# Department of Integrative Biology

# **Document of Expectations for Postdocs and Supervisors**

**Purpose**: Establishing clear expectation documents is a valuable practice for principal investigators and their lab members because it establishes a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and norms within the research environment. These documents serve as a communication tool that outlines how the advisor-mentee relationship will function, covering areas such as work hours, authorship policies, feedback timelines, lab culture, and professional development opportunities. By explicitly defining expectations early on, both parties can reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings, manage potential conflicts more effectively, and create a more inclusive and supportive environment. It also empowers mentees by giving them a clearer picture of what success looks like and how they will be supported in achieving it. For advisors, it provides a framework to ensure fairness and consistency in how mentorship is delivered. Ultimately, expectation documents contribute to a more transparent, respectful, and productive research experience for everyone involved.

**Instructions:** Building and maintaining a productive working relationship between a supervisor and a post-doctoral researcher is crucial for their success. This document is intended to establish clear expectations for both the postdoc and the supervisor within the first few weeks of joining the lab, which should be reviewed annually thereafter. This document can be used either as a checklist (this document) during a meeting or as a form to fill out, in which additional details for your lab are provided for each bullet point below in written form. All university and department policies are expected to be followed; these expectations provide additional expectations for both individuals.

## **1. Introduction**

* **Objective Statement:** Outline the purpose of this agreement on expectations, emphasizing commitment to effective, inclusive, and culturally appropriate mentoring by the supervisor.
* **Implementation:** Describe the frequency of discussing these topics (at a minimum, annually)

## **2. Individual career and professional goals**

* **Long-term career goals:** Discuss and align on the supervisee’s long-term career aspirations.
* **Short-term Goals (SMART):** Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals for research and professional development.
* **Milestones:** Establish key milestones for the coming year, the duration of the appointment, and strategies to monitor progress.

## **2. What you can expect from the supervisor:**

### Guidance on Work Expectations and Plans:

* **Regular assessments:** Schedule periodic evaluations to assess progress and address any issues.
* **Constructive feedback:** Establish a framework for providing and receiving feedback.
* **Mentoring aligned with individual goals:** Tailor mentoring to support the mentee’s personal and professional objectives.

### Professional Development

* **Training opportunities:** Encourage participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, and other skill development opportunities.
* **Networking:** Encourage participation in academic and professional networks.
* **Publication and presentation:** Outline expectations for disseminating research through publications and presentations at conferences and other events.

### Resources and Support

* **Funding**: Provide the mentee with a timeline or framework for funding sources and options during their graduate school timeframe.
* **Access to resources:** Detail available resources, including laboratory equipment, funding, and administrative support.
* **Support services:** Highlight support services such as writing centers, mental health services, and career counseling.

### Training and Resources:

* **Verify required trainings:** Ensure mentee training is complete
* **Organize backups and contingency plans:** Plan for coverage of time-sensitive responsibilities and unexpected events.

### Overview of other responsibilities for the coming year and time available:

* **Mentoring philosophy and available time:** The supervisor should clearly describe their mentoring philosophy and how they will implement it in concrete ways
* **Other ongoing projects or commitments:** Describe other projects or commitments that may take time away from research conducted in collaboration with the postdoc and provide timelines for when the supervisor may be out of the office or unavailable.

## **3. What you can expect from the Postdoc:**

### Commitment to Work:

* **Guidance on work expectations and plans:** Understand and adhere to project goals and expectations.
* **Work hours:** Maintain agreed-upon working hours.
* **In case of absence:** Be sure to communicate promptly regarding any emergencies or events that prevent or restrict you from conducting your research.

### Professional and Academic Duties:

* **Mentoring undergraduates and graduate students:** Cover expectations of the post-doc for mentoring others in the lab.
* **Lab management duties:** Participate in managing lab operations as required.
* **Complete required trainings and coursework:** Fulfill all mandatory training and academic requirements.
* **Professional development:** Frequently seek out and attend department seminars and other recommended professional development and career growth programs and opportunities.
* **Publication and presentation:** Establish goals for writing up publications and presenting your research.

### Training and Resources:

* **Comply with required trainings:** Will complete and comply with necessary training programs.
* **Organize backups and contingency plans:** Plan for coverage of time-sensitive responsibilities and unexpected events.
* **Funding**: Seek out funding opportunities as appropriate and agreed upon with the supervisor

Overview of other responsibilities for the coming year and time available:

* **Other ongoing projects or commitments:** Describe other projects of commitments that may take time away from research conducted in collaboration with the supervisor and provide timelines for when the postdoc may be out of the office or unavailable.

## **4. Mutual expectations:**

Communications:

* **Preferred methods:** Specify preferred communication channels (e.g., email, text, Slack, Teams).
* **Response expectations:** Define expectations for responses outside of work hours.
* **Contact hours:** Define expected availability and communication times.
* **Contact information:** Provide up-to-date contact details for both mentor and mentee.
* **Inclusive professional language:** Encourage the use of respectful and inclusive language.

Cultural Competence

* **Cultural awareness:** Promote understanding and respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
* **Bias mitigation:** Address and mitigate potential biases in mentoring relationships.

Conflict Resolution

* **Procedure:** Outline steps for addressing and resolving conflicts or misunderstandings.

Time Management and Commitment

* **Expectations:** Define the expected time commitment for both mentor and mentee.
* **Scheduling:** Establish guidelines for scheduling and managing time effectively to balance research, coursework, and other responsibilities.
* **Time off**: Define the guidelines for requesting time off and the expectations for work during university breaks.

Research Products and Access

* **Data, code, and other research product handling:**
  + **Group collaboration:** Define how experiments, code, and/or data will be collaboratively managed. Clarify roles and responsibilities.
  + **Data & code stewardship and access:** Because, as per policy, all data are owned by MSU, but individual researchers are the ‘stewards’, it is expected that the postdoc and supervisor discuss and clarify who is the steward of collected data and who also has access and can use the data.
  + **Lab notebooks (electronic or not):** Describe expectations related to maintaining lab notebooks or other forms of communication and documentation for research conducted in the lab
  + **Long-term curation:** Specify formats and plans for long-term data storage and curation.
* **Authorship and credit:** Define expectations for authorship and other forms of credit and attribution for all data products, not just data (including code and other research products). Preferably, there is an authorship policy template that the lab uses that can be the starting point of authorship discussions.
* **For researchers who collaborate beyond the lab or MSU, include those individuals in the above discussions and agreements**

At the completion of the post-doctoral research position (offboarding):

* **Research material archiving:** Describe who is responsible for ensuring that physical or digital materials are archived or accessible to other researchers, depending on the above agreements.
* **Physical sample and other cleanup:** Remove any samples, materials, or digital files that are no longer used.

## **5. Signatures and Agreements**

* **Acknowledgment:** Provide spaces for both parties to sign and acknowledge their commitment to the mentoring agreement.
* **Date:** Include dates to formalize the agreement.