Lab Expectations, Jonathan Cohen, SUNY-ESF 8/20/18

1. I try to be as available as possible to my grad students when they need help with their projects. If my door is open, feel free to come in. If it’s not, feel free to knock and if I’m busy we can arrange for a later time to talk. You may call, email, or text me with project related matters on evenings or weekends, although my response might not be immediate.
2. I will initially view you as a junior colleague who I am mentoring. By the end of your program, I will come to see you as more of a partner or peer. You may find that you increasingly desire independence over time in decision making related to your project. This is normal for an academic career. I will be supportive of that process, but I do invest a lot in my students’ projects so I expect you to keep me in the loop on your work. If you are excited about some development with your study, there is a 100% chance I will be excited to hear about it. As the person responsible for your grant’s products, I also need to be informed of decisions or problems that might affect meeting our objectives, even if you believe you can solve a problem without me.
3. At the start of your grad program, we will have a weekly meeting of up to one hour. I will also require weekly check-ins from the field. Over the course of your program, you may find that your mentoring needs change and that you want to meet less often. You will also likely identify mentors besides me, and will spend time working with them. Every student will differ in this respect. It is important for you to communicate your mentoring expectations to me each year, so that we can make a plan that works for both of us.
4. Everyone in the lab, including me, is a human being. You should expect me to view your inevitable mistakes as learning opportunities, and to forgive you as long as you treat them that way. I expect the same of you, when I make mistakes.
5. Lab meetings are where we learn from and with each other, and share our individual knowledge and experience. They are mandatory parts of your assistantship, so I expect everyone to attend unless it’s impossible for you (for example if you’re in the field). If you are getting your degree remotely, we have technological options for you to join in lab meetings.
6. Working in the office is also important for exchanging ideas and helping each other, and for being able to spontaneously come to me or other members of your committee for help or advice. I will normally be in the office 5 days a week. I expect my grad students to work in the office no fewer than 2 days a week as part of your assistantship, including the lab meeting day, but the more days you come in, the better.
7. If you are taking personal time away from work or will miss a lab meeting for any reason, I expect you to let me know as much in advance as possible. This holds no matter how many days you typically come into the office. You do not have to share the details of your reason with me if it is personal, but if you would find it helpful to talk to me about something, listening is also part of the advisor’s role. Be aware that ESF also provides free counseling services: <http://www.esf.edu/counseling/>. The Academic Mental Health Collective (<https://amhcollective.com/>) is another good resource.
8. If you want take a job outside of grad school, either for pay or as a volunteer, that has hours during the regular work week, I expect you to discuss it with me ahead of time. Your assistantship requires 20 hours of week per work, but in reality you are being paid to meet objectives related to your project so we need to ensure you will meet them.
9. I appoint research assistants for one semester at a time. Continued appointment will depend on meeting degree- and project-related objectives that you and I will discuss, with input from your committee as needed. But reasonable progress will always be my basic standard, and my goal will be to help you meet it if you start to struggle.
10. If you don’t submit your thesis chapters for publication within one year of graduating, I reserve the right write them up myself. You will still be the lead author, assuming the remaining work is editorial.
11. You will have one committee meeting per academic year, during which time you update the committee on your progress and expected progress, and you will fill out a grad student self-evaluation form and go over it with the committee. These forms are intended to help you reflect on your progress, and to get feedback on all aspects of your grad program from your entire committee on a regular basis.
12. Lab social functions are not mandatory for you to attend, but everyone is highly encouraged to join in! These include: when we have lunch during lab meeting time without any official agenda, when we meet outside of lab meeting times for social reasons, the monthly wildlife/conservation biology potluck at Dr. Frair’s house. However, if you get a benefit from such an event (like presenting your work and getting feedback at the potluck) it would be good etiquette for you to reciprocate.
13. Authorship in academia is a complicated and not always intuitive subject. One simple rule of thumb for my lab is that if I played a role in writing the proposal for any project that generates a published article or unpublished report, a conference talk, or a conference poster, then I should be a co-author (you will always be the lead author). Anyone in the lab who made an intellectual contribution should also be a co-author. It is entirely possible that your thesis work will generate side projects that do not directly involve me, and that will lead to papers written with other collaborators and mentors, and where I would not be a co-author. I think those are great experiences and important parts of your professional growth, and I will be supportive if it happens. However, your primary focus should be writing papers based on your thesis. When in doubt about authorship, come to me to discuss it.
14. All faculty and students at ESF have a Google Drive folder with essentially unlimited storage. I have subfolders for each students and will email you a link to yours. I expect you to regularly back up your project data to that subfolder. Exceptions may be data that are shared with collaborators on an external database. I will not share your folder with anybody else without discussing it with you.
15. I expect you to read the EFB Graduate Student Handbook (https://www.esf.edu/efb/graduate/documents/handbook.pdf). It will make many policies and procedures clear to you. If you think something is unclear or missing let me know.
16. I believe that being a wildlife biologist is the best job ever, and I am looking forward to working with you in this early and exciting phase of your career!