

Guidelines for graduate students working in the Purchase research group

What perspective students should do

- If you are interested in working with me please start the process by sending along the following things
- Tell me about yourself and what you do for fun
- Tell me about your science experience, email me:
 - a cover letter explaining why you are interested in working with me, what types of research you have done in the past, what your ultimate goals are
 - a CV
 - a copy of your university transcripts (unofficial is fine)
- Contact other students in my lab to get their opinions on me, the group, the university, etc.

What to expect in general

It is my goal that you receive the best quality and most enjoyable experience possible. To achieve this, I strive to create an efficient, open, and fun working environment. Here are some general guidelines to avoid any confusion.

Graduate school is very different than undergraduate studies. A major shift occurs when you go from learning about previously existing knowledge to creating knowledge. It is the beginning of a career in science and can be an enlightening event for many. You must have a passion for what you are doing. Graduate school is not a good place for those who pursue it because they have nothing better to do. You do not need to have the highest grades to succeed as a grad student (although it doesn't hurt), but you do need interest, creativity, and determination.

I will put tremendous amounts of time, effort and resources into supervising students. I expect students to work hard, and be both highly motivated and independent. You will be an active participant of a research group, which includes individuals from both within and outside my lab. Below are some more specific guidelines.

What to expect of me

- I am here to do whatever I can to make your graduate experience as educational and rewarding as possible. I will put a great deal of time and resources into your education and try to help you shape your own project so that you can carve out your own contribution to science.
- In almost all cases, the taxpayer is paying for the research you are conducting. It is my responsibility to make sure these resources are used in the most efficient way possible.
- I will be available to answer questions as they arise. I will get comments back on your written material as soon as possible.
- Funding
 - I will not agree to supervise you unless I have funding in place for your program. The university will only guarantee you this one year at a time, as it is conditional on you maintaining a good academic standing.
 - The current minimum per year is \$22,500 for Ph.D. students and \$21,000 for M.Sc. students in the Biology program. You may (are likely to) receive more than this (maybe much more if you win scholarships), depending on where your funding is coming from. I will provide you with details before acceptance.
 - In most situations, your funding package will include some undergraduate teaching.
 - For students without incoming scholarships, my philosophy is to provide starting \$ moderately better than the minimum, but award you with bonuses for performance (like \$ bonus for submitting papers to journals within your thesis program time).
 - Your stipend is not a salary; this is not a job, you are not getting paid to work. Do not think of it as a wage.
 - This \$ is support that I have worked hard to get, to enable you this educational experience.

- There is a big difference in what is “required” of you (functionally a pass vs fail of parts of your program) and what is “desired” (you perform well enough to be competitive for a job).
 - Sometimes things happen along the way, and in the end we may be working to get what is required (do the minimum needed for your degree). However, I will never set students up to just do what is required.
 - You will not aim for the minimum. I will regularly point out these differences during the years you spend with me. I want you to do well, not just do ok.
- Meetings
 - As a default, I will meet with you one-on-one weekly for MSc students and biweekly for PhD students.
- I will let you know (and keep record) if I think you are not performing at the “desired” (likely to be competitive for a job) or “required” (a likely eventual pass) level. You may not want to hear it, but I believe it is irresponsible of me to not tell you.
- Reference letter
 - A big part of what you are probably hoping to achieve in the end is a great reference letter from me.
 - The people you are applying to are my colleagues and likely my collaborators/friends and therefore I will give them my honest opinion in confidence. Hopefully this will mean you will get a great reference letter.
 - Your degree/thesis is a PASS or FAIL (no grade), but how well you do and your potential, as well as your attitude through your degree will be reflected in my reference letters for you.

What I expect of you

- I expect you to be motivated.
 - Please do not accept a graduate research position with me if the topic doesn’t excite you.
 - If you are doing it because you can’t find “something you like better”, after enough time you will lose motivation and you are going to make your life miserable, which will most likely make my life miserable.
- I expect you to have a positive and helpful attitude and to enjoy yourself.
- I expect you to be creative and determined.
- I expect you to be ambitious. Initially aiming for the minimum will not result in a good reference. Ideally you will want to do more than is logistically possible, and I will have to pull you back. I should not have to be constantly pushing you. It gets noticed.
- Be proactive. It gets noticed.
- I expect you to be independent. This will influence my impression of your abilities.
 - You need to anticipate what to do next, figure out what options are available and the pros/cons of each.
 - The entire group/department/campus/city is here to answer questions and help you.
 - In most situations this stuff will fall into place through day to day interactions.
- I expect you to work hard and to accomplish tasks in a timely manner. If we agree on a timeline and you later find out that is unrealistic, then you need to inform me so that we can make the necessary changes.
- Science doesn’t happen efficiently in isolation; you will be an interactive participant of a research group
 - You are here to interact and learn from other graduate students within my group and the rest of the department, and you will be mentoring undergraduate students. I will also be learning from you.
 - In order for this interaction to take place you have to be here. Therefore, unless some special circumstance warrants it, I expect you to be in the lab during normal working hours (regardless if you work outside of them as well). I will notice if you do not.
 - Your stipend is also related to this. If the taxpayer is providing a means for you to be a part of a research group, then you need to be here. Therefore, if you leave town for extended periods of time (for example “to write up”), your stipend may be suspended.
 - There are other faculty/students here that you should actively/passively learn from. Whenever possible, I expect you to attend weekly biology seminars on topics remotely relevant to ecology/evolution/conservation, and take advantage of any journal discussion groups, professional development, etc. In other words, you should attend most of these as a default. I will know if you do not.
 - Many of our interactions will be in social settings, especially when engaging with other research teams.
 - You may have collaborators in addition to me. Your attitude/respect/politics towards all such interactions will influence my impression of you.

- I expect you to write a research proposal within the first 6 months of your program. This will organize your thoughts, speed things up, and be a general introduction to your thesis. It will likely be refined/modified afterwards.
- Science doesn't happen unless it is published. Without publishing, the flow of research funding to my group will be cut off. It is my job not to let that happen.
 - I expect all graduate students to produce at least one publishable manuscript (hopefully many more). Your thesis needs to be at a stage where a manuscript is ready to submit to a scientific journal before I will support your defense of it. So that you know, you can technically defend it without my support (I have no say in whether you pass/fail).
- I expect that you will provide me with regular updates of copies of all data that you collect related to projects that we collaborate on. I should not have to nag you to do this, be proactive.
- Authorship
 - I expect to be a co-author on any work where I have made a significant contribution. In some cases, there may be other students or collaborators that have made significant contributions to your work and therefore they will also be co-authors.
 - The first author needs to take the largest responsibility for the work. In most cases, you will be the first author, but under certain circumstances this might need to be someone else.
 - You will hopefully seize opportunities and be secondary author on bonus manuscripts while you are here (these would not be part of your thesis). There are clear rules with many journals of what is required from people to be an author. Helping a friend collect data for example may not cut it, you might have to do more. I will give you these opportunities, but you cannot drop the ball and expect to continue playing.
 - Even if you are first author, it may be appropriate for some projects for me to be corresponding author.
 - Depending on the project, I may have deliverables to a funding agency that includes a manuscript by a certain date. You will be setup with projects where this achievable for you to write it. However, if you stop working efficiently on it for any reason (took a job and converted to part-time, took leave, quit, etc) then I still have to provide that manuscript. In those situations, I may have to take over as first author and finish the work. If you continue to be involved in the process you would be an author, and you could still use some form (but not the manuscript itself) in your eventual thesis.

Letter of understanding

- Before I agree to supervise you, we will communicate over email and you will acknowledge that you have reviewed and agree to these guidelines. They are meant to protect you and me.
- Additionally, the School of Graduate Studies has provided a template checklist of a Letter of Understanding between supervisors and students. I will provide this to you for discussion, and we will both sign some version of it before you begin your program. It is meant to protect you and me.