I am writing this open letter to prospective graduate students who are interested in pursuing my involvement in their graduate school experience in hopes that it will provide clarity and guidance about how we might work together throughout your time at CSU. This is meant to offer you a starting point to envision our collegial advisor/advisee or mentor/mentee relationship as I want you to be able to make an informed choice about our fit.

Keep in mind that I can only take on a limited number of advisees and committees as an internal or external member. I only serve as a committee member on projects that have multiple overlapping scholarship areas with mine, either topically or methodologically. Former and current advisees / mentees have worked on the projects such as transnational and multilingual identity constructions, cultural diversity and listening in educational contexts, labor practices and marginalized identities, gender performance in a variety of contexts, loneliness as a deliberative issue, empathy and journalistic practices, discursive construction of societal values and ideologies, diversity and social support, health communication, and engaged communication projects, among others.

If I say “no” to you, it may be because I am already at capacity or because I believe that you can find a better match elsewhere. In other words, a decision to not serve on your committee is not a judgment about your worth or the quality of your project! In all cases, I encourage you to form your committee as soon as you are comfortable doing so as faculty tend to accept / decline students on a rolling basis until they reach capacity.

Ultimately, I aim to build a scholarly community marked by sustainable dialogue and creative learning where everyone can flourish. As a scholar devoted to studying listening and dialogue, diversity and difference, ethics and well-being – I strive to learn more about that in all of my relationships, research, teaching, and global community engagement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elizabeth S. Parks

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Dialogue and Diversity Specialist, Center for Public Deliberation
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QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Forming a committee can be a daunting task. There are so many different pieces to consider about research framework, topic, timing, and relational connection. This list of questions is meant to help you decide whether and how to pursue a conversation with me about committee membership. You can get a good sense of what I do and who I am as a mentor and advisor by reviewing my CV and CSU website, reading my recent publications, taking coursework with me, and talking to others who have worked with me. I expect that you will do this and to demonstrate preparation for our conversation by having answers to these questions before we talk in-person about my participation in your committee.

● What are your primary research interests and how do they intersect with mine? Be able to articulate what you are curious about studying, how you think you might go about that scholarship, and how those areas of interest relate to my scholarship.

● Why do you think I might be a good fit for your committee? Be able to articulate what you think I can contribute to your scholarship or graduate school experience, but also why you think we would work well together.

● What role are you hoping I will fill in your committee, and why? If you are asking me to be an advisor or committee member, you must have a goal for my involvement. Be able to articulate what that is, how you came to your decision, and what goals and hopes you have about our working together.

● What does your ideal advisor / committee member do for you? Being able to articulate this to me will help me determine whether I can meet your hopes, as well as determine how best to support you if we end up working together.

● What is your timeline to degree completion and graduate school values? Understanding your reason for being at CSU, your game plan, and your expectations for work-life balance will help me frame my involvement in your day-to-day education.

● What are your career goals? You may not know exactly what you want to do yet, or you may have a clear end point. Regardless, I want to support you as a whole person, no matter what that is. Do some soul searching to describe possible trajectories after graduating so I can support you in getting there.

● What are your collaboration expectations? As scholars, we each have certain research and writing expectations to meet for different audiences and communities. How do you envision us fitting into each other’s research and writing goals?

● What questions do you need answered? Knowing what you need in this moment to make a good decision can lead to asking the right questions of me during our first (and subsequent) meetings. I’m committed to answering honestly and transparently.
MENTORING PERSPECTIVE

Mentoring and coaching people to become the best version of themselves is one of my deepest joys. If you have asked and I have agreed to mentor you, I consider it both an honor and a responsibility for the duration of our relationship. I take it seriously and in a spirit of mutuality, where we both come with something to offer. As such, I expect us both to:

- Listen, communicate openly, and create an accessible and inclusive space to show up with our whole selves in our meetings and interactions. For some, that means regularly scheduled meetings while for others that means asking for help when needed. Establish these expectations with each other early.
- Be independently motivated, take initiative to meet as needed, and protect each other’s time. Trust is built on consistency. If we need something, I expect we’ll try to meet before anything becomes a crisis. I also expect us to respect each other’s time and integrate what we talk about as much as possible before we set up another time to meet, especially with feedback on papers, planning logistics, etc. I prefer most things in digital form.
- Celebrate achievements, encourage movement through tough times, and challenge each other to be the best versions of ourselves and strive for excellence. That includes meeting deadlines and offering critical feedback on our work, especially as it nears final iterations.
- Email when there are important action points to note and follow through on obligations. Respond to emails and other forms of communication within 48 hours when on contract, even if it is to explain the need for more time. (As I am on a 9-month contract, I may not be available during the summers for much mentoring support.)
- Support each other’s career goals, and not attempt to plan the other’s life or shape them into a miniature version of yourself.
- Help develop each other’s network of professional and personal mentors; we should not attempt to be all things for each other and helping each other develop a supportive social network to excel is key to long-term success. I expect us to pursue balanced lives.
- Be a team player. I mentor many undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students, both on this campus and at others. We form a community of scholars that span time and place. I expect us to be a part of that community—giving and receiving the benefit of that social support as we have the capacity to do so in different seasons of our lives.
- Point each other toward the resources needed and opportunities available to move forward with our professional goals. Ultimately, the choice will be up to each person as to whether to pursue or utilize those resources, but always work to open doors for each other.
- Be curious and ask questions. Have an “open door policy” where we create trust to seek help and feedback when needed. Ask questions to shine light on different ways of thinking and doing, and don’t give up on learning for learning’s sake.
- Respect intellectual property and confidentiality of ideas. In the world of brainstorming ideas and authentic interaction, we should look out for each other’s good and make it a safe space to process, but we should never take credit for what is not ours.