

Invertebrate Ecology Lab

Mentee-Mentor contract

[Adapted from the Vertebrate Ecology Lab contract]

Goals of the research program

As a professor I am expected to write grants and initiate research that will contribute to science, the academic community, and to society, including training the next generation of scientists. As part of your training, you will be conducting research under my guidance. It is imperative that we follow the scientific method and conduct ourselves in an ethical way. We must always keep in mind that the ultimate goal of our research is publication in scientific journals. Dissemination of the knowledge we gain is critical to the advancement of our field. I also value outreach and informal science education, both in the classroom and while engaging with the public. I expect you to participate in this component of our lab mission while you are part of the lab group.

What I expect from you

An important part of my job as a professor is to train and advise students. I must contribute to your professional development and progress in your degree. I will help you set goals and hopefully achieve them. However, I cannot do the work for you. In general, I expect you to:

- Learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research
- Learn how to present and document your scientific findings
- Be honest, ethical, and enthusiastic
- Be engaged within the Invertebrate Ecology Lab and the MLML community. This includes participating in lab events such as Open House and attending & hosting seminars.
- Treat your lab mates, MLML community members, equipment, and yourself with respect
- Take advantage of professional development opportunities
- Obtain your degree
- Work hard—don't give up!

You will take ownership over your educational experience

- ✓ Acknowledge that **you have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of your degree**. This includes commitment to your path, courses, and thesis. You should maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards.
- ✓ Ensure that you **meet regularly with me** and provide me with updates on the progress and results of your research. Communicate new ideas that you have about your work and challenges that you are facing. I cannot advise about issues that you do not bring to my attention.
- ✓ **Heed the advice of your thesis advisor and committee and implement changes to your program based on their advice**. They collectively have decades of experience and their advice is meant to foster the best research, skill development, and scale for a project that fits the program's requirements.
- ✓ **Be knowledgeable** of the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the graduate program and your university. Make use of the MLML Graduate Program Coordinator and the Student Handbook. Comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones, and rules related to chemical safety, biosafety, and fieldwork.

- ✓ **Actively cultivate your professional development.** If there is something you want to learn more about, let me know and we can try to cover in lab meeting. Join a society and participate in meetings.

You will be a team player

- ✓ Attend and actively **participate in lab and graduate student meetings**, as well as seminars. Participation in lab meetings does not only mean presenting your own work, but also providing support to others in the lab through shared insight. Do your part to create a climate of engagement and mutual respect.
- ✓ Strive to **be the very best lab citizen**. Take part in shared lab responsibilities and use laboratory resources carefully and frugally. Maintain a safe and clean laboratory space. Be respectful, tolerant of, and work collegially with all laboratory colleagues: respect individual differences in values, personalities, work styles, and theoretical perspectives.
- ✓ **Be a good collaborator**. Engage in collaborations within and beyond our lab group. Collaborations are more than just publishing papers together. They demand effective and frequent communication, mutual respect, trust, and shared goals.
- ✓ **Acknowledge the efforts of collaborators**. This includes other members of the lab as well as those outside the lab.

You will develop strong research skills

- ✓ Take advantage of your opportunity to **learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research**.
- ✓ **Challenge yourself** by presenting your work at meetings as early as you can and by preparing scientific articles that effectively present your work to others in the field. The 'currency' in science is published papers, they drive a lot of what we do and because our lab is supported by taxpayer dollars we have an obligation to complete and disseminate our findings. You will be expected to author or make major contributions to at least one journal paper submission.
- ✓ **Keep up with the literature**. Block at least one hour per week to do literature searches.
- ✓ **Maintain detailed, organized, and accurate field and/or laboratory records and make them accessible at all times**. Be aware that your notes, records and all tangible research data are the property of the Invertebrate Ecology Lab director or MLML (unless we make other arrangements beforehand). When you leave the lab, I encourage you to take copies of your data with you. But **one full set of all data must stay in the lab, with appropriate and accessible documentation**. Regularly backup your computer data to the Google Drive folders we set up and share together.
- ✓ **Be responsive to advice and constructive criticism**. The feedback you get from me, your colleagues, your committee members, and your course instructors is intended to improve your scientific work.

You will work to meet deadlines

- ✓ **Strive to meet deadlines**: this is the only way to manage your progress. We will establish mutually agreed upon deadlines for each phase of your work during one-on-one meetings at the beginning of each term. As long as you are meeting expectations, you can largely set your own schedule. *It is your responsibility to talk with me if you are having difficulty completing your work and I will consider your progress unsatisfactory if I need to follow-up with you about meeting deadlines.*
- ✓ **Be mindful of the constraints on my time**. When we set a deadline, I will block off time to read and respond to your work. If I do not receive your materials, I will move your project to the end of my queue. Allow a minimum of one week prior to submission deadlines for me to read and respond to short materials such as conference abstracts (I will try to respond within 1-3 days)

and three weeks for me to work on manuscripts, research proposals, or grant proposals (I will strive to return them in 1-2 weeks). Please do not assume I can read materials within a day or two, especially when I am traveling.

You will communicate clearly

- ✓ Remember that all of us are “new” at various points in our careers. **If you feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or want additional support, please overtly ask for it.** I welcome these conversations and view them as necessary.
- ✓ **Let me know the style of communication or schedule of meetings that you prefer.** If there is something about my mentoring style that is proving difficult for you, please tell me so that you give me an opportunity to find an approach that works for you. No single style works for everyone; no one style is expected to work all the time. Do not cancel meetings with me if you feel that you have not made adequate progress on your research; these might be the most critical times to meet with a mentor.
- ✓ **Be prompt.** Respond promptly (in most cases, within 48 hours) to emails from anyone in our lab group and show up on time and prepared for meetings. If you need time to gather information in response to an email, please acknowledge receipt of the message and indicate when you will be able to provide the requested information.
- ✓ **Be professional.** Our scheduled meetings and communications are professional interactions. Written emails should be free of most typos, direct, and polite. Scheduled meetings are time set aside to talk about your project and concerns. Regard these as important steps to advance in your degree program and prepare accordingly. This means sending any documents ahead of the meeting, arriving on time, and completing any tasks we agree upon before the next meeting so we can move forward.
- ✓ **Discuss policies on work hours, sick leave and vacation with me directly.** Consult with me and notify fellow lab members in advance of any planned absences. I believe that work-life balance and vacation time are essential for creative thinking and good health and encourage you to take regular vacations. Be aware, however, that there will necessarily be epochs—especially early in your training—when more effort will need to be devoted to work and it may not be ideal to schedule time away. This includes the field season.
- ✓ **Discuss policies on authorship and attendance at professional meetings** with me before beginning any projects to ensure that we agree.
- ✓ **Help other students** with their projects and mentor/train other students. This is a valuable experience!

What you should expect from me

- ✓ **I will work tirelessly for the good of the lab group;** the success of every member of our group is my top priority, no matter their personal strengths and weaknesses, or career goals.
- ✓ I will be **available for regular meeting and informal conversations.** My busy schedule requires that we plan in advance for meetings to discuss your research and any professional or personal concerns you have. Although I will try to be available as much as possible for “drop in business”, keep in mind that I am often teaching, meeting with students, or working on proposals and papers so have limited time.
- ✓ I will **communicate** with you effectively. I will respond to your emails or messages as quickly as I can, and I will read and edit materials you send me within 2 - 3 weeks unless there are difficult situations.
- ✓ I will **help you navigate your graduate program.** However, you are responsible for keeping up with deadlines and being knowledgeable about requirements. Nevertheless, I am available to help interpret these requirements and select appropriate coursework. Although it is my ultimate

responsibility to select your thesis committee members, I will invite your interests and concerns into that consideration.

- ✓ I will **discuss data ownership and authorship policies** regarding papers with you. It is important that we communicate openly and regularly about them. Do not hesitate to voice concerns when you have them.
- ✓ **I will be your advocate.** If you have a problem, come and see me. I will do my best to help you solve it.
- ✓ **I am committed to mentoring you,** even after you leave my lab. I will provide honest letters of evaluation for you when you request them.
- ✓ I will **facilitate your training in complementary skills needed to be a successful scientist,** such as communication skills, proposal writing, lab management, mentoring, and scientific professionalism. I will encourage you to gain practice in mentoring undergraduate students and interns.
- ✓ I will **encourage you to attend scientific/professional meetings** and will make an effort to fund such activities. Please use conferences as an opportunity to further your education, and not as a vacation.
- ✓ I will strive to **be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful. I will try my best to understand your unique situation, and mentor you accordingly.** I am mindful that each student comes from a different background and has different professional goals. It will help if you keep me informed about your experiences and remember that graduate school is a job with very high expectations. I view my role as fostering your professional confidence and encouraging your critical thinking, skepticism, and creativity. If my attempts to do this are not effective for you, I am open to talking with you about other ways to achieve these goals.

Yearly evaluation

- ✓ We will sit down to discuss progress and goals once a year. At that time, please tell me if you are unhappy with any aspect of your experience as a graduate student. Remember that I am your advocate, as well as your advisor. I will help you with any problems you might have with other students, professors, or staff.
- ✓ Similarly, we should discuss any concerns that you have with respect to my role as your advisor. At the same time, I will tell you if I am satisfied with your progress, and if I think you are on track to graduate by your target date. It will be my responsibility to explain to you any deficiencies, so that you can take steps to fix them. This will be a good time for us to take care of any issues before they become major problems.

Graduate Student name

Signature and Date

Faculty mentor

Signature and Date