Empowering Yourself to Solve Problems

- Don't be bashful about calling university offices for help, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

- When asking, seek to understand, not to challenge.

- Be prepared. Write down your questions before contacting a university office. Have all the information and documentation available that you may need in your discussion.

- Clarify your own thinking: What outcomes do you want? Are there other options that may be acceptable, even if not your first choice?

- Be pleasant. Treat university employees as you like to be treated. Getting angry or rude will not resolve your problem. It may only confuse the real issues.

- Keep good records and take notes. Ask for the names and titles of employees you talk with, and note the date of the conversation. Save all your letters and receipts. Ask the person or office to help you understand why they acted as they did. Ask employees to identify the rules, policies, or laws that governed their actions. Ask for copies.

- Talk to the right people. The first person you meet may not make or be able to change policy. If you cannot resolve the matter, ask to talk with a supervisor. Ask questions until you understand what happened and why.

- Read carefully all information available to you. Many university decisions may be appealed, but there are often specific criteria and deadlines. Be sure to follow appeal rules and meet deadlines.

Adapted from Before You Call by Laurie McCann, University of California, Santa Cruz.