Professors are People Too!

Faculty Mentoring is an opportunity for you to interact with faculty in a less intimidating situation. The program is designed for you to gain greater insight about your classes and how they might relate to your post-graduate goals. This is the time for you to really understand how what you do in the classroom is connected to what Engineers actually do in the real world.

Always remember that professors are people too! They are human just like you are. Don't be intimidated by them. If you have a professor that comes across “mean” or “arrogant” in the classroom, chances are that it is just their teaching style. If you feel overwhelmed in class, Faculty Mentoring and office hours is time outside of class to get to know a little more about them. They will be much more approachable one-on-one.

If a professor appears annoyed when you approach him or her, don't take it personally. Chances are it has nothing to do with you. Believe it or not, teachers do have lives off campus. They're raising families, writing books and struggling to make due financially (yeah, you're not the only one).

Meeting with Professors can help you to:

- Clarify course guidelines, the syllabus, a specific assignment, lecture, or discussion.
- Understand comments on papers or assignments.
- Improve your grades.
- Communicate about absences or illnesses.
- Get advice on graduate study or future plans.
- Make suggestions for self-improvement, books to read, etc.

Take the time to get to know them as people or show an interest in their field because they'll appreciate it. Ask what research they're working on or what books they're writing, and you'll be amazed at how accomplished some of your professors are.

Your Understanding of Coursework
If you have a question after a lecture or doing some reading, take the time to ask your professor about it after class or during office hours. You'll get the information you need to better grasp the material and give your professor the opportunity to see your interest and enthusiasm.

Your Motivation
Even if you have a perfect understanding of the class material, your professors can still help you push yourself to do your best. For example, they can give you suggestions for related reading or help you explore and choose topics for an assignment.

Your Grades
A huge advantage of seeing your professor before turning in a paper or taking a test is that the professor gains insight into how hard you prepared. This will be an important factor when it comes to grading your work, since it makes your professor more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt and to give you credit for your effort. If you don't get to know the professor, by contrast, she has no way of knowing whether your work has flaws because you didn't take enough time on it, or, as you may have explained in office hours, because it is the first lengthy research paper you've ever written.

Your Letters of Recommendation
When it comes time to apply for internships, jobs, or graduate school, you'll probably need professors to write letters of recommendation for you. They can write much better letters, of course, if they know you as more than a face in a crowd.
Your Networking Opportunities
Your professors may be able to help you plug into a professional community or even find an internship or job. For example, let's say you can't get enough of contemporary fiction, and you're considering becoming a book editor. Your creative writing teacher may be able to tell you about local author readings, invite you to book parties, or put you in touch with a publishing house.

Granted, some professors may be more approachable than others. You may get someone to answer a question after class, or someone who ends up being a mentor. But whatever role they play, they're there to help you learn. They're a resource that you shouldn't pass on.

Still don’t know what to do in your Faculty Mentoring session? Here are a few questions that you can ask your Faculty Mentor to get the session started.

How did you make the decision between teaching/research and professional practice?
What aspects of an academic career do you find most rewarding?
What advice do you have for a student who is seeking an academic career in Engineering?
What are the advantages to earning a Master's degree and/or a Doctorate?
How did you become interested in your field?
What do you think are the most important factors in an undergraduate engineering student's academic success?
What schools did you attend and how did you choose them?
What other aspects of your discipline are available to you besides the one you chose?
What is the best way to approach an instructor about working in his/her lab?
What is your research interest and how did you choose it?
What new types of engineering opportunities do you foresee?
What is the biggest obstacle that you have had to overcome professionally or academically?
How do you feel about double majoring?
How should I study to be best prepared for class?
How much study time is required for your class each week?
What academic issues did you have as an undergraduate and how did you resolve them?
What is the best way to approach you to ask questions?
What motivates you?
Which areas of your field do you find most interesting and why?
What are some good resources to find out more information about this field of Engineering?
How might your research impact every day life?