

Choosing and Working with an Advisor and Committee  
Wednesday Awareness Workshop – February 27, 2008  
Office of Graduate Studies, UCSD

A good advisor will serve as a mentor as well as a source of technical assistance. A mentor should provide, or help you to find, the resources you need (financial, equipment, and psychological support); introduce you and promote your work to important people in your field; encourage your own interests, rather than promoting their own; be available to give you advice on the direction of your thesis and your career; and help you to find a job when you finish.

*How to be a Good Graduate Student, Marie desJardins*

- ❖ How many advisees does this person have? What is the average time their Ph.D. students take to finish their degrees? What is the dropout rate for their students? (How does this compare with others in the department?) Where do their students go when they finish?
- ❖ Is the advisor's personality appealing and compatible with your own? What kind of person do you expect your advisor to be? What kind of relationship do you envision?
- ❖ What is *your* working style? What kind of interaction/guidance do you need from an advisor? Do you want someone to check up on you weekly or let you work uninterrupted for months?
- ❖ If you have, or are planning, a family, consider whether your advisor will be supportive and accommodating. Will you be expected to be in the lab seven days a week? What will happen if you have a sick child and need to reschedule a meeting?
- ❖ For lab-based sciences: Does this advisor have access to the equipment and facilities you want to use? Who are the other people in the lab? Will you work well with those people and in the existing lab environment? You're not necessarily looking for best friends here, but compatible colleagues.
- ❖ Be aware of any interpersonal conflicts between your advisor and potential committee members. You don't want their conflict to be played out all over your research.
- ❖ Look for committee members that balance out your advisor's strengths and weaknesses. Outside committee members can also be voices in your corner in the case of a departmental or personal dispute.

Further reading:

How to Be a Good Graduate Student (Marie desJardins)

<http://www.cs.indiana.edu/how.2b/how.2b.html>

So Long and Thanks for the Ph.D. (Computer Science Grad School Survival Guide)

<http://www.cs.unc.edu/~azuma/hitch4.html>

Insider's Guide to Choosing an Advisor (for laboratory sciences)

<http://www.psychwww.com/tipsheet/insider.htm>

Advice on Choosing a Research Area and Doctoral Advisor

(from UCSB Mechanical Engineering Department)

[http://www.me.ucsb.edu/dept\\_site/student\\_info/advice-area-advisor.pdf](http://www.me.ucsb.edu/dept_site/student_info/advice-area-advisor.pdf)

General Graduate School and Advisor Advice (focus on women, but useful for all)

<http://inst.eecs.berkeley.edu/~wicse/advice.html>