

Research Advisor Meeting Guide

Ecology and Evolution, University of Montana

*This is meant to be a guide for getting graduate students working with their advisor(s) and acquainted with the EE program, not an instruction manual or a checklist. We suggest you determine which of these themes and questions resonate with your own priorities and needs rather than working through them. **This is not a contract** of conduct for the student or advisor. As always, it is the student's responsibility to meet their goals and goals set by the program.*

Students should know that the answers to many of these questions will likely change over time as funding changes and as the student develops skills. It may be useful to revisit these topics with advisor(s) over the course of the student's degree program.

Communication

Will we meet regularly? How often and for how long?

In between meetings, what is the best way to communicate about the project?

What do you expect me to prepare for meetings?

Am I expected to be available in person (versus working from home) during certain hours/days of the week? Available via other means of communication?

How quickly am I expected to reply during normal working hours? Outside of normal working hours?

What mode or combination of modes of communication do you prefer (in-person, email, Zoom, phone)?

How often will you communicate about a project?

How far in advance do you prefer to first know about upcoming due dates for things like letters of reference?

Do you want me to remind you about upcoming deadlines as they get closer?

How involved do you like to be in committee formation? Who is responsible for scheduling committee meetings? How far in advance should meetings be scheduled?

In what ways can we shape opportunities to discuss my mentorship needs or check in on our advising relationship and modify as needed?

Learning Expectations

Are there key papers or chapters I need to read early on?

What is the frequency and type of feedback I can expect while learning different skills (e.g. lab, field, computational, etc.)?

How much initiative should I take to learn new skills? Related to my specific project or related to my general interests?

Will you provide assistance for attending workshops and/or courses for me to develop new skills when available? e.g. special courses at other universities

If I would like accommodations for a disability (e.g. dyslexia, ADHD, etc. including physical disabilities), how do I get that process started? Are there other people who I can talk to within the program for advice?

It may be beneficial to discuss further with your advisor how this affects your work process, what changes work for you, specific areas you struggle with, etc., but it is not required to disclose specifics about your disability to your advisor if you do not want to.

General Work Expectations

When are lab meetings and how long are they? How are lab meetings structured?

How soon should I tell you about days off?

Who do I contact/how do I gain access to required areas of campus? e.g. autoclave access, chem stores, keys for buildings

What basic training(s) are required? e.g. chemical hygiene plan, responsible conduct in research, human subjects training, animal models training, environmental health and safety

How much time am I expected to spend on other or old projects? What about side projects within the lab or with collaborators?

Are there already existing outreach opportunities I should know about/can participate in? Am I expected to spend finding my own outreach opportunities? What is a reasonable amount of time to spend on outreach opportunities versus my other work?

Lab Work and Expectations

Are there standard protocols (e.g. documents, kits, etc.) I need access to?

Who should I go to for learning specific lab protocols? Are there specific people I should learn certain lab skills from?

Who purchases lab supplies? How are they paid for and approved? Where do packages get delivered?

Who are the emergency contacts for lab situations? Students should also share emergency contacts with advisor and/or lab members in case of emergencies.

Who should I bring physical/lab safety concerns to?

What are the cleanliness expectations in lab? Who is responsible for lab cleanliness? (e.g. everyone has their own space or space is largely shared)

What are the opportunities and expectations for mentoring undergraduates in the lab? What is the process for bringing undergraduates into the lab? Can we pay students versus working for credit? Is there a process for handling any difficulties or disputes with an undergraduate in the lab?

Field Work and Expectations

Who is responsible for relevant permits for field work?

Where is field equipment stored and how is it managed in the field?

What trainings do I need to complete to be certified for field work?

What policies and guidelines do we follow regarding safety during field work?

What are the expectations to drive to/from field sites? Is there other large equipment I will need to operate?

Are there policies or restrictions regarding bringing other students or friends along to field work/field sites?

Writing and Presentation Expectations

What is your usual approach to working with students during the writing (or creating presentations) process?

What is your approach to giving feedback on writing? Will you give direct edits?

How much time in advance do you prefer to have to turn around feedback on writing?

How polished should a document (or presentation, etc) be before I bring it to you? Should I seek feedback from others before bringing it to you?

What does a dissertation or thesis generally look like under your mentorship? (e.g. 3 papers stapled together or a completely independent document)?

What do coauthorship expectations and guidelines look like in your lab?

What are your expectations for attending conferences? E.g. attending only versus presenting (oral or poster)

Information Sharing and Storage

What are the expectations regarding lab notebooks?

Who owns the data generated while working in this lab?

Are there lab programming resources (e.g. scripts, documents) I should have access to?

Where is data centrally saved or stored? How do I access this storage?

What are the preferences regarding backing up data and how often?

What are the methods for securing data generated?

Who is responsible for archiving data or making data publicly available (e.g. uploading to Sequence Read Archive)?

Troubleshooting and Resources

Who or where can I go to for help with ____? (e.g. IT help, financial help, etc.)

Who can I go to for help with TA resources? What if I feel like I'm being asked too much?

What resources are available for me to borrow - reserving rooms, technology, vehicles, etc.? Who do I go to reserve these?

Do I have a mailbox? Where is it and should I expect to receive anything there regularly?

What are the mental health or physical health resources available on campus for me?
Can I talk to you about these concerns?

Financial Resources

How highly am I expected to prioritize finding and applying to other funding opportunities? How much time relative to other work?

What is your philosophy on how research is funded within the lab and between different projects?

How much is summer pay? What is the process for applying to work study? When should I begin the work study process with financial aid for the summer to ensure timely pay?

Are you willing to pay for semester fees (not included in tuition waiver)?

Are you willing to pay for health insurance?

Are you willing to pay for conference fees and travel fees?

Are you willing to pay for membership to relevant societies? (Notably, those that require membership to attend or present at a conference)

Is there funding available for technology resources? (E.g. computer equipment, but also office supplies, lab notebooks, etc.)

Are there any regular funding opportunities for graduate students (e.g. grants for travel, field work, research expenses) I should know about? Either those regularly for EE students or those specific to this lab's/my research topic?

What are my options and resources in a financial emergency? (e.g. can advisor front rent or other bills for a student in the case of late pay from the university?)