Student/Advisor Expectations – A basis to build upon…

The information below should be used as general guidelines in the student/advisor relationship. These are not rules that are set in stone but a platform to build on. Every advisor and lab situation is different so expectations should be discussed and clearly laid out by both parties prior to the "track and advisor declaration form" being signed.

Things to consider…

Research

- What general area of research is a particular advisor working on and what specific projects are currently being conducted?
- Is this general area something you are interested in working on for the next few years?
- Projects are continually evolving. You may not be working on the same project that is currently being conducted. This is often correlated with the aims of grant funding.
- Have a plan if you are unable to work with your "first choice" advisor or project.
- Be open-minded about what type of research you might do. You could find a project or area you really love that is completely different than what you thought you wanted to do.
- Peer review and research validation is important. MS students should expect to submit at least one published manuscript and PhD students should submit at least three; though you should discuss individual expectations with your advisor.
- Know and adhere to all guidelines for intellectual property. When in doubt, ask your advisor.

Cohesiveness

- Find out how much supervision and direction the advisor will give you and in what manner they conduct it. Establish open, effective and straightforward communication with your advisor and other lab personnel.
- Spend a few weeks in the lab of any prospective advisor before making any decisions. Make sure that the research area and functional dynamics are a good fit.
- Request to attend group meetings within the lab.
- Other students in the lab can provide good insight into the project, advisor and expectations. A good relationship with other students is beneficial to your success.
- Try multiple labs before making a decision. You may be surprised how well you fit into a lab OR research area OR track that you didn't expect to like.

Time Commitments

- GRA/GTA agreements are typically set at 40-50%. This does NOT mean that you should expect to be in the "office" for 20 hours per week and you're done. You should consider your thesis to be above and beyond your GRA/GTA work requirements.
- An advisor will generally expect you to hold regular hours like a job. Generally between 8-5, you should be working in class, lab, office, etc.
- Academic breaks are a great opportunity to catch up on research
- An advisor will expect you to make regular forward progress on your research (even if it is negative results, it's still progress) The time it takes you to do this will vary.

- GRA research will develop your knowledge and experience. This should be kept in mind when "counting the hours you work." The more work you put in, the more you get out.
- Outside jobs (on or off campus) are generally frowned upon. If it is necessary, discuss it with your advisor BEFORE you take another job.

Funding

- It's important…but not everything!
- It's in your best interest to find an advisor that has funding to support you.
    - If funds are temporarily not available as a GRA, GTA's are sometimes available to bridge the gap between a PI's grants. These should NOT be counted on as a guarantee.
    - Students with a GTA need to consider the time demands by that appointment and the impact that will have on your research ability. You will still be expected to be engaged and productive on your research project. Multiple GTA appointments throughout your career can impede research effectiveness and your graduation timeline.
- Actively participate in the grant seeking, writing and application process. It is vital to the success of your lab and is extremely beneficial experience for you to have.
- Funding is tied to a project that has specific aims and deadlines. If you accept funding, you agree to apply your time and efforts to that project.
- Renewal of financial aid is not automatic. It is contingent upon factors such as availability of funding, satisfactory performance, good academic standing and adequate research progress.
- Be proactive about your funding. Do some work and find out what options are available to you (ie..NIH, NSF, specific research foundations, etc). Do not expect for your advisor or BIOE administration to keep track of your funding for you. Know when your current funding will end and initiate new funding with enough notice to meet deadlines.

General Tips

- A GRA is "a real job." Your responsibility is to your advisor and the ongoing research for which he/she is responsible. A GRA does NOT get paid to simply write their thesis or do homework.
    - Even if you are funded through an outside source (SELF, NIH, NSF, etc) you are still responsible for conducting research pertinent to the lab's goal.
- Work independently with guidance to solve open-ended problems. Don't get discouraged when things don't work the way you expected. If you knew what was going to happen, it wouldn't be research. Collaborate with your advisor and peers, get creative and try something else.
    - When you graduate and get a job, YOU will be the expert people will turn to for answers. Be able to overcome obstacles in research.
- It's good practice to analyze data and make sure it is reasonable as you collect it….NOT after you've conducted all of your experiments or when you are ready to write your thesis.
- There are some great research opportunities at the medical center and off campus. These come with some additional challenges. It is advisable you discuss these with the program assistant and other students.
- Your advisor's time is extremely valuable. Consider the value of their time and input and utilize it like you would if you were paying them a consulting fee.

Questions you should consider asking a prospective advisor…

1. Do they have specific hours they want to see you in the lab?
    a. Is it applicable to do work outside of the lab?

2. Are you allowed to take time off? (vacation, holidays, spring break, summer, etc)
    a. How long?
    b. Will your project require intervention from others if you're gone (cultures, etc)?

3. How do they assess your progress?
    a. Do you have to initiate contact? Do they have weekly meetings?
    b. What should you do if you're struggling?

4. How is coursework prioritized?
    a. What courses should you be taking and how does it apply to both your lab project and thesis?
    b. Do they like you to take all courses upfront?
    c. Will you be heavily involved in research immediately and taking a light course load every semester?
        i. How will this affect your academic timeline? (ie…Qualifying Exam)

5. Can they fund you?
    a. Duration and/or terms of agreement?
    b. How much?
    c. Is tuition included?
    d. Other costs included? (fees, travel to conferences, etc.)

6. How can you help apply for more grants?

7. How many journal submissions are expected?
    a. How can you be first author of a publication?
    b. Where does that lab typically submit publications?
    c. Read some current lab publications

8. What conferences are you expected to attend?
    a. Will you be submitting abstracts/posters, etc?
    b. Is funding assistance available?

9. What are their expectations of you?
    a. This is also a great time to share what you expect from them!

10. What is their policy if you deem it necessary to get another job?
    a. Outside employment often conflicts with academic/research progress.

11. How will they help you find a job upon graduation?
    a. To what areas will your skills make you marketable?
    b. Where do their grads get jobs?

12. What is the average and/or expected time to degree for students in that lab?

13. Is their research primarily modeling/computational or experimental?

14. How would your research project be determined?
    a. What are the clinical/market applications of the research?

15. With whom do they collaborate?
    a. Engineers, industry, med center, etc???

16. What courses do they teach?