

MENTORING STATEMENT

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GOAL

Healthy labs depend on the relationship between adviser and advisees. I am committed to create a supportive and intellectually stimulating work environment, but much of this will depend on understanding each other's expectations. My primary role is to provide intellectual guidance and help you make the best of opportunities to develop as a professional. Your role is to put in the work needed to become an independent thinker and take charge of your goals. Here, I want to share my philosophy and expectations for students, postdocs and research fellows joining my lab on how I want us to work as a team.

DIVERSITY PHILOSOPHY

I strive to create a diverse, inclusive, and supportive environment in the lab. I firmly believe diversity of people bring in diversity of thought and experience which spurs creative progress in science. I like to work with each student and postdoc to identify their needs, understand barriers they face and help them explore opportunities to develop a roadmap for their goals. This is contingent on regular and transparent communication.

COMMUNICATION

Open, honest, two-way communication is key to healthy relationships. We need to lay out our needs, goals, deadlines, and concerns. It would be impossible for me to track the details of your individual lives and work. If there is an issue, you need to tell me. As will I with you. I also believe in honestly conveying both pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses of your work and progress. This may discomfit some, but the ability to take criticism is critical to professional development.

Resolving conflicts: Please feel free to reach out to me to discuss any concerns about your interactions with me or others. Fostering mutual trust is important to me. However, if you are uncomfortable speaking with me, you are welcome to speak with others, regardless of whether you want them to convey the message to me.

RELATIONSHIPS

Professional relationship: My first principle towards our relationship as mentee and mentor is to treat each other with respect as individuals. A healthy professional relationship also means that we respect boundaries. We have more to do in our lives than just science.

Relationship with lab members. Mutual respect is the core working principle for our lab. Be considerate and work as a team. I like to maintain an easygoing work environment. That does not imply laxity. I have high expectations of quality, sincerity, good work ethic and personal and scientific conduct – from myself and all members of the lab.

Personal life: As a lab, we will respect each other's personal lives. We are people first and scientists after. I like to spend time with my family, deeply value my personal life and interests, and will take breaks to recoup. I will (usually) not work in the evenings – I expect you to respect that boundary. I strongly encourage everyone in my lab to work hard but be efficient so that you have a healthy, independent life outside the lab.

WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY

I do not believe productivity to merely be a means to advance our careers. To be a productive scientist is our moral responsibility as people who use public funds or private donations for our work. A paper is not just for your CV. It is how we share our knowledge with the wider community. I also believe that we should all strive to communicate and share our science beyond academic or specialist audiences. I am happy to work with you on science communication and outreach, but eventually that is something that each person has to do on their own.

Independence: I do not micromanage. Especially for PhD students and postdocs, I expect you to work independently with regular check-ins and appropriate support from me. You have to think through your long-term goals, scientific interests (especially as they evolve through time), and the training you need. I can then give you the right feedback. I am committed to help you, but with the goal of making you independently capable of handling your work.

Individual development plan: Laying out your goals and the steps necessary to achieve them will guide my inputs and your skill development.

Regular meetings: To ensure that we maintain progress in your work, I will meet with you every two weeks at least, especially when you are working on ideas, analysis, or proposals. Unless urgently needed, meetings may be more erratic when either of us is doing fieldwork or traveling. I am also happy to schedule extra time during the time that you feel it is needed for your progress. You have to determine the agenda for our meetings and have a plan for what you want to discuss. I also expect regular follow-up work to ensure progress from one meeting to next.

TIME MANAGEMENT

I work better with clear timelines and deadlines laid out. We all have a lot on our plates. I try hard to be efficient with my time, and I expect you to appreciate that. So that I can help best as an advisor, I expect my advisees to have short- (e.g., 6 months) and long-term (e.g. 2 to 3 years) goals with periodic check-ins. It is your responsibility to keep me updated on your timelines. Remember that I have to often manage 4-5 people's work in addition to mine. Timelines may change and evolve, but setting practical goals with feasible workplans is a key life skill, and not just in academia. It will help you be efficient and productive with your time and avoid stress. I expect you to chart your course and then we work together according to this. Time management is a trait I encourage you to develop. From my side, I want to make the best of your work time. Effective time management is a highly transferrable skill in any professional setting.

THESIS

I expect that you will develop your own research topic within the scope of my lab's work. My work has largely been motivated by theory and first principles, and I expect the same from you. I encourage, but do not insist, that students develop a project that takes advantage of my previous or ongoing work and/or datasets from collaborators. I expect your work to be firmly grounded in and motivated by ecological theory. I expect you to read the literature widely but know your chosen topic deeply to form testable *a priori* expectations. Finally, I expect that your work will offer general insights beyond the specifics of your study system.

PUBLICATIONS

The process of developing, implementing, analyzing, writing, and publishing research will train you in skills that are valuable beyond academia. For an academic career path, publishing in the peer reviewed literature is essential. While I expect you to lead the work, I will actively work with you to develop ideas, provide inputs with analysis and interpretation, and the writing process.

Graduate students: I expect all your dissertation chapters to be of publication quality (Master's and PhD). The publication process should start early. For PhD students, I am willing to work with you ASAP into your PhD to explore whether there are ideas we can implement with existing data.

Postdocs: I expect that you will produce at least one peer-reviewed paper on the project for which you have joined the lab.

Research fellows: I do not insist that you work on a publication, but if you do, you will have my full support and help through the process. In fact, starting to publish early is always good for you to develop key skills needed for your growth as an independent scientist.

Authorship: I believe in credit where it is due. You will be first author on the work you lead and complete, but you have to take initiative. Keep in mind that for many projects, publication has to happen within a reasonable time frame. PhD students will be lead author on all of their dissertation chapters. Authorship for any other publication will be decided jointly. I only expect to be included as an author if I have made a substantial contribution in helping you develop the idea, collecting or analyzing data, or in writing the manuscript. I am always open to discussions on authorship but we should have this early in the process of developing a paper, knowing that we can revise the decision (by mutual consent) at a later date if roles have changed.

FUNDING

Stipends for PhD: Funding with a PhD fellowship from CSIR, DBT, or other agencies provides full-time support to work on your graduate training.

Research funding: Regardless of whether you join an ongoing project and build your questions within that framework, I encourage you to apply for research grants. Learning to write good proposals is an excellent skill. Receiving grants increases your competitiveness for jobs. I will work with you to find funding, but remember the main responsibility is yours. You have to put in the work to develop the ability to convince a generic audience to fund your ideas.

COURSEWORK

Coursework can be a double-edged sword during a PhD. Of course, some courses will be needed to develop key skills (e.g., advanced stats), and it is your responsibility to identify what knowledge you need. But one should be careful about the proportion of time invested in courses. Sometimes, courses and assignments can lull you into a sense of doing something without actually making progress towards the goals of your PhD. Mandated courses (necessary or otherwise) aside, we should discuss which courses are actually beneficial to your goals.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching provides an incredible opportunity to gain a depth of understanding of material. It also provides many transferrable skills, including engaging audiences, communicating complex concepts to non-specialists, and balancing time spent on teaching with time spent on research. I encourage students (and postdocs) to teach, especially if they are interested in an academic career.

CONFERENCES & NETWORKING

In today's competitive world, a professional network is essential, regardless of career path. I expect all my advisees to attend scientific meetings and conferences and share their research. I will do my best to help support you, but conference money rarely comes via grants, so you will have to do your bit to find funds. I will also try my best to connect you with people relevant to your interests and goals – it rests on you to build on those opportunities.

TO SUMMARIZE...

My goal is to facilitate your training towards becoming a sharp, critical and independent thinker. To achieve this, I expect you to have a vision for your long-term career path and communicate your interests and career goals so that I can provide appropriate advice. Be open to constructive criticism. Guidance cannot replace self-motivation. I understand that expectations should be tailored to individual aspirations and abilities, but I consider some skills as essential and expect that you imbibe them. While I will fully support your endeavors, your success eventually depends on the work you put in towards your goals. Ultimately, I am only a stepping stone in your journey towards the scientist you want to be.