

Duke University Biology Department Expectations Document*

Mentoring expectations of advisors, committee members, and graduate students.

1. *Motivation and objectives*

The primary mission of graduate education at Duke University is to prepare the next generation of scholarly, educational, and professional leaders. In order to fulfill this mission, we seek to instill in each student a key set of values and capacities necessary for the production of knowledge in the service of society, as well as responsible membership in a community of scholars. These key attributes include: independent critical judgment, academic rigor, intellectual honesty, the ability to frame and conduct important agendas for scholarly inquiry, familiarity with collaborative work, and effective communication skills.

In this broader context of the intellectual community of scholars at Duke, successful students in the Biology PhD program are creative initiative-takers who take charge of their own course through the program. They draw on resources available to them to seek mentorship and often gain their own external funding. These students are highly engaged in promoting a positive departmental culture, and bring diverse perspectives and backgrounds to form the cornerstone of the scientific research enterprise in our department. After graduation, our students find their calling in a wide variety of STEM careers.

The goal for this mentorship statement is to **improve the transparency of mentorship expectations in order to focus on excellence through diversity and inclusion**. We aim to tailor the mentorship and training of each student toward achieving their career goals. To do this, we seek to communicate expectations more clearly and provide additional resources enabling students to meet those expectations so that every student who enters our doors has an equal opportunity for success in our program and beyond.

Excellence in research, teaching, and service requires the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Our departmental vision for inclusive excellence is closely allied with that of the Duke University Trinity College of Arts & Sciences:

“Trinity College Arts & Sciences has clearly and consistently articulated its deep commitment to diversity as a central tenet for new ideas and creativity. To be a truly educated person, one must embrace and practice an appreciation for different disciplines, thought processes, modes of expression, backgrounds, and histories – in other words, engagement with the full range of knowledge and human experiences. Indeed, this is the core of the liberal arts education. Complex issues belie simple solutions, and diversity provides a way of thinking and using different perspectives, not only to more effectively solve today’s problems but to imagine future possibilities in an unscripted world. And finally, we seek to develop not just an inclusive environment for faculty, students, and staff, but a collaborative community that promotes a “culture of belonging,” so that diverse perspectives not only provide value but are publicly recognized for the value they add.”

Herein we delineate departmental aspirations for achievement of diverse excellence in recruitment and mentorship. We lay out departmental expectations of advisors, mentees, and

committee members. This is a living document that students and faculty will periodically assess and adjust as needs change.

2. *Goals and expectations for excellence in mentorship: expectations for advisors, mentees, and committees.*

2.1. Goals for excellent advisors

2.1.1. *The mentorship compact.* As early as possible in a student's graduate study, the advisor will prepare an expectations document in consultation with the student. This written document explains the advisor's commitments to the student regarding communication and meeting frequency, timeliness of written feedback, etc.), as well as their expectations of the student (lead time for recommendation letters, time spent in lab/field, attendance at seminars and lab meetings, expectations of standards for the awarding of the PhD, etc.). The student will prepare a similar document outlining their expectations of mentorship from the advisor and their commitments as a graduate student. Early on in the student's thesis work, the advisor and student will meet to discuss their respective written documents, make any necessary changes, and formally agree to both documents. The advisor is responsible for sending both documents to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) office to be included in the student's file. Frequency of meetings and expectations of response time to student emails should be stipulated and agreed upon in the mentorship compact.

The format of this written document is to be decided jointly by the advisor and the student. Resources, templates, and information about possible formats of both the advisor's and the student's documents are now available on the departmental website.

In advance of each of the student's milestones through the Ph.D. program, the student and advisor will meet to discuss these two documents, and if necessary, make any changes. If modified, the new agreements will be sent to the DGS office to be included in the student's file.

2.1.2. *Advice and support for completion of milestones.* Advisors are responsible for awareness of their students' trajectory through the program, including progress and completion of key milestones (program of study meeting, preliminary exam, etc). Advisors are responsible for helping students prepare for these milestones (reading and providing feedback on draft documents, etc). Advisors should be in communication with students regarding support and resources for staying on track. The DGS office should track student progress on milestones and be in communication with the advisor and student regarding these milestones in a timely manner. The advisor should provide the student necessary training in how to schedule their own meetings with the student's dissertation committee (e.g., providing to the student times they are available for meetings, pointing the student to logistical information for how to schedule a meeting room, etc.)

2.1.3. *Track student progress using an IDP.* Students and advisors are strongly recommended to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP). [MyIDP](#) is a recommended format for trainees supported on NIH grants, and is recommended by the department as well. Another appropriate

format includes that required by the University Program in Ecology (UPE, see THIS LINK). This document details student career goals, self-evaluation and advisor-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, professional development plans, and research plans for the PhD. Advisors and students should meet at regular intervals to discuss the IDP, adjust as the student evolves, and provide feedback in detail at a regular basis (recommended biannually or yearly, although the optimal frequency should be decided based on the mentorship document above). As part of the IDP, advisors are expected to have open conversations with the mentee regarding their long-term career goals and guide them to tailor their training appropriately. Resources should be made available in cases where the student's aspirations go outside of the faculty member's expertise. For example, helping students identify on-campus resources for students aspiring to non-academic careers (helping students find workshops, encouraging them to network in their area of interest, join training in teaching, etc). Electronic copies of IDP files and subsequent yearly updates will be maintained confidentially by the DGS office.

2.2. Goals for excellent faculty Ph.D. committee members:

3.2.1. Committee members will provide written and oral feedback on any unpublished dissertation chapters at the defense with an aim to help the student to prepare those chapters for eventual publication. In preparation for publication, should the student request it, the committee will comment on any manuscript from the student's dissertation when the student sends them a manuscript. The committee member and student should communicate explicitly to reach mutual agreement on a timeline for edits and committee feedback prior to submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

2.2.2. Each meeting of a student's Ph.D. committee (from the first committee meeting to the dissertation defense) will begin with a period of 5 to 10 minutes in which the advisor will leave the room while the student and the rest of the committee remain. This discussion will be in addition to the time that the student leaves the room for the committee to discuss privately. The student will first choose one committee member to chair this meeting. The student will then be free to speak confidentially about how their mentoring relationship with the advisor is working, and what might be improved. The committee member chosen to chair this meeting will summarize the discussion of the meeting in writing and send it to the DGS. The DGS will then discuss any concerns raised in the meeting with the student and, when appropriate, with the advisor.

2.2.3. The chair of the committee will be someone other than the advisor, similar to how committees are run in the Office of Biomedical Graduate Education programs (OBGE).

2.2.4. The committee is expected to be available to the student outside of regularly scheduled committee meetings for advice, resources, and other training support. The goal here is to aspire toward a culture in which a student has access to a network of mentors with diverse expertise relevant to the area of study.

2.3. Graduate students:

2.3.1. Students are responsible for keeping on track with their milestones and understanding when they must complete each of them toward the completion of the Ph.D. (this information is laid out clearly in the Biograds handbook, i.e. 1st committee meeting by the 3rd semester, prelims by the 6th semester, annual committee meetings in the 7th and 9th semesters, final seminar and dissertation defense by the 12th semester, at least two semesters of teaching assistantships before the defense). If circumstances arise that make it difficult for the student to meet one of these milestones, it is the student's responsibility to notify their advisor and/or the DGS of that fact as soon as that possibility becomes apparent.

2.3.2. Graduate students are encouraged to write proposals for externally funded fellowships and grants to support their dissertation research for which they are eligible to apply, as well as internal fellowships and grants offered by The Graduate School. This experience in grant writing and external support will provide excellent training and assists with clarifying the aims of the thesis research.

2.3.3. If a student plans to submit one of the chapters of their dissertation for publication prior to submitting the complete dissertation to their full committee for the defense, they are strongly encouraged to circulate the manuscript to their entire committee early on in the publication preparation process. The purpose is to give the committee an opportunity to comment on the manuscript prior to its possible publication and subsequent inclusion in the dissertation, as well as for the student to receive comments and feedback from a community of readers with broad expertise.

*Thank you to the initiators and authors of this document for their contributions to its content (listed in alpha order):

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