Santos Lab at Ohio State University

Mentoring Expectations

This document lays out what you can expect from me, and what I expect from you. It's a starting point for conversation, not a substitute for one. If anything here is unclear or doesn't fit your situation, let's talk about it.

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Contents

Quick Reference: Most important things

- Respond to messages within 24 hours
- Be respectful, be safe, ask questions, take notes, keep records, be organized
- Practice mentoring “up”
- Check out resources in the Lab Teams folder
- Come to meetings prepared and ready to drive the agenda
- It’s not about the hours worked but about products and progress
- You are responsible for your degree requirements and career preparedness
- Apply for travel and research funding
- Develop intellectual independence by reading a lot and workshopping your ideas
- Back up your data, and know where your files are stored
- Treat museum specimens with the upmost care, especially if they’re loans.
- I will be transparent whenever possible, so just ask

1. Respect

Our ability to work effectively, both as individuals and as a team, depends on maintaining a culture of mutual respect. It's the responsibility of every lab member to maintain this culture. Each of us comes to the table with a different knowledge base, skillset, and life experience. Studies show this diversity is essential for effective teamwork and scientific innovation.

We show mutual respect by:

- Calling labmates by their preferred names and pronouns
- Actively listening to each other
- Giving people grace and the benefit of the doubt
- Keeping our workspaces clean and organized
- Arriving to meetings on time and prepared
- Responding promptly to communications
- Understanding that everyone is busy, and giving lead time for requests
- Donating your time to help each other and sharing your skills
- Supporting labmates during vulnerable moments, like practicing talks

Our lab doesn't exist in a vacuum. We're part of the Department of Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology and the Museum of Biological Diversity. We all chip in to keep the department functioning. Show the same respect to other members of the department and university that you'd like granted to you.

Talk to me if you're unsure how to handle an interpersonal situation in the lab or department. Definitely talk to me if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in my lab or in the museum.

On criticism

Criticism is a normal part of doing science. It may feel uncomfortable, but it sharpens our skills and improves our work. You'll get feedback from me as part of my job. Labmates should also seek out and give feedback to each other. Keep criticism constructive and focused on the science, not the person.

Mentoring up:

Mentees should practice mentoring "up." This means that mentorship is not something you passively receive, but that you actively participate in. This gives mentees greater agency in their hierarchical relationships. Communicate your needs and preferences and tell me if something is not working for you. See PDF in Lab Teams folder about how to mentor up.

If the concern involves me

Psychological safety is a believe that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes. **If you do not feel psychological safety in my lab then I have failed as a mentor and leader.** Please talk to me if something I'm doing is not working for you. If you don't feel comfortable talking with me about your concerns, you can reach out to James Pease (graduate program chair) or the Office of Ombuds Services: https://faculty.osu.edu/faculty-support/faculty-life/office-ombuds-services

2. Onboarding

We have a separate Onboarding Checklist in the lab Teams folder. It is a living document. Please add to it if you learn something helpful.

3. Communication and Meetings

I expect responses to messages within 24 hours during the workweek (Mon–Fri), unless I know you're on vacation or otherwise unavailable. I'm reachable by email, text, and Teams chat.

One-on-ones

I'll schedule standing 1:1 meetings with all graduate students and postdocs. Ideally these are in person. You drive these meetings and help set the agenda. We'll keep a running agenda together in OneDrive to track what was discussed and any action items for follow-up.

Lab meetings

Held monthly and driven by lab members. Hosting rotates each month, and the host picks the topic (whether feedback on preliminary data, a practice presentation, a paper discussion, or another idea). My role is to moderate, not drive. All lab members are expected to attend unless an absence is excused in advance.

4. Progress in Your Degree and Beyond

Degree requirements

You're expected to be on top of all requirements and deadlines for completing your degree. Don't expect me to know these offhand. I *can* tell you whether I think you're ready for a milestone like qualifying exams, and how to prepare.

Career preparation

You won't be in my lab forever, and you're expected to prepare for your next move while you're still here. I'll support your career aspirations, but fair warning that I've only had one career path in my life, and that's the one I'm most familiar with. I'll give advice and connect you with people and opportunities as best I can, but you must drive your own career readiness. Seek out mentors beyond me — your committee is a resource, use them.

5. Working Hours

Graduate school is simultaneously a job and school, which can make for awkward contradictions. There will be periods when classes or teaching take time from research. Still, remember that graduation hinges on writing a thesis or dissertation of original research, even if your goal afterward is a non-research job.

If you are on a TA or RA, you are expected to work 20 hours a week in that role. You should be concerned if your TA duties spill over beyond 20 hours a week on average. The line between RA duties and your own research is blurrier. Talk to me if you are unsure how to balance things.

I avoid saying things like "work X hours a week on research" because **it's not really about hours worked, but about outcomes** — manuscripts submitted, talks given, grants applied for, and whether you're competitive for the career you want. Missing milestones is a problem, whether you work 60 hours a week or 30. Managing your time is your responsibility.

I don't expect lab members to work weekends or holidays. Graduate school is a marathon, not a sprint, and a healthy balance of work and rest is what sustains a career long-term and prevents burnout.

Day to day, you're free to work wherever you're most productive, including home, a coffee shop, the lab, your on-campus office. I'll provide all graduate students and postdocs their own desk in MBD regardless. Talk to me if you have preferences or need accommodations for your on-campus space.

Time off

> *WORK IN PROGRESS. Spell out vacation, sick leave, and parental/medical leave: how much, how to request it, how much notice to give, and who to notify (you, the graduate coordinator, or both).*

I support lab members taking time off. If it's just one day at a time, I don't need to approve or even know about sick days or personal days unless it requires rescheduling a meeting. If you need to take an extended amount of time off (>1 week) let's talk about how to maintain projects and whether we need to shuffle duties temporarily.

6. Supplies, Travel, and Funding

Funding is a shifting landscape; I may say "no" to something I said "yes" to before if my circumstances change. I'll be transparent about funding availability, so just ask.

Equipment and supplies

I'll generally purchase equipment, computers, portable hard drives, office supplies, software, and lab consumables. Anything purchased with my funds is university property and stays here when you leave the lab.

Please don't purchase anything with lab funds without my approval. Always ask before using equipment or consumables in another faculty member's lab.

Travel and conferences

Travel funding is limited. Sadly, I can't pay for the whole lab to attend a conference every year. Assume you'll apply for your own travel funding.

Try to attend at least one conference a year. Sometimes the lab goes together; sometimes you'll find a different conference that fits your interests, and that's fine. Start your presentation early and give a practice run for me and the lab first. Abide by the conference's code of conduct and remember you're building your professional reputation and representing my lab and the university.

You will need to fill out a Travel Authorization through Workday ahead of any business travel. Mark Frantz can help you.

Funding

I've collected research and travel funding opportunities in a spreadsheet in the Lab Teams folder. This is a living document, please add to it.

I expect you to actively apply for funding (research, travel, education expenses, and/or stipend) throughout your program, even if you're already funded. This has real benefits:

- Release from TA responsibilities
- Learning to write grants is an important skill
- My own funding for you is limited
- Funding looks good on your CV
- Freedom to travel to places you want to go

I'll support your applications with feedback and letters of recommendation, but please give me at least 2 weeks' notice.

7. Research Topics and Ownership

A Master's thesis is one project; a Ph.D. dissertation is three chapters (equivalent to three MS theses). I expect each chapter or thesis to be a publishable unit. You'll be first author on manuscripts from these projects, and I'll (usually) be senior author. The best dissertation is three published papers stapled together — make that your goal.

First project

For all graduate students, I'll assign your first project. This will be your thesis (MS) or first dissertation chapter (Ph.D.).

Later chapters (Ph.D.)

My philosophy on graduate degrees: what separates a Ph.D. from an MS is intellectual independence. This is why I expect Ph.D. students to come up with their second and third chapters independently. I'll help you shape your ideas and make sure they're tractable, but they still have to be your ideas. Working backwards, this means your qualifying exam proposal should contain at least the seeds of these ideas. Intellectual creativity is hard for many students, but ideas will come more easily if you read a lot.

Side projects

I generally encourage side projects. if you want a research-oriented job after graduation, you must publish as many papers as possible, and side projects lead to more papers. Just don't let a side project derail your dissertation progress. It's easy to start a project, but hard to finish one.

Authorship

Talk to me if you're ever unsure who should be a co-author on a project. I agree with everything on this page: https://github.com/marekborowiec/lab-wiki/wiki/Credit-and-Authorship

Leaving the lab: data, code & authorship

No one will be in my lab forever. As a rule of thumb, data generated while you were in my lab and (especially if) funded by me belongs to the lab, and we must maintain access and ownership of it after you leave. Prepare for your exit early by practicing good data management. Assume me or a labmate might need to search for "your" data files a year after you leave and make the job easier on us. Comment your code well.

It is normal for project timelines to spill over long after a person leaves. Please be open with me, and honest with yourself, about your likelihood of being able to finish projects after you leave and start a new position. Authorship agreements made before you left will be upheld, so long as you maintain open communication. I understand that circumstances may change. I assume you will be busy in your new role, but **please** if we ask you a question, respond promptly. In the worst-case scenario, if you fail to respond to repeated inquiries about projects, you will forfeit authorship. This is because when we submit a manuscript to a journal, we must confirm that all co-authors approve of the submission. We cannot claim this honestly if you have not responded to us about your approval of the submission.

8. Read a Lot

In graduate school, you're in charge of your own development as an expert in "your field." You're responsible for seeking out, reading, and retaining the scientific literature relevant to your studies, both classic and contemporary. Develop a reading routine and retention strategy that works for you. Since your diploma will say "Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology," any literature under that umbrella is fair game. Don't rely solely on papers from class, reading groups, lab meetings, or papers I tell you to read.

We maintain a lab library in room 1527. Please don't take a book out of the room without signing it out on the clipboard.

9. Data Management, Coding, and Writing

Every lab member must hone three skills: data management, programming, and scientific writing.

Data management

You're responsible for managing your data, preventing data loss, and organizing it so it can be retrieved later. Imagine looking for a file a year from now; will you know where to look? Could someone else understand what each column in your spreadsheet means? Back up your data regularly; assume your computer could fail tomorrow and have a plan. We have several storage options, ask if you're unsure which is best.

Programming

You are expected to learn R. Like a foreign language, it takes regular practice and immersion to stick. Comment your scripts well so others can follow them. Error messages are expected, and debugging is a skill to build. Data and scripts tied to manuscripts eventually go into a repository like Dryad, downloadable by anyone — so make sure your scripts run cleanly and are understandable by a stranger by the end of a project.

Scientific writing

Writing a manuscript isn't like writing a class essay. Expect many drafts before submission. I don't like to edit drafts directly in Google Docs or OneDrive. Instead, I'll use Track Changes in Word. When I hand a manuscript back, accept the changes you agree with and mark your own edits with Track Changes too. Include the date in each draft's filename. I don't ban AI writing tools outright, but you're responsible for anything AI-produced, and some journals require disclosure of AI use.

10. Museum

> *This section is a work in progress — full rules and regulations for using/working alongside the collection are still being written.*

Students in my lab can expect access to the Fish Collection for their research. Marc Kibbey runs day-to-day operations. All students and postdocs must complete safety training before using the collection. After-hours access is allowed, but you must follow the after-hours guidelines.

You may need to loan specimens or tissues from other collections. Always cc me on emails arranging loans. Keep your own loan records. **Treat loaned material with the utmost care** — our reputation with other collections is paramount. Failing to properly care for loaned specimens, losing or swapping labels, letting specimens dry out, or losing specimens outright can mean our lab never gets loans from that museum again.

11. What You Can Expect From Me

These things are part of my job, and I do them happily:

- Supervise your research so you produce high-quality science, safely and ethically, in a way that enriches your training, our lab, the university, the scientific community, and the public
- Support your development as an independent scientist, communicator, and critical thinker
- Listen actively when you communicate your needs
- Allocate a minimum of one hour a week for one-on-one time with you
- Write letters of recommendation, given enough lead time
- Give timely, constructive feedback on your manuscripts, proposals, presentations, and other work
- Connect you with resources and opportunities, and act as a liaison between you and the broader scientific community
- Workshop your ideas with you
- Help you troubleshoot problems
- Obtain funding for the lab
- Advise you in good faith on graduating and getting a job in your chosen field
- Foster an inclusive, harassment-free, productive culture in the lab and department. As a faculty member, I'm a mandated reporter for discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. I'll always tell you if I need to file a report — you won't be blindsided.

- Be transparent whenever possible — about my expectations of you, the status of your projects, the feasibility of your proposed research, funding availability, whether you're on track to graduate, the job market and your competitiveness, or anything else. **Just ask.**

12. Going Forward

This document aims to clarify expectations: what you can expect from me, and what I expect of you. I'm a new faculty member, so I’m still learning. I'll keep adding to this document, since experience is the best teacher.