

Why Does the Statistical Consulting Center Require Student Clients to Bring Their Advisor to the Initial Meeting?

It is the policy of the Statistical Consulting Center (SCC) that we require student clients to bring their major professor or research advisor to the initial meeting with SCC consultants.

Some faculty members see this as an unnecessary imposition on their time and/or believe that their students should pursue many aspects of their research as independently as possible, including seeking advice on statistical matters.

So why do we do this?

There are several reasons:

1. Approval. Advisors should approve of the role that the SCC will play in the student's research project. We **do not** write statistical analyses for a thesis or dissertation (although we will give feedback) but we do provide advice and will do data analyses for students.
 - Very often, statistical analyses are well beyond the expertise that a student outside of the statistical sciences can reasonably obtain via coursework or on his/her own. Therefore, we feel that working with a statistician and even relying on us to implement analyses is appropriate. But ultimately, this decision is up to the student's advisor (and committee, perhaps).
2. Participation in Decisions. When consulting with the SCC, issues often arise that the advisor should weigh in on or, at least, be aware of. It is desirable for students to take ownership of their research and make many decisions on their own. Nevertheless, the advisor's input is often helpful or necessary and it is most efficient for the advisor to be present.
 - It may be that the data will not yield answers to the questions of interest because of a design flaw or other methodological problem. It may be that the analysis is much more complicated than anticipated. Decisions may be required about how to operationalize research questions, or how to prioritize them.
3. Better Communication. Again, the student should have ownership over his/her research project and be able to communicate clearly with SCC consultants about it. Doing so is good training for them. Nevertheless, it is often helpful for the advisor to offer clarifications. It is better to do so at the meeting than after the fact.
4. Billing Issues. If the student uses the SCC for more than an initial meeting he/she will incur fees for our services. If the advisor has funds to cover those costs, then it is best for the advisor to be present to discuss the fees and payment details. The advisor will want to have a clear understanding of what he/she is paying for.

5. Collaboration or Consulting? Sometimes the statistical challenges of a project are large and it may be sensible for the SCC to approach the project as a collaboration rather than a consultation. In such a situation, co-authorship and/or involvement on a grant proposal may be appropriate in lieu of an hourly fee for our work. Typically, the advisor should participate in that discussion.

6. Future Work. Finally, the SCC wants to develop ongoing relationships with researchers on campus. To this end, we want to get to know the advisor and his/her research area. We also want faculty researchers to get to know us and what we do. Building that relationship may lead to future consulting projects or collaborations that will benefit both parties.