

Developing shared expectation between graduate students and advisors

Roles & Responsibilities

What are the student's primary responsibilities during the coming year (e.g. reading peer-reviewed literature, in-lab working hours, etc.)? What does satisfactory progress on the project look like?

What are the advisor's primary responsibilities to the student during the coming year (e.g., providing lab equipment, ensuring computing resources are available, organizing fieldwork campaigns, etc.)? What are the advisor's primary responsibilities to the student's overall education and research agenda (training, feedback on manuscripts, sending the student to conferences)?

Funding

What is the funding model (e.g. internal and external fellowships, teaching, and research assistantships)? How long will current funding last? What subsequent plans for funding are in place (if needed)? What funding is the student expected to acquire independently of the advisor? What are the uncertainties in future sources of funding and contingencies for funding shortfalls (if applicable)?

What opportunities will the student have to assist with grant proposal preparation and submission?

Communication Channels & Individual Meetings

What is the best way to contact each other? Under what circumstances should different modes of communication (e.g., email, text, Slack, etc.) be used? What is the appropriate time frame to expect a response? Are certain times (e.g., weekends, evenings, holidays, religious festivals, etc.) generally considered "off-time" for regular communication?

When do you plan to? Should the student prepare an agenda beforehand? How long will the meeting be? What happens if the meeting needs to be canceled?

Vacations, absences, and time away from campus

Discuss expectations regarding vacations and time away from campus and how best to plan for them. How does funding (or other considerations) affect time off or away from campus? For both advisor and student - What is the time frame for notification regarding anticipated absences? How should unexpected absences (e.g., illness) be communicated and handled?

Coursework

Discuss how requisite coursework is decided and when. What courses should the student take? Will the advisor assist in choosing courses? Should courses be taken for a grade or Pass/Fail (if possible)? What grades are expected for courses inside or outside of the Field (e.g., “minimum passing grade,” As and Bs, etc.)? What expectations does the advisor have about research work while the student is taking courses?

Milestones & Benchmarks

Discuss completion of programmatic milestones (formation of special committee, planning for MS defense, Q-exam, etc.). Discuss timeframes and deadlines. What happens if those milestones are not being met within the timeframe?

What is expected during the A-exam? Advisors vary considerably in preferred formats and range of coverage.

Feedback on research

In what form and how often can the student expect to receive feedback regarding overall research progress, research activities, etc.? How much time is needed by the advisor to provide feedback on written work, such as chapter and publication drafts?

How should the student give feedback to the advisor on what is or is not working (in terms of advising)?

Research Papers & Authorship

How many research papers is the student expected to lead? Co-author? And on what timeline (e.g., “results for the first manuscript should be completed by the end of the first year” or “a manuscript should be submitted at about the same time as the A-Exam”)?

How is authorship or author order decided? Discuss disciplinary norms around authorship; list potential papers and the likely order of student’s authorship, e.g., first, second, etc.

c. If either the student or advisor has concerns about authorship or author order, how should these concerns be expressed? (Note: it is fairly common for manuscripts to change hands and for author order to shift as projects evolve)

Preparing for challenges

When a challenge arises in research progress, where should the student go for help? If the project seems untenable or the student realizes they are no longer interested in a project, what is the path forward?

Research or Lab Group Participation

What are the advisor’s expectations for student participation in research or lab group meetings (e.g., weekly attendance, quarterly presentations, etc.)? How should the student expect to interact with other group members? What role does the advisor play in these group meetings?

What should the student expect the advisor to do to facilitate collaborations within the lab or research group at Cornell (or more broadly)?

Professional Meetings, Workshops, & Conferences

How many professional meetings is the student expected to attend in the coming year? Is funding available to attend these meetings? What potential sources of funding exist (e.g., department and grad school funds)?

What are the expectations for authorship, attribution of ideas, acknowledgment of funding, and sharing material with the advisor before giving presentations at conferences?

Professional Goals

Identify short-term and long-term goals, and discuss any steps/resources/training necessary to accomplish the goals. How will the student take responsibility for their career, and how will the advisor support the student's career goals?

Technical, Professional, & Social Skill Development

What are the skills and abilities that the student will focus on developing during the upcoming year? These could be academic, research, or professional skills, as well as additional training experiences such as workshops or internships.

What are key inter-personal or other social skills that are important for the student to practice and master during their education?

Networking Opportunities

What networking opportunities will be available to the student (e.g., meeting with seminar speakers, participation in collaborative meetings, etc.)? Which on-campus or department seminars should be attended regularly?

What are the expectations for giving presentations at department seminars (Grad Review, Horticulture seminar, etc.)? How will the advisor support student networking and presentation preparation? What will the student do to seek out and engage in networking opportunities?

These questions were adapted from the Field of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences