letters of recommendation for application to doctoral programs. Active participation in class is indispensable and will be commented on in recommendation letters. In addition, collaboration on research projects within or outside of TC, presentation at academic conferences, editing support in academic journals, and publications are examples of activities that increase your chances of receiving a strong recommendation letter from faculty.