Setting Expectations with a “Welcome to the Lab’ Letter

April 7 & 12, 2022

Graduate Faculty Development Program

We will begin at 10:05 A.M.

While you wait, learn about the new Women's Entrepreneurship program at the Innovative Genomics Institute
Add Your Pronouns
Help us create more inclusive virtual spaces. Please add your pronouns after your last name in Zoom to prevent instances of misgendering.

Mute Yourself
Please ensure that you place yourself on mute when not speaking.

Questions
We will have several opportunities for large group discussions after breakout rooms. We ask that you hold your questions until then. We will also have time for questions at the end.
Setting Expectations with a “Welcome to the Lab” Letter

Isaac Strong, PhD
Program Director
Graduate Faculty Development Program

Bill Lindstaedt, MS
Assistant Vice Chancellor
Career Advancement, International and Postdoctoral Scholars
Learning Objectives

By the end of the workshop, participants will ...

• be familiar with the Graduate Faculty Development Program’s operational definition of a research mentor

• appreciate the unique difficulty of setting expectations as a research mentor

• begin to create a “Welcome to the Lab” letter in collaboration with other faculty

• describe the three phases of establishing a “Welcome to the Lab” document: creating, implementing, and upholding/iterating
Goals

1. Increase the use of expectations-setting documents such as a “Welcome Letter” to:
   - Make the job of supervising, mentoring and educating easier
   - Improve equitable and inclusive lab leadership practices
   - Increase communication and efficiency in the lab
   - Avoid unnecessary conflict, resolve conflict when it happens
   - Promote mental health, wellness and satisfaction and productivity

2. Provide a forum for faculty to share ideas and advice about topics, content and wording of expectations documents

3. Seed considerations about best practices for communicating, revising and implementing your expectations
Agenda

1. Scope/purpose
2. Outline
3. Language
4. Implementing tips
What expectations do you want to set for your trainees?

PollEv.com/gfdp
The challenge for every PI: *Balancing multiple roles, wearing multiple hats*

### 7 Supervisory Responsibilities

1. Set expectations/ Take baseline assessment
2. Teach, train & delegate effectively
3. Give kudos and corrective feedback continuously
4. Recognize progress & reward achievement
5. Articulate & enforce consequences
6. Manage conflict
7. Provide support

### Mentorship Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychosocial Support</th>
<th>Career Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendship</td>
<td>sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social</td>
<td>coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role model</td>
<td>protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent</td>
<td>exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acceptance</td>
<td>challenge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### You are a special kind of mentor: a Research Mentor

*(A super mentor, combining mentor, educational and supervisory tasks)*

*Adapted from* Manage Up: Managing Your Relationship with Your Research Mentor, an OCPD course for students and postdocs. Created by Naledi Saul and Laurence Clement.
The “Welcome Letter”

1. Document shared by entire lab, and with new members

2. Describes PI and group expectations around conduct, behavioral norms, research practices, lab management practices

3. “This document describes what you need to know to be successful in this lab.”

4. Unique to your lab and the way you want to lead your group
Is an expectations document necessary?

Survey of 338 early career researchers, A. Murat Eren lab @Uchicago: Mentorship in the Life Sciences: Voices of mentees

*Mentor has a lab culture or code of conduct and expectations document*

“Data in this survey suggest that the match between mentors and mentees play a key role in defining the outcomes of mentee-mentor relationships.

Fortunately there is a way to ensure that match early on by creating a *code of conduct* or a *lab culture & expectations* document to share with perspective mentees.

These documents help mentors to be upfront about their mentorship strategy and their key expectations from the members of their group, so mentees could have an opportunity to find better matches.”
Is an expectations document necessary?

Survey of 338 early career researchers, A. Murat Eren lab @Uchicago: *Mentorship in the Life Sciences: Voices of mentees*

“As of today, such documents seem to be very uncommon among mentors”
Is an expectations document necessary?

Survey of 338 early career researchers, A. Murat Eren lab @Uchicago:
*Mentorship in the Life Sciences: Voices of mentees*

“the experience of trainees with mentors that provided a code of conduct seems to be much more positive”
Is an expectations document necessary?

*Structure and belonging: Pathways to success for underrepresented minority and women PhD students in STEM fields* R. Mendoza et al, UC Berkeley and NSF AGEP California Alliance

- Indicates that clear expectations and clear performance standards help mitigate the effects of bias, uneven treatment and the expression of negative stereotypes
- Where the literature shows that conditions of ambiguity are more likely to enable the expression of bias.
Is an expectations document necessary?

UCSF is no different

Most mentees are satisfied with guidance on their research but other components of mentorship need work such as communication of expectations, discussion of career goals, and pursuit of other training opportunities outside the lab.
Three phases of Welcome Letter

- Creating your set of expectations – your Welcome Letter
  - Define purpose and goals
  - Write your outline
  - Complete the document/fill in blanks
    - Consider language you’re using

- Implementing the expectations in your lab

- Upholding expectations and iterating on your expectations
Different styles and purposes

Structured, detailed, high degree of specificity

Aly Lab, Columbia University

The key to a happy lab life is in the manual
https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06167-w
Different styles and purposes

Structured, more philosophical, heavy focus on training stage-specific expectations

Puckett Lab, University of Memphis

Table of Contents – Lab Expectations

Rules
Safety and Health
Collegiality

Expectations
Work Hours
Standing Weekly Commitments
Conferences
Authorship
Grant Writing
Own Your Mistakes

Specific rules for different lab members
Postdocs and senior PhD students
My responsibilities
Trainees responsibilities

Junior PhD students
My responsibilities
Trainees responsibilities

Undergraduates
My responsibilities
Trainees responsibilities

Puckett Lab Expectations
https://puckettresearch.org/people/lab-expectations/
### Core Values
- Advance scientific knowledge
- Enhance public appreciation and understanding of scientific knowledge
- Uphold the integrity of science
- Contribute to the collegial and intellectual culture of academia
- Respect human diversity
- Fulfill members’ goals for advancement

### Core Plan
- Consistently publish articles in leading journals
- Maintain consistent external funding
- Graduate all students in a timely manner
- Prepare undergraduates for graduate programs by mentoring them as researchers
- Teach courses effectively
- Broadly serve the Biology Department, the University of North Carolina, and professional field of ecology

---

**Mitchell Lab, UNC Chapel Hill**

http://mitchelllab.web.unc.edu/prospective-members/
Discussion #1: Goal of your document

Backward design: start with purpose and how you’ll measure success

On your own first, consider these questions to get started: (3 minutes)

consider writing out your answers in your template document

1. What do you want this document to achieve? Why?
2. How will you know if your goals for this document have been achieved?

When you get to your breakout room: (8-10 minutes)

1. Have everyone introduce themselves (name, pronouns, department/graduate programs)
2. Go around in a circle to share your answers to the questions above

consider writing notes from what you hear from your colleagues if what they share inspires you to think differently

These instructions/discussion questions can also found in the chat panel.
Three phases of Welcome Letter

- Creating your set of expectations – your Welcome Letter
  - Define purpose and goals
  - Write your outline
  - Complete the document/fill in blanks
    - Consider language you’re using

- Implementing the expectations in your lab

- Upholding expectations and iterating on your expectations
Outline of your document

Open your Welcome Letter template

Tour of the document
Discussion #2: Outline of your document

On your own first: (5 minutes)
1. What topics and subtopics from the template do you like? Which do you not like?
2. Do you feel that there are topics/subtopics missing that you think would be important to have in your document?
3. Are there topics/subtopics that you are unsure about?

consider editing this document as you reflect on these questions to get you started on your own expectations document

When you get to your breakout room: (8-10 minutes)
1. Have everyone introduce themselves (name, pronouns, department/graduate programs)
2. Go around the group to share your answers to the questions above

consider writing notes and making edits to your document from what you hear from your colleagues

These instructions/discussion questions can also found in your template document.
What topics and subtopics should a Welcome Letter include, to set expectations effectively?

**Large group discussion:**

What ideas did your group come up with?

What’s an idea you added that wasn’t in the template?

What’s something you learned from a colleague that you had not considered before?

We’re taking notes to incorporate into UCSF template
Now that you have your document started …

Rest of the template contains crowd-sourced content that you might find helpful for different topics/subtopics.

**Yellow Highlighted font:** where you could personalize the text for your needs

**Red font:** where you might have something ‘ready to go’ already

**Black font:** somewhat ‘universal’ text

**As helpful as it can be to have examples to follow/use, it is important that you make this document your own**
Three phases of Welcome Letter

- Creating your set of expectations – your Welcome Letter
  - Define purpose and goals
  - Write your outline
  - Complete the document/fill in blanks
    - Consider language you’re using
- Implementing the expectations in your lab
- Upholding expectations and iterating on your expectations
Assessing the language you use

After you’ve drafted your document, go back and ask yourself if your expectations are:

Clear  Equitable  Inclusive

Note: you will all be getting a tip sheet PDF with all of this information (and more).
Are your expectations **clear**?

**Specific**  
Could your expectation be broken down into steps or pieces in order to be understood? Does it need to be?

**Measurable**  
If you cannot tell if someone met your expectation or not, it's not written well enough yet.

**Action-oriented**  
Is there actual behavior or conduct associated with your expectation?

**Realistic**  
Do current and future lab members think your expectations are manageable/realistic?
Are your expectations equitable?

Equal is not necessarily equitable.

Equity considers the contextual experiences/circumstances of people, recognizing that resources, opportunities, and power are not always distributed equally.

Questions to ask yourself

What assumptions might I be making?
Are there barriers that prevent some people from meeting this expectation?

Example from the lab

When paying for costs associated with a conference, lab members pay for registration fees, hotels, and flights (when applicable) upfront, and will then be reimbursed by the lab.

Expectation applies to everyone equally, but does it impact everyone equally?
Are your expectations equitable?

Questions to ask yourself
What assumptions might I be making?
Are there barriers that prevent some people from meeting this expectation?

Example from the lab
When paying for costs associated with a conference, lab members pay for registration fees, hotels, and flights (when applicable) upfront, and will then be reimbursed by the lab.

Expectation applies to everyone equally, but does it impact everyone equally?

Assumptions:
- everyone has the ability to pay upfront
- everyone can wait to be reimbursed

Barriers:
- those unable to pay upfront and/or those unable to wait to be reimbursed are practically denied the benefits of attending conferences
- puts undue burden on some lab members to seek assistance with paying
  - people may feel forced to disclose their financial situation
**Having an expectations document is making progress toward equity in your lab.**

**Questions to ask yourself**
What assumptions might I be making? Are there barriers that prevent some people from meeting this expectation?

**Example from the lab**

**EQUITABLE**

When paying for costs associated with a conference, lab members have several options:

1. pay upfront with their own money and get reimbursed
2. submit a payment request to [administrative assistant] have the lab pay upfront for you
3. book hotels and flights using Connexxus (UC Travel Program), available through MyAccess, which will allow you to use lab funds.

*Assistance with learning and navigating the Connexxus system is available upon request.*

**EQUAL**

When paying for costs associated with a conference, lab members pay for registration fees, hotels, and flights (when applicable) upfront, and will then be reimbursed by the lab.

**Having an expectations document is making progress toward equity in your lab.**
Are your expectations inclusive?

Questions to ask yourself

Am I inviting people to bring their diverse experiences and perspectives? Do my expectations create a lab culture in which differences are valued? Despite good intentions, do my expectations exclude anyone?

Equitable expectations/policies lend well to inclusive environments, and here are some additional things you can consider.

Language

1. Use gender neutral words whenever possible
   - people vs. men and women
   - normalize they/them as a singular pronoun
   - avoid using ‘guys’ to refer to a mix-gender group

2. Person-first language
   - people with disabilities vs. disabled people

3. Implicit messages
   - “We’re here to do science, leave personal stuff at the door”
   - mentors typically help mentees through ‘personal stuff’
   - lands differently for folks already not feeling included

content-guide.18f.gov/our-style/inclusive-language/
Questions to ask yourself

Am I inviting people to bring their diverse experiences and perspectives?
Do my expectations create a lab culture in which differences are valued?
Despite good intentions, do my expectations exclude anyone?

Lab Policies

1. Lab Interactions

“In this lab, we include pronouns in email signatures.”

“There may be conflicts or concerns relating to inclusivity between members of the lab. If you don’t feel comfortable coming to me to address those concerns, you can confidentially reach out to the Office of Ombuds.”

2. Community Building

building connections between members of the lab is important for fostering a sense of belonging

consider a wide range of activities i.e. not always involving alcohol

3. Intentional Recruitment

examine biases in how you recruit students and postdocs

recruit more lab members who identify as being from backgrounds historically underrepresented

postdocs.ucsf.edu/path-to-postdoc
Questions to ask yourself

Am I inviting people to bring their diverse experiences and perspectives? Do my expectations create a lab culture in which differences are valued? Despite good intentions, do my expectations exclude anyone?

Inclusive Leadership

My Diversity-Equity-Inclusion Ally Pact

I know I have **blind** spots
- the inability to see that what I’m doing might be harmful to someone

I know I have **tough** spots
- the natural resistance to input that suggests
  my behavior conflicts with my intention

I know I have **blank** spots
- a lack of data and knowledge about crucial differences in social advantages and disadvantages between myself and others

I know **I have work to do**
I promise to do the work I need to do to see my biases, spare you my defensiveness, and educate myself in order to be the most effective teacher/student/parent/family member/employer/employee/colleague/partner/friend/citizen I can be.

I hope you will always feel entitled to let me know if my blind, tough, or blank spots ever cause you to feel anything less than respected, included, and well-served by me. I promise to always do my best to receive your notice of my mistakes with humility and gratitude.

I know I have **blind** spots
- the inability to see that what I’m doing might be harmful to someone

I know I have **tough** spots
- the natural resistance to input that suggests
  my behavior conflicts with my intention

I know I have **blank** spots
- a lack of data and knowledge about crucial differences in social advantages and disadvantages between myself and others

I know **I have work to do**
I promise to do the work I need to do to see my biases, spare you my defensiveness, and educate myself in order to be the most effective teacher/student/parent/family member/employer/employee/colleague/partner/friend/citizen I can be.

I hope you will always feel entitled to let me know if my blind, tough, or blank spots ever cause you to feel anything less than respected, included, and well-served by me. I promise to always do my best to receive your notice of my mistakes with humility and gratitude.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific</strong></td>
<td>Could your expectation be broken down into steps or pieces in order to be understood? Does it need to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurable</strong></td>
<td>If you cannot tell if someone met your expectation or not, it's not written well enough yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action-oriented</strong></td>
<td>Is there actual behavior or conduct associated with your expectation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realistic</strong></td>
<td>Do current and future lab members think your expectations are manageable/realistic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equitable</strong></td>
<td>What assumptions might I be making? Are there barriers that prevent some people from meeting this expectation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive</strong></td>
<td>Am I inviting people to bring their diverse experiences and perspectives? Do my expectations create a lab culture in which differences are valued? Despite good intentions, do my expectations exclude anyone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Is this clear?**
- Specific
- Measurable
- Action oriented
- Realistic

**Is this equitable?**
- What assumptions might I be making?
- Are there barriers that prevent some people from meeting this expectation?

**Is this inclusive?**
- Am I inviting people to bring their diverse experiences and perspectives?
- Do my expectations create a lab culture in which differences are valued?
- Despite good intentions, do my expectations exclude anyone?

---

**Example**

**Professionalism**

"When attending and/or presenting at conferences, you should present yourself in a professional manner. This means: wear business formal/business casual attire, be punctual (or better yet, early), be available at poster sessions to answer questions about your work, etc."
Three phases of Welcome Letter

• Creating your set of expectations – your Welcome Letter
  • Define purpose and goals
  • Write your outline
  • Complete the document/fill in blanks
    • Consider language you’re using

• Implementing the expectations in your lab

• Upholding expectations and iterating on your expectations
Implementation considerations

Involving your lab members in writing, editing, implementing and revising your lab Letter

Good practice is to set clear expectations that can apply widely/fairly while consistently evaluating those expectations with your team in order to adapt quickly -- both actions promote inclusivity. -- UCSF Ombuds Office

Introducing your lab letter to existing vs new members of the lab
   Existing – in person/lab meeting

Revising annually vs static

Drafting an original and asking for feedback

Establishing a committee

Being clear about what is negotiable before asking for feedback
Upholding/Iterating Considerations

Upholding expectations and consequences

Responding consistently when expectations are not met

Responding quickly when expectations are not met

Revise/iterate when something is not working – living document

Using the document to uphold expectations
Your explicit (and implicit) expectations allow students to understand more than just what you expect of them and others – those expectations, and how you uphold them, tell your learners who you are and what you’re about. – Asst Dean for Diversity and Learner Success
We’re here to help you in your work to finish and implement

Questions?
Please take time to complete our evaluation

Link in chat panel

or

point your mobile device’s camera at the QR code below and follow the link
Using performance-based language to set expectations

Are your expectations easily understood as behavior-based and measurable? Does your writing include unintended subtext?

1. I embrace students following diverse career paths. Other possible careers include teaching at smaller colleges, conducting research for government agencies such as USGS or USDA, or working to apply ecological principles to conservation for an organization like The Nature Conservancy. But whether or not you pursue research after your Ph.D., I expect that you will publish your dissertation research in peer-reviewed journals. -Mitchell Lab, UNC

vs

2. I have no expectation that all lab members will want to remain in academia; that’s great, as there are wonderful jobs across industries. This means first, that I accept students with diverse career goals; and second, that if career goals shift, the lab member should discuss this change with me so we can reorient the training plan towards the new dream job. -Puckett Lab, U of Memphis

Both messages start out conveying openness about career outcomes. #1 may be interpreted: “Here are other careers I approve, and you must publish.” #2 may be interpreted: “The important thing is that we communicate.”
Using performance-based language to set expectations

Can you break down your expectations into smaller components and write them so that members know what to do?

1. Values in the Smith lab require that we treat each other respectfully

vs

2. Noise Policy
General quiet time: Quiet time is between 9am and 5pm in the lab. Please respect other people's needs to work quietly in lab during those times by lowering your voice and generally keeping noise to a minimum. If you do need to talk, do it quietly and/or set up a meeting in a room with closed doors.

Headphone rule: If someone is wearing headphones, respect their need for quiet. Do not tap them on the shoulder to talk. Do not talk loudly next to them. Exception: if there is a fire alarm or other emergency and they are not aware, do alert them for their own safety.

Both messages are about respectful behavior in the lab. #1 leaves much open to interpretation. #2 narrows in on one aspect of lab life and defines respectful behavior. So much easier to engage with lab members around #2 and to enforce #2.