2009

SURF PEER ADVISORS

THE ROLE OF THE PEER ADVISOR

USEFUL RESOURCES & INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR ADVISEES

The Office for Undergraduate Research
As a Peer Advisor, you are expected to fill several critical roles in order to guide students as they construct their SURF proposals. Having received the SURF Grant and completed your own research study, you possess a wealth of experiential knowledge and understand what it takes to conduct a purposeful investigation of a topic that intrigues you. In your position as a Peer Advisor you are expected to share the lessons you learned from those experiences and give direction based on the training you receive from the Office For Undergraduate Research and the Writing Center.

More concretely, we expect Peer Advisors to take on the following responsibilities:

1. To encourage students to go over the proposal guidelines and obtain a thorough understanding of the application instructions;
2. To help direct students’ writing and serve as another audience to share ideas with; and
3. To give honest feedback and constructive criticism.

Research can be incredibly overwhelming; as a Peer Advisor you can help make the process less daunting for other students.
Defining Your Role

Serving as another audience with whom advisees can share ideas and concerns places you in a position to provide feedback on the clarity of their proposals both in terms of study design and writing quality. However, you are not their only resource.

The Role of the Faculty Advisor

Each of us has had experience designing a research study, writing a successful proposal, and conducting an investigation. None of us, however, are experts in any particular field of study. Though we can provide guidance and perhaps help enhance clarity of a project’s design as it is presented in the proposal—we are not expected to help students design their research study.

This is a critical role of the faculty advisor, and is not one you as Peer Advisors are expected to fill. For this reason, choosing the best faculty advisor for one’s research topic is incredibly salient in defining the outcome of your proposal and study altogether.

On Choosing an Advisor:

- An advisor’s research interests should closely match the students’
- An advisor should be someone who has enough time and enthusiasm to mentor the student throughout the research process, not just to write a letter of support
- An advisor should have a personality compatible with the students’

The Role of the Writing Center

If you find your advisees struggling with writing—organization, style, coherence, and so on—referring them to the Writing Center might be most helpful. Though we are trained by Writing Center staff, their staff are available explicitly for this purpose.

“The Writing Center has a wealth of tip sheets on writing available from their website, and they have skilled instructors ready to work with students on all kinds of writing challenges. Note that the Writing Center staff do not proofread or edit drafts; however, they are happy to teach proofreading skills and strategies that your advisees might apply to their proposals. Visit the Writing Center website (http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb) for more information.” – Kim Abels, Writing Center Director

Besides, it never hurts to have another reader critique one’s proposal.

Peer Advisors last year found that many advisees’ initial research proposals lacked a defined purpose, needed better-defined research questions, and needed to be more concise. Identifying the “right” faculty advisor and utilizing the Writing Center can be useful resources for students struggling with any of these issues.
The purpose of the IRB and the Office of Human Research Ethics is to ensure that all researchers follow ethical procedures in planning and carrying out research involving human subjects. Students whose proposals involve research with human subjects are required to take on online course in Human Research Ethics Training and submit an application to the IRB for approval before they can begin their research. Students may do this after their SURF proposal is funded but they must receive IRB approval before they can begin their research or receive their SURF funding. Students should be aware that their faculty research advisor must also take the Human Research Ethics Training and sign their IRB application.

**OUR Section of Website:** For Students: Research Involving Human Subjects
http://www.unc.edu/depts/our/students/students_irb.html

**Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE):**
http://www.ohre.unc.edu/
WHAT INFORMATION should you share with your Advisees?

One of the best ways to prepare your advisees to craft the best proposal possible is to ensure that they understand from the beginning what is typically expected of a standard research proposal.

Standard Components of a Research Proposal

I. Introduction and Theoretical Framework
II. Statement of the Problem
III. Purpose of the Study
IV. Questions and/or Hypotheses
V. Study Design: Methods
VI. Significance of the Study

For the SURF, it is also critical to keep in mind the feasibility of the study a student is proposing. Ensuring that the student conveys their aptitude and preparedness is key; this could include demonstrating relevant skills and experiences like:

- Language proficiency
- Interview experience
- Relevant course history
- Previous lab experience
- Previous travel abroad and demonstrated cultural sensitivity
- Knowledge of data processing software
- Previous research experience
- Contacts, especially if research involves travel

What are SURF Reviewers Looking For?

In the past, the SURF faculty reviewers judged proposals based on the following criteria:

- Evidence of a well-developed hypothesis or research question
- Feasibility including evidence of student's ability to carry out the proposed research
- Explanation of why the question is important
- Well-planned and thoroughly explained research methods
- Faculty research advisor's letter and active involvement; evidence of a solid relationship between the faculty advisor and the student

Guidelines Available on the OUR Website

http://www.unc.edu/depts/our/students/fellowship_supp/surf.html

Application Materials
- Online Application
- Written Statement
- Letter of Support
- Official Transcript

Format Requirements

Deadline: February 25, 2010 at 4:00pm

For questions or comments on your Peer Advising experience, please contact Martha Arnold at OUR
msarnold@email.unc.edu