2024 Dowen Lab Mentor-Mentee Compact

An important part of my job as a professor is to train and mentor students to become capable scientists. In general, I expect you to:

- Learn how to plan, design, and conduct high-quality scientific research
- Follow principles of responsible conduct of research
- Thoroughly document your research using a digital notebook
- Learn how to present your research in talks, posters, and publications
- Be independent; this includes asking questions and seeking help when necessary
- Be honest, ethical, and enthusiastic
- Develop and sustain a growth mindset
- Be engaged within the lab, your PhD curriculum, and the broader research community
- Treat your labmates and resources with respect
- Take advantage of professional development opportunities
- Obtain your degree

Our lab values include:

- Scientific discoveries take time and are hard work
- Self-reflection and acknowledgment of our accomplishments is important
- We are a team, and our collective and individual successes depend on each other
- We value outreach and engaging with the broader non-scientific community
- Together we are responsible for creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful work environment
- People and viewpoints from diverse backgrounds are valued and supported.

What You Can Expect from Me

I will work for the good of the lab group and each person in the lab. The success of every member of our group is my top priority, no matter their personal strengths and weaknesses, or career goals. If each person is successful, the lab will be successful. I will do my best to help you develop into an outstanding scientist.

I will help you develop a project that is exciting, impactful, feasible and that has achievable deadlines. Together, we will strive to find the right balance and we realize that science is dynamic and our plan may change over time.

I will be available for regular meetings, informal conversations, and on Slack. My door is usually open, and I encourage members of the lab to come in as necessary or desired. In addition, I like to have a one-on-one meeting that is weekly or bi-weekly. At these meetings we can discuss your research and any professional or personal concerns that you may have. In general, this is your time to use to your benefit; although, in some cases, I may have specific topics to discuss. If we are scheduled to meet, I expect that you respect this commitment.

I will help you navigate your graduate curriculum. As stated below, you must be responsible for keeping up with deadlines and being knowledgeable about requirements. However, I am available to help interpret and advise you on these requirements, select appropriate coursework, assemble a thesis committee, and take advantage of professional development offerings on campus.

I will conduct regular formal evaluations of your performance and progress. At the end of each semester, I will assign a grade for your Dissertation Research. I will ask you for a list of accomplishments
for the semester and goals for the next semester. We will discuss these together. At the same time, we should discuss any concerns that you have with respect to my role as your advisor. If you feel that you need more guidance, tell me; if you feel that I am interfering with your work or development as a scientist, tell me.

**I will respect your privacy.** Any conversations we have that are not about your research will be treated as confidential information and will not be discussed with anyone else. There may be times when I believe advice from another person might be valuable. If such a case arises, I will discuss it with you first and will only proceed with your permission.

**I will discuss data ownership and authorship policies with you.** I structure my lab so that students have independent projects that I hope will lead to one or more 1st-author publications. Nonetheless, overlaps and collaborations are common. To prevent these from creating unnecessary conflict, it is important that we communicate openly and regularly. Do not hesitate to voice concerns when you have them.

**I will be your advocate, defender, cheerleader, and coach.** If you have a problem, come and see me. I will do my best to help you solve it. When warranted, I will enthusiastically nominate you for awards and recognitions.

**I will facilitate your training in complementary skills needed to be a successful scientist.** These include oral and written communication skills, grant writing, lab management, mentoring, and scientific professionalism. I am responsive to requests for assistance, feedback, and information (manuscript drafts, posters, talk feedback, etc.). I will also do my absolute best to help you investigate and prepare for your future career.

**I am committed to mentoring you, even after you leave my lab.** I am committed to your education and training while you are in my lab, and to advising and guiding your career development, to the degree you wish, after you leave. I will provide honest letters of evaluation for you when you request them.

**I will encourage you to engage with the broader scientific community.** You can expect to regularly attend conferences. These should be seen as opportunities to further your education and to meet and interact with other scientists. You will be expected to present your work at conferences.

**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.

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**What I Expect from You**

**You will take ownership over your educational experience**

**Acknowledgement that you have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of your degree.** This includes commitment to your work in the classroom and laboratory. 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 activities and experiments. You should also use this time to communicate new ideas that you have about your work and challenges that you are facing. **Remember:** I cannot address or advise about issues that you do not bring to my attention.
Complete required training and compliances. This includes Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training, laboratory safety training, and HIPAA training. You should also pay attention to the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the graduate program, the Graduate School, and the University. Comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones, laboratory practices, and rules related to laboratory safety.

Actively cultivate your professional development. We have outstanding resources to support professional development and I hope that you will take full advantage of these. You should discuss specific plans or goals with me so that I can facilitate your training where possible.

You will be a responsible and contributing member of the laboratory

Attend and actively participate in all lab meetings. Participation in lab meetings means not only presenting your own work but providing support to others in the lab through shared insight. This often comes from naïve questions, so you should not hesitate to ask for explanations of background, rationale, or interpretation. You should refrain from using your computer or phone during lab meetings, except for taking notes.

Strive to be the very best lab citizen. Take part in shared laboratory responsibilities and use laboratory resources carefully. 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 (the latter should be discussed with me first). Collaborations are more than just publishing papers together. They demand effective and frequent communication, mutual respect, trust, and shared goals. Don’t forget to acknowledge collaborators and contributors in talks and on posters.

Help other students with their projects and mentor/train other students. Mentoring undergraduates can be a valuable experience but must be done responsibly. We will discuss selection and mentoring of undergraduates as it becomes appropriate for you and the stage of your training.

Be respectful of shared equipment and the equipment in other labs. You will often be using equipment that does not belong to our lab. I ask that you respect this equipment and treat it as carefully as our own equipment. Always return it as soon as possible in the same condition you found it. If something breaks, tell me right away so that we can arrange to fix or replace it. Don’t panic over broken equipment. Mistakes happen. But it is not acceptable to return something broken or damaged without taking the steps necessary to fix it.

Dress appropriately in lab. The dress code, as stated by EHS, is "Minimum PPE requirements to work in a biological lab include: lab coat, long pants, fully enclosed shoe, safety glasses and gloves". I will provide safety glasses and lab coats. Generally speaking, the lab uses very few toxic or hazardous materials.

You will develop strong research skills

Take advantage of your opportunity to work at a world-class university by developing and refining stellar research skills. I expect that you will learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research. However, I don’t expect you to do this on your own. Research ability is a skill that is learned through experience and exposure.

Keep up with the literature. You may want to block off time to peruse current tables of contents for journals or do literature searches or subscribe to updates through various channels. Participate in our
journal clubs. You can also bring up particularly relevant or interesting papers in lab meeting, on Slack, or in our one-on-one meetings.

**Maintain a detailed, organized, and accurate laboratory digital notebook.** Generally, we use Microsoft OneNote for our digital notebooks, but others are acceptable but should be discussed with me. It should be possible for someone new to the lab to read and understand your notebook. All original data must be stored on a backed-up repository (our lab server space on Pierre is suitable). These files must be labeled and referenced in your lab notebook in a form that others can understand. This is particularly important for digital data like sequence files and images. Original notebooks and data are the property of UNC, but you may make copies to take with you when you leave.

**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, not to criticize you personally. A growth mindset is imperative at all career stages.

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**You will work to meet deadlines**

**Strive to meet deadlines.** This is the only way to manage your progress. Deadlines can be managed in several ways, but I expect you to work your best to achieve them. We will establish mutually agreed upon deadlines for each phase of your work during one-on-one meetings at the end 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 making progress in your research.

**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. Although I will try to be quick, please do not assume I can read materials within a day or two, especially when I am traveling, teaching, or working on similar projects with other students.

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**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. Ask questions when I am around, but don’t be afraid to ask others in lab – we have a helpful and experienced lab, so know that folks other than me may be excellent resources.

**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.

**Discuss policies on work hours, sick leave and vacation with me directly.** Consult with me 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.