Advising Contract

Writing a thesis or dissertation is one of the most intellectually challenging and rewarding experiences in your academic career. This document presents my expectations and strategies for successfully navigating the process. It is organized into three sections detailing: (1) my expectations as an advisor, (2) your responsibilities, and (3) recommendations for staying productive and engaged.

1. Prerequisites

Before you ask me to serve as your advisor or as a member of your committee, please carefully review this contract, send me your current résumé or CV, and a copy of your transcript.

2. Advisor-Advisee Expectations: How We Will Work Together

1. **Regular Communication:** You should be in regular contact with me. I expect you to stop by during my office hours and update me on your progress at least once a quarter. This will help us work together effectively. You should stop by as often as is useful for you.
2. **Check-in Memo:** At least 24 hours before our meeting, you should send me a one-page memo summarizing your progress since we last met and a proposed agenda for our upcoming meeting.
3. **Realistic Timeline**: Within the first several weeks of your project, we will work together to create a realistic timeline for the completion of your project that aligns with the program requirements and your personal goals.

3. Progress and Accountability: Align Your Time With Priorities

1. **Weekly progress:** My expectation is that your thesis/dissertation is a priority. You are expected to demonstrate measurable progress on your project on a weekly basis. Daily engagement with your research, even in small increments, is highly recommended for maintaining momentum.
2. **Quarterly planning:** You will develop a strategic plan every quarter to translate your goals into actionable steps. Each strategic plan should outline key milestones, anticipated challenges, and concrete next steps.
3. **Required readings and workshops:**
    a. Graduate students must read "Caltech Rules for Writing." Undergraduates must read the "Organizing Your Social Science Research Paper," though it is also helpful for graduate students.
    b. Graduate students should plan to attend the American Politics Workshop. In fact, you should show up to every department-level event or talk.

4. Best Practices

Quality research requires sustained focus, yet staying focused in a world of digital distractions is difficult. Your attention is a limited resource. Protect it. I have found that the best way to harness your focus toward what you value is to align your habits and practices concretely with your goals and aspirations.

1. ***Be curious.*** Ultimately, the goal is to write a quality thesis or dissertation; however, the journey is the real reward. Setbacks are an inevitable and critical part of the learning process. How you handle them will determine your success. Use this opportunity to stretch yourself and explore new perspectives. Be kind to yourself as you learn and grow. Learn from your mistakes and be open to feedback and alternative viewpoints.
2. ***Be accountable***. Identify your goals and values, and then track how you spend your time. At the end of the week, you should be able to report, within a minute, how you spent your working time. I use the app Timeular to track how I spend my time. The Pomodoro Technique is also useful. If you care about something, measure it.
3. ***Be organized.*** At the start of every day, you should list the priorities that you can realistically accomplish within the time that you have available. You should complete the highest-priority tasks first and proceed accordingly. Use a calendar and/or a project management program to enhance your workflow. Careful organization can significantly improve your efficiency and productivity. Zotero is an indispensable tool for academic research.
4. ***Be Present***. Avoid task switching. While you're working, only do that. Silence your phone notifications, block access to distracting sites, and focus on one thing at a time. Time blocking is a powerful productivity technique that reduces task switching and facilitates deep work.
5. ***Seek out resources to cultivate positive working habits in the digital age***. I encourage you to explore resources on productivity and deep work, such as Cal Newport's books (e.g., *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*). Moreover, I suggest you take the initiative in how you approach technology and how it affects your life. Proactively seek out ways to improve your habits and processes.
6. ***Set high expectations for yourself.*** Life is short, and writing a thesis or dissertation is a considerable time commitment. Don't waste your time with a half-hearted effort. Invest fully in the endeavor to get the most out of the experience. As the poet Charles Bukowski said, "If you're going to try, go all the way."

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____