Graduate Student Research Assistantship Agreement

Revised June 16, 2023

General Philosophy

My role as a mentor is to help each student develop skills, knowledge, and confidence so that they are positioned to achieve their academic and professional goals. I encourage independence and creativity and expect my students to work hard, take ownership of their projects, and explore their research interests with a strong sense of curiosity and an open mind. To help you succeed in graduate school, we will meet regularly to talk about progress, challenges, ways I can help, and the next steps. My hope is that students feel both challenged and supported throughout their graduate studies. My mentorship style will differ among students because each student will have different needs and respond best to different strategies.

Each of us should strive to foster inclusivity and have zero tolerance for discriminatory behavior. Please talk to me if you experience any discrimination, including microaggressions. You can also contact the Office of Equity and/or Title IX offices on campus as needed. Members of my lab are expected to follow USU policy: "does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, including harassment, based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy, Title IX, or any other federal, state, or local law."

Expectations of students

Expert knowledge of the literature on your topic of study. This requires a huge investment of reading and thinking time and is essential to good scholarship. By the time you are done with a graduate thesis or dissertation on a topic, I expect you to know the relevant literature better than almost anyone else, including me.

A strong work ethic in the field, lab, and classes. Hard work pays off. Along with a strong work ethic comes **good time management skills**. There is a lot to juggle in graduate school, and it is extremely challenging to have important deadlines years away (see important deadlines below). I expect to be kept informed of your research and course activities, and any challenges you encounter, to ensure you are making satisfactory progress. This includes regular updates on your course performance, the progression of your proposal, thesis, or dissertation, and grant and manuscript writing.

When USU is in session (fall and spring semesters), your time will be split between your classes and research. In the initial phases of your program, it is expected that you will have a heavier time commitment to courses. Towards the end of the program, you will likely be working almost entirely on research. When USU is not in session (summer), most of your time should be spent on your research. At times I may ask you to serve in a supporting role in other research ongoing within our research group. If you wish to provide a supporting role in research of other labs, I ask that you discuss with me first.

Complete your degree in accordance with your funding. If you were hired on a grant or teaching assistant position, there are deadlines and expectations in place for the completion of the work (see below). Talk with me or your class instructors (if on a TA) about grant/TA expectations. Unfortunately, funding deadlines are often not flexible and additional funding is rarely available. In extenuating circumstances, I will do everything I can to find additional funding to help you complete your degree, but this is not guaranteed.

An ability to have fun with science. Your research should be exciting to you because it provides you with a chance to explore your intellectual and academic capabilities. Capitalize on this opportunity.

Take time off. It is important to take some time off. Be deliberate about your work-life balance and plan mental health breaks as needed. In addition to academic holidays, you can take up to two weeks off a year. All holidays outside of academic holidays must be approved by me in advance.

Be an involved member of our scientific community. QCNR and WATS work hard to provide a supportive and engaged community for its students, faculty, and staff. We know from experience that being part of a tight-knit community helps foster better mental health and learning. I expect you to participate in brown bag meetings, seminars, lab meetings, and college/department/lab socials. Although it is not required, I hope that you will be an engaged member of QCNR and WATS graduate communities.

A desire to learn. Graduate school offers an excellent opportunity for students to explore within and outside their area of expertise. I expect students to attend seminars, take up chances to meet with speakers, actively participate in brown bag groups and lab meetings, and identify other opportunities to explore and learn about science. Use such opportunities to hone your critical thinking skills and become a better public speaker.

Independence and ownership of the research. A substantial difference between your graduate research and prior undergraduate or professional work is that you should have a much higher sense of ownership of your graduate research. I will provide ideas, training, teaching, support, and mentorship – but I will not be able to answer questions for you in your defense. You will need to defend your choice of methods, analysis, and interpretations. When you have an academic problem, study it, try to find solutions, and then come to me to discuss options. Read the literature, talk with other graduate students, or at least think about it before we talk. I can tell you what I think is best and, in some cases, I may have a strong opinion, but in many cases, I will not have the answers. Sometimes no one has the answers, and it will be up to you to make a choice and be able to justify it. When you graduate, you will be able to confidently tell a prospective employer that you know how to research a method, manage fieldwork, analyze data and write it up, and successfully complete a project. Importantly, I will also be able to say these things about you.

Maintain a good academic standing. I expect you to maintain an "A" average in your classes. USU places a graduate student on probation if their GPA drops below 3.0, which may result in termination of their graduate research and/or teaching assistantship. I take academic probation

seriously and reserve the right to dismiss students from my lab that are not making satisfactory progress, as described below.

Be a good representative of our lab. Although I encourage independence and ownership, no student is an island. I expect you to include me in decisions, value my input, and acknowledge my role as your mentor. You are contributing to the development of both our careers.

A willingness to apply for funding for your research and other support. I encourage students to apply for internal (e.g., graduate research grants through USU) and external funding. I will provide as much financial support as I can, but learning how to acquire funding is an important skill and an important way to build your CV.

Data. Data are critically important to all that we do in science. Data collected by our research group are owned by USU and funders, and all data must be backed up on a continuous basis in a cloud forum. This protects students from losing their data/work, and also protects me and USU who are ultimately liable to the granting agencies that have funded the research. Unless other arrangements are made, the protocol is for me to invite you to a Box folder that I create (do not create the folder yourself because it will count against your storage space and, more importantly, will disappear when you leave USU). The Box folder is then stored on the cloud, as well as copied onto my computer and external hard drive. You should use that Box folder as the main drive on your computer where you store all data (copies of data sheets, spreadsheets of entered data, etc.). It is advisable to also store analyses, proposals, manuscript drafts, site photos, and anything else that would be problematic to lose. Large GIS files that are easily replaceable (e.g., downloadable online) need not be stored in this folder. Please do not store personal items like music or personal photos in this folder.

Hard copy (paper) datasheets must be scanned as pdfs ASAP after data collection. These pdf copies should be sent to me via email, as well as stored in the shared Box folder. Hard copies should be permanently archived in the lab, preferably using a 3-ring binder.

Presentations. I expect you to attend presentations and present your preliminary and final research results at professional local and national meetings. I will do the best I can to financially support your attendance at these. Following standard practice, all presentations involving your research should list me as a co-author. I would like to see presentations/posters 2-3 times before you give them. So plan to share an initial draft at least a week in advance. Presentations should acknowledge funding agencies with grant numbers.

Publications. Scientists owe it to the public, their funders, and the scientific community to make their findings public. You should be excited to get your work out there and to help progress your scientific field. Your chapters should be written as academic papers. For all written works you should first obtain my approval before sending them out to your committee or for review. Unless discussed otherwise, I expect to be a co-author on any papers or other products associated with your thesis/dissertation work. The addition of other co-authors should be discussed and cleared with me prior to making invitations. You will have six months post-defense to submit your papers to journals. After that, if you have not worked with me to develop an alternative timeline, I reserve the right to submit the papers with myself as the first author and you as a co-author.

Whether I actually exercise this right will depend on the particular student, situation, and timeline.

Honest communication with me about your graduate, career, or personal needs. Communication is important; if you feel you need more or less assistance than I am providing, need some other special consideration, are having personal (i.e., physical or mental health) issues, or if you are frustrated with my actions or actions of your colleagues, you must make me aware of your needs. What tends to work well is to schedule a weekly meeting and cancel it if not needed in a particular week. The Department further requires all graduate students to send brief updates to their committee members at least once per semester. These can be short, even bulleted lists, but should help keep everyone on the same page.

Take responsibility for your actions, and act ethically and professionally. You should objectively evaluate all data and admit when your hypotheses are incorrect. You must be an honest and objective scientist. This includes critical thinking about your own and other work. Most importantly, you must respect the work, beliefs, and feelings of other human beings, whether they are other students, technicians, cooperators, staff, or interested members of the public.

Equipment care. Please look after lab and field equipment, including routine maintenance of vehicles. If you damage equipment or notice damaged equipment, please let me know right away. Return all equipment and supplies to the proper location. Every so often we will have a lab clean-up day where we go through, clean, and organize our supplies and equipment, and it's helpful to have everybody involved. You are expected to keep your lab area clean and safe.

When you complete your studies, you need to reach out to me to develop a plan for either the long-term storage or disposal of samples. If you need to dispose of samples, you are required to follow all SOP and University policies for the proper disposal of items. If you worked in the field, you are responsible for removing any remaining equipment (lagging, rebar, etc.), but please check with me first before removing it.

Research permits and training. I expect you to be familiar with and acquire all necessary permits and training to conduct your research. You must remain in compliance with your permits and training at all times.

What you can expect of me

To do my best to assist you whenever you need help. Come by my office, or contact me by phone or email.

To discuss ideas for research projects and to help you to develop your proposal, thesis or dissertation, and manuscripts for publication.

To provide editing and critical input within a reasonable time on your research proposals, intermediate products, presentations, and thesis or dissertation.

To discuss and assist you with study objectives, analysis, interpretation of results, organization of thesis or dissertation and manuscripts, and career goals.

To provide an opportunity for you to develop as an independent researcher and to foster an environment of learning and professional growth. This will include not only supporting you but also challenging you to achieve your full potential.

To provide reasonable financial and logistical support for your research. Financial support includes paying publication costs and (as funds are available) paying for attendance at scientific meetings.

To be professional and ethical, and to treat you honestly and with respect.

What not to expect of me

To give instant feedback on emails, proposals, letters of recommendation, or manuscript drafts. I will make every effort to respond to you as quickly as I can but please try to give me at least two weeks' notice. There are times I am traveling or exceptionally busy.

To have the answers to all of your questions. You should seek out advice from fellow students, statistical experts, committee members, or other faculty if necessary. I will help you find the right person.

To do your work for you. If you need to learn a new skill or program to complete your research or analyses, I will not necessarily have or acquire the new skill too.

To walk you through all University guidelines and procedures. You will need to make sure that your student status, forms, classes, Research Assistant information, and registration materials are in order. The details change year to year and your cohort may follow different 'rules' than students that start a year before or after you. The graduate student handbook and the department staff are great resources for this information relevant to you.

Performance reviews, course corrections, and conflict resolution

Research is a creative process and therefore often proceeds along a non-linear path. Personal issues also sometimes prevent researchers from completing work according to an expected timeline. Ensuring research continues at a satisfactory pace requires clear guidelines, good communication, flexibility, and dedication. Each research collaboration is unique, so we will establish a frequency for research check-ins (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) and performance reviews (e.g., semi-annually, annually) that works for both of us. The frequency may change as needed throughout your program. Minor concerns regarding the pace of completing research tasks may be addressed verbally, as long as we have a mutual understanding of what needs to be accomplished and the timeline. If I have significant concerns about you falling behind in your research, I will provide a written explanation of expected tasks/objectives and a timetable for demonstrating progress or achievement of these benchmarks. The Department Head will be notified of the issue at this time and other limitations on your professional activities may be

implemented (e.g., restrictions on side projects, participation in extracurricular activities, teaching activities). If performance continues at an unsatisfactory pace, I will provide written notification of the timeline on which funding may be terminated, and expectations to avoid termination, with a minimum of 1 month notice before termination. You are encouraged to engage the Department Head, Dean, or Vice Provost of Graduate Studies, in that order, for guidance on how to handle difficult situations or if you feel you have been treated unfairly.

I acknowledge that I have thoroughly read and understand the lab guidelines

_____ Date _____

I acknowledge and understand that my graduate funding is tied to _____ and will lapse on _____

Staying on Track

Use this document to make sure you stay on track to meet administrative and academic obligations. I am here to guide you through this process and help with the formation of your thesis, methods, and analyses; please speak with me frequently about all of these topics. Brian Bailey (brian.bailey@usu.edu) will also be an invaluable resource with many of these steps.

When you arrive

- ☐ Commit your A number to memory; you will use it for everything.
- ☐ Pick up keys, get settled in your office and get logged in to your computer
- ☐ Complete hiring forms (W4 and I-9) and select your healthcare plan
- ☐ Install Box Drive and start using your folder to store project-related files and data
- ☐ Set up a regular weekly meeting with me
- ☐ Send me your photo and a blurb for our website
- ☐ Read the WATS grad handbook carefully
- ☐ Start thinking about prospective committee members. MS students need 3 total (including me), and PhD students need 5 total (including me). For PhD committees, one person has to be from outside WATS. Discuss possibilities with me.
- ☐ Apply for a parking permit if desired
- ☐ Get a USU ID card (https://www.usu.edu/card/usu-id-cards). This card gives you access to everything on campus including the gym and pool. You can also add money to your card so you can use it at dining spots on campus (and you get 10% off when you use it).
- ☐ Obtain a Utah Driver's License
- ☐ Signup for and complete lab safety training
- ☐ Attend the WATS induction course
- ☐ If you are funded on a NSF grant, complete additional training

By the end of Semester 1

- ☐ Have a strong idea of your project outline and what your chapters will look like
- ☐ Begin drafting your proposal and literature review (the latter may not be necessary)
- ☐ After talking to me, form your supervisory committee and submit the *Supervisory Committee Approval* form
- ☐ Draft a list of potential courses for your time here. Discuss these with me. The official *Program of Study* needs to be approved in semester 2
- ☐ Complete P-Card Training. https://www.usu.edu/pcard/training
- ☐ Complete Sexual Misconduct Prevention Training. www.usu.edu/equity/trainings/student-prevention and other required trainings (you will get an email)
- ☐ If you are using vertebrates in your studies, complete an animal ethics course

Before the first field season

- ☐ Read the lab safety document
- ☐ Complete a Wilderness First Aid or Wilderness First Responder course. Register through QCNR grad safety liaison representative (a registration email is sent to all grad students).
- ☐ Complete USU Driver's Training: https://www.usu.edu/risk/vehicles/drivers-training
- ☐ Write your field plans and protocols (store on BOX)**.** Best practice is to write your methods in detail. I will iteratively work on this with you. Send to appropriate committee members for feedback.

During the field season

- ☐ Write up your methods and results as you go – don't save all the writing for the end.

By the end of Semester 2

- ☐ Meet with your supervisory committee to discuss research plans and to have your *Program of Stud*y approved.
- ☐ Submit the *Program of Study* form.
- ☐ PhD students: start thinking about Comprehensive Exams, talk to committee members about this at your first committee meeting.
- ☐ Participate in the WATS graduate research symposium if you started in Summer or Fall. If you started in Spring you may opt to wait until the following year. Discuss this with me.
- ☐ Have your proposal completed and ready to review by your committee members. I will give you feedback several times on this before you send it to your committee members.
- ☐ You need to have obtained Utah residency by the end of your first year in Utah

By the end of Semester 3

- ☐ MS students: After your proposal is approved by your committee, submit the *Master's Thesis Project Approval* form
- ☐ PhD students: Complete your comprehensive exam. Submit A*pplication for Candidacy*

3 months before your Defense

- ☐ Schedule your defense date with your committee members
- ☐ Submit the *Copyright form*
- ☐ Submit the *Authorship form*

6 weeks before your Defense

- ☐ Ensure that your committee will not change between now and your defense

3 weeks before your Defense

☐ Your committee needs ample time to review your thesis. Three weeks is typical, though you should discuss this with your committee; some require a month.

☐ Submit *Appointment for Examination* form

After graduating

☐ Submit all manuscripts within 6 months of graduating.