

Connecting with Supervisors – SPPH MSc & PhD Information Session

Wednesday, November 3 from 10am to 11am

Summary: A panel discussion with three SPPH Professors – Drs. Mieke Koehoorn, Susan Cox, and Hugh Davies. We discussed how applicants can write effective introductory emails to faculty and the attributes of characteristics of successful applicants.

Key Takeaways:

1. An email is the most common way to connect with a potential faculty supervisor. It is really important to write an email that makes an impactful first impression.
 - a. Do your homework – make sure you research the faculty member you are contacting. You might read recent news articles about the person, or read any of their recent publications.
 - b. Make it personal – Faculty members get a lot of emails. They are more likely to respond if you can tell them why you are interested in their work. Make a connection between the faculty member's interests and your own interests. Tell them about something you thought was interesting or exciting that is related to the faculty member's research area.
 - c. Demonstrate your interest in research – tell the faculty member why you are interested in pursuing research degree and why you want to gain more research skills.
2. Some qualities that faculty members look for in students are: independence, creativity, curiosity, resilience, and perseverance.
3. There are differences in requests for MSc and PhD applicants.
 - a. For MSc applicants, it's okay to have less research experience. MSc applicants might not have any publications or conference presentations. However, you can still demonstrate your interest in research and show how you demonstrate qualities that can make you a good researcher (see 2 above).
 - b. For PhD applicants, it is important to demonstrate a research trajectory. You should think about why a PhD is a good next step for you and how it will build upon work you have done in the past, and lead you to your future goals.
4. It is okay if you are switching research areas or if you come from a non-traditional background. Make sure you explain why you are making a change, and/or how you see your expertise informing and contributing to your future research.
5. We recommend that you talk to current students or recent graduates of the program and ask for their perspective and experiences. You can ask a potential supervisor to put you in touch with other students they have supervised. You can also reach out to the SPPH student organization, TAPPHS.
6. You do not need to have a detailed research proposal when you contact a faculty member.
7. You do not need to attach anything to your first email. If a faculty member wants to see your CV, transcripts, or a research paper you wrote, they will ask for it at a later date.
8. Two or three well-crafted and thoughtful emails is probably a better use of your time than many emails that are not personal and use the same general text.