

# **BIAS Academic Support Guide**

## **2021 - 2022**

This guide describes some of the possible academic resources available to support Bennett Computer Science students, particularly students who are struggling or may need additional support in their courses. This guide uplifts and centers the experiences of students who have previously accessed different forms of support. We hope that this guide will expand your awareness of when and why one may access different forms of academic support. Academic difficulties may be deeply personal and may feel isolating, and we hope that this resource makes you feel less alone in your struggles.

While we tried our best to make this resource as thorough and comprehensive as possible, we acknowledge that it likely will not be. We greatly appreciate any feedback on how we can make our resource more comprehensive and inclusive of a wider range of experiences.

This resource was written by Sunisth Kumar in Bennett Artificial Intelligence Society. We invite all community suggestions or feedback on this document. If you have any questions or feedback, please contact [e19cse367@bennett.edu.in](mailto:e19cse367@bennett.edu.in).

## Table of Contents

<b>Individual Advocacy</b>	<b>3</b>
How to Email a Professor	4
2. Guide to Professor Office Hours	5
3. How to Ask for Help	6
<b>Academic Support Resources</b>	<b>8</b>
Academic Mentor	8
<b>Advocating to Administration</b>	<b>9</b>
The CS Department	9
SEAS (School of Engineering and Applied Sciences)	9

# Individual Advocacy

“**Individual advocacy**”, sometimes referred to as “self advocacy”, is the act of advocating for yourself and your individual needs, concerns, or wishes.

Several times throughout a semester, you may find yourself in a scenario where you have a special extenuating circumstance, wish, or need. Some examples include:

- You wake up with the flu on the morning of your midterm.
- You are applying for a scholarship and need a letter of recommendation.
- You have an assignment due later this week, and you had a particularly difficult week with family issues. You realize that you won't be able to finish it before the deadline.

In all of these scenarios, you may want to ask for something - an excusal from your midterm, a letter of recommendation, or a deadline extension - from faculty or course staff.

In college, you are your own greatest advocate. It is extremely common and completely normal to request accommodations or ask someone in a position of power to do something for you. As we discuss in this section, we encourage you to form relationships with and get to know faculty and other academic support resources (such as your academic mentor) so that you will feel more comfortable reaching out and asking for help when you may need it. However, even if you don't have an ongoing relationship with the person you're requesting accommodations from, we still encourage you to always ask.

While it is possible that not all of your accommodations or requests will be able to be met, the worst thing that can happen when you ask politely is that you'll be in the same situation that you would have been in, had you never asked.

While individual advocacy is (as the name implies) very individualized, as discussed in the “[Academic Support Resources](#)” section, you have an incredibly **large team of people supporting you** who are always available to give you advice and even help you by advocating with (or for) you. However, no one knows your own individual experiences better than yourself. Because professors, academic deans, and mentors are also busy folks with their own concerns and lives, unfortunately they won't always know what's going on in your life or your courses. We strongly encourage you to reach out to your academic mentor or other support contacts if you're struggling in your courses or anticipate an upcoming concern.

In general, we strongly recommend the following guidelines when making your request:

- Always ask for your accommodation as early as possible.

Reach out as soon as you know that you may wish to use an accommodation. This gives folks you're asking more time to consider your request and respond. Reaching out in advance also shows that you are considerate of the other person's time, and your own thoughtfulness about

your concern. If you reach out earlier, you will also get a response earlier, so if you are not granted your accommodation you can plan appropriately.

It is always possible to request a deadline extension, and then submit earlier. If you request a recommendation letter too late, then the person may just not have time to write and submit the letter before its deadline.

- When appropriate, always use a kind and polite tone.

When you're writing your email, you should consider how it would make you feel to be on its receiving end. Remember that faculty/administrators are people too, and if you are asking them to go out of their way to do something for you, then you should express your gratitude in your email.

There may be some scenarios where you feel it may be inappropriate to use a kind and/or polite tone, for example if you are voicing a complaint or concern. If you would like guidance on these kinds of scenarios, we encourage you to reach out to your academic support resources and/or the DSA office.

- If you're ever unsure, consult with your mentor.

Your mentor, and academic dean are there to help you and are professionally trained to provide academic support to students! No concern or question is too big or small. These folks could help you draft/revise your email, submit any necessary documentation if necessary to reschedule an exam, or just be a good sounding board for any other concerns you have.

## **1. How to Email a Professor**

There are several reasons why you may wish to email a professor. If you would like a course to make an exception to their typical course policy for you (such as granting you an extension, excusing your absence, etc), you will likely need to email the professor and/or the course staff. You may also wish to email your professor to request their support in opportunities you're pursuing, such as writing a recommendation letter or joining their group as a research assistant.

Before you reach out to university faculty, you should skim through the course syllabus and/or the faculty's personal website to ensure that the faculty member would be the best point of contact for your concern.

The following websites have guidelines example templates that you can use as inspiration when drafting an email to a professor:

- Guidelines for "[How to email a professor](#)"
- This Medium blog titled "[How to Email Your Professor \(without being annoying AF\)](#)"

- This USC website titled “[How to Email a Research Professor](#)”, which has templates for reaching out to professors about research opportunities

In addition to these articles, we’d like to emphasize:

- Faculty are people, just like you!
  - When writing your email, you should consider how easy it is to read and if the action items you intended the faculty member to take after reading your email are clear. You should only send emails that look like emails that you would want to read. No giant walls of text, confusing or ambiguous sentences, etc.
- You should expect a response if the faculty is teaching a course you are in.
  - Responding to emails and interacting with undergrad students is part of a professor’s job. If you don’t get a response and you need one, you can (and should!) bump your email.
- Always proofread your whole email at least once!
  - So you can catch those sneaky typos:-)

## 2. Guide to Professor Office Hours

Although faculty teaching courses in the computer science department are not required to hold “**office hours**” each week, but some do and you can always contact your faculty to organize one.

**The purpose of faculty office hours varies by course.** In some courses, faculty office hours are an opportunity for students to ask conceptual questions about the course material. In other courses, faculty office hours can serve as a more “general-purpose” opportunity for students to drop in, meet the professor, or share their concerns about the course.

### Reasons to go to faculty office hours

1. If you feel comfortable with raising a concern that you may have in-person, then you can **ask the professor to chat about your concern** at office hours.

If you are interested in getting the professor’s feedback or if you are struggling to communicate your concern via email, it may be more efficient to discuss your concern in-person. Before attending office hours to discuss your individual concern, you should consider e-mailing ahead or requesting a “slot” if available. If you’re unsure what the purpose of faculty office hours are in your course, you can also email the professor and ask what would be the most appropriate time to meet and discuss your concern.

2. If you find that you are struggling and/or would benefit from additional support in a course, we encourage you to **reach out to the professor** and potentially meet with them.

The faculty member will likely be able to provide you with more information about course support resources and the course's grading policy. Reaching out early in the semester / as soon as you begin to have concerns about your grade in the course is also helpful in that the professor now knows you and can see your interest in improving your performance in the course.

All courses in Bennett CS are graded on a curve. If you have concerns about what your final grade will be or how you are doing in the course, we strongly encourage you to reach out and ask the course instructor.

### 3. No reason at all!

If you are available during a professor's office hours, we strongly **encourage you to attend**, even if you don't have any particular questions or concerns.

Office hours are a great and casual way to get to know and develop relationships with faculty. The Bennett CS department is unique in that it is quite small - we have significantly fewer students (and fewer faculty) than CS departments at other schools. Most CS faculty at Bennett chose to become a professor because they love teaching and interacting with college students - they would be making three times as much if they were doing the same research in industry! - and would be happy to chat with you about their research, their professional development/journey to becoming faculty, or just hear about your experiences as a Bennett CS student.

Here are some more helpful articles about office hours - some of them have example questions that you can ask faculty!:

- <https://adulthood.asu.edu/blog/your-fear-office-hours-about-end-guide-meeting-professors>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/05/678815966/college-students-how-to-make-office-hours-less-scary>

### 3. How to Ask for Help

This section has several linked email templates for different kinds of scenarios where you may wish to ask for help in a course.

As mentioned above, we strongly encourage you to reach out to and connect with your professor, mentor, or academic dean via email. These resources can help you draft your requests and/or even make requests for you (i.e. email the professor on your behalf) if you wish.

Asking for a deadline extension:

- <https://www.hercampus.com/lifestyle/how-ask-extension-assignment>

Sharing mental health concerns with a professor:

- <https://mhanational.org/how-talk-your-professor-about-your-mental-health>

# Academic Support Resources

If you ever find yourself struggling academically, we recommend looking into the academic resources that Bennett offers!

## Academic Mentor

- Bennett undergraduates are assigned faculty members as their mentor!
- You can contact them to seek guidance on any academic or non-academic concerns

If you feel uneasy or unsure about reaching out to your academic advisor, here are some questions that can help guide your conversation!

- What will my academic program look like? Does my current/future schedule seem manageable and realistic?
- How can I pursue my interests? What courses would you recommend and what type of flexibility do I have to explore with my requirements?
- Are there any classes that I should prepare for within my concentration? How can I prepare myself for the more advanced courses that I hope to take?
- Are there any unique academic opportunities (ex. Study Abroad) that match my interests? Are there any programs that you would recommend?
- If I'm struggling in a course, where should I look to for help? What resources would you recommend?

Please note that these questions aren't meant to be comprehensive and that you can ask your advisor **any question you see fit!**

Other questions can include:

- **Academic Advising** - What classes to take, degree logistics, and general academic advising
- **Career (Academia/Research)** - Getting into CS-related research at Bennett, pursuing graduate school, and future research-related paths in universities, companies, and more
- **Career (Industry/Other)** - Recruiting, interview prep, experiences at companies, student entrepreneurship
- **On Campus** - Events (gatherings, workshops, colloquia, etc.), ways to get involved, extracurriculars
- **Random Discussion** - What it sounds like but keep it CS-related and civil!



# Advocating to Administration

As you move through your academic career, you will interact with the CS department, SEAS, the College, and other administrative bodies. We want to help you feel prepared to communicate your concerns, questions, and feedback as you work with teaching staff, professors, and department staff. If you ever feel uncomfortable, or unable to do your work effectively due to members of the administration, please take a look at the resources below.

## 1. The CS Department

The CS Department takes your feedback seriously. The department is constantly working to make the environment more inclusive. There are several reasons you may feel the need to advocate to the department:

- A department-wide policy that is/can be problematic / is not inclusive.
- A classroom environment disproportionality negatively affects students of a certain identity.
- A course curriculum is not inclusive to all identities and experiences.
- Teaching staff have favored certain students over others.
- Teaching staff/professor has used problematic language in the classroom environment.
- A professor has committed microaggressions towards you or your classmate.
- And more...

When a professor/teaching staff makes you or your classmates uncomfortable, this should be brought to the department's attention. What does this mean?

### Who is "The CS Department"?

<a href="#">Dr. Deepak Garg</a> HOD CS Department.	Mode of Contact: <a href="#">Email</a>
<a href="#">Pawan Kumar</a> , CS Undergrad Program Coordinator.	Mode of Contact: <a href="#">Email</a>

## 2. SEAS (School of Engineering and Applied Sciences)

### Who is SEAS?

<a href="#">Dr. Debajyoti Mukhopadhyay</a> , Dean SEAS.	Mode of Contact: <a href="#">Email</a>
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