PhD Seminar

Choosing an Advisor

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The Advisor-Student Relationship

• The choice of your advisor is one of the most important decisions of your life
• The advisor-student relationship is lifetime
• You must be mutually respectful, professional, and be comfortable with each other
• You have a two-variable optimization problem:
  1. Advisor
  2. Thesis topic

Both variables are equally important
Student Motivation and Management

Advisors have different ways to motivate students:

- Fear
- Caresses
- Carrots
- By example

What works best for you?

What is most comfortable for you?
Publishing Issues

• How good is your advisor at writing?
  – Can your advisor complement your writing?
  – Can your advisor teach you what you do not know?
• Does your advisor publish much with students?
• Who does most of the writing?
• Where does your advisor publish?
• What order of authors does your advisor use?
Practical Concerns

• Is your advisor “research active” (publishing)?
• How many students has your advisor graduated?
• Will your advisor be here until you finish?
• Does your advisor have funding?
• How responsive is your advisor?
• How long do your advisor’s students take to finish?
• Where do your advisor’s students work now?
Junior vs Senior Faculty

• **Junior faculty** typically:
  – Work harder on research
  – Are more anxious to publish
  – Have more time for students
  – Need to graduate students

• **Senior faculty** typically:
  – Get more done with less effort
  – Have more funding
  – Have more experience advising students
  – Have a track record that can be evaluated
  – Expect more independence
Standing in the Field

• Is your advisor known in his or her field?
  – Do you want to work within your advisor’s core area of competence?
  – If not, how far away?

• Does your advisor
  – Serve on conference program committees?
    • Program chair?
  – Journal editorial boards?
    • Editor-in-chief?
  – Regularly review papers?

• Does your advisor have contacts that can help you in your future career?
Advisor’s Responsibilities

- Technical issues
- How to write papers
- How to make presentations
- How to interact with other members of the profession
- How to write proposals

University faculty are measured by the quality of their students’ work
The Role of the Committee

• Form the committee for the research, not the comps
• The committee should be people who:
  – Can contribute technically to your thesis
  – Will proactively read your thesis and offer helpful advice
  – Won't give you too much of a hard time (ie, won't fight with your advisor)
  – Will be able to help your future career (ie, with reference letters, etc)
  – You can talk to comfortably (perhaps regarding complaints about your advisor)