Rothfels Lab Community Compact

(Much of this document is phrased as applying to graduate students, but it also applies, with some slight tweaks, to undergraduates, postdocs, and other community members).

The document focuses on **general run-of-the-mill** community expectations. For **more serious issues**, see the set of campus resources at the end of this document.

Welcome to graduate school (or postdoc school, or undergraduate school) and welcome to the Rothfels lab! Graduate school is a strange environment and being a graduate student is a strange job. So is being a PI, for that matter. As part of helping us each get the most from our time together, here are some foundational expectations I have for lab members, and what you can expect from me in turn.

Short version: Being a graduate student and being a PI are both professional activities, and campus (and off-campus places like field sites) is our workplace. I expect everyone (including myself) to behave in a professional, courteous, and respectful manner, and to support each of us to do our jobs to the best of our potential.

Professionalism

What I expect of you: **I expect graduate students to be professional, polite, and supportive— of themselves, of others, and of our equipment and supplies**. We don't all need to be friends, but we do all need to treat each other with respect. Respect includes making room for everyone to speak, taking responsibility for our own actions, speaking to and about each other respectfully, being alert to and accommodating the needs of others in a proactive manner, not intruding in an unwelcome manner into the activities of others, etc. Remember, graduate work is a surprisingly personal enterprise, so endeavor to be extra gentle to those around you.

On the "stuff" professionalism front, remember to sign out equipment, to track reagents, to notify the responsible parties if anything is getting low, to perform your lab tasks (and arrange for them to be done if you're away), and to clean up after yourself. As a professionalism sub-point, I expect a default level of reasonable punctuality (i.e., not chronic lateness)—if you're running late for something, that's fine, just let me (or whomever you're meeting) know, so that we're not waiting for you.

Finally, obviously, behave in a safe manner and adhere to the relevant rules and policies. If at some point someone is unable to maintain professional behavior, they should excuse themselves from the workplace (and potentially go on leave). Similarly, if unprofessional behavior of others (anyone—it need not be another member of the lab) is impacting a student's ability to do their work, I expect to be notified of the problem, anonymously if necessary.

What you can expect of me: **You can expect me to be professional, polite, and supportive of you, and to invest in the individual success of the lab members and in the collective success of the lab.** In those rare times that I actually generate data, I will clean up after myself, track reagents, etc. And I will endeavor to be punctual, and to give advance notice if I'm running late. I will take all concerns about unprofessional behavior seriously, and will work with the graduate student community (you) to address those concerns.

Community

What I expect of you: **I expect graduate students to participate, as colleagues, in the lab community**: be in the office regularly; to attend all lab meetings for which they're available (and have read the papers); to lead lab meetings; to comment on each other's talks; to perform lab tasks; etc. More generally, I expect students to invest in success of the lab—the tide raises all boats, as they say, and associated managerial/logistical/interpersonal skills that come from that investment are valuable in themselves. Part of this investment is in sharing expertise—I expect students familiar with protocols to train others in those protocols, and to be available to assist their labmates in areas where they have experience. In addition, I expect students to participate in the broader herbarium and departmental student communities: to attend departmental seminars, assist with interview weekend, etc.

What you can expect of me: You can expect me to participate in lab meetings, to allow/facilitate student involvement in lab meeting (i.e., not to take up all the time talking, myself), to have read the papers, and to lead lab meetings. **I will invest in strengthening the lab community, and in promoting/defending its interests** (resources, opportunities, etc.).

Health & Welfare

What I expect of you: **I expect students to look after their personal physical and mental health.** This expectation extends to being proactive to potential health risks, and to issues of work-life balance (see also "time management", below, as well as the campus resources section at the end of the document). If someone is sick or if they might be contagious, I expect them to stay at home.

What you can expect of me: You can expect me to prioritize my health, and to stay home if I'm sick. I will also try to maintain a healthy work-life balance, so as to be able to best represent my interests, and yours.

Communication

What I expect of you: **I expect honesty in communication.** If I am falling short in some area, I expect you to tell me. And if you're struggling with a concept, I expect you to ask for clarification and to solicit my help as necessary. I additionally expect you to pursue other potential resources on campus. I don't need to know everything—your personal lives are your own—but if something is affecting your ability to do your job, I expect at least to be notified (such a notification can be very general, e.g., "Under the suggestion of my doctor, I will be unable to come to work for the next two weeks").

What you can expect of me: **You can expect me to be honest with you, and to receive your concerns (and information about your needs or gaps in your understanding) without judgment**. And you can expect me to help you as I am able, including reference to any outside-of-lab resources that am I familiar with. If I feel that a student is under-performing in an area, I will speak with them about it (as a conversation, not a scolding). You can expect me to respond within 24h to emails or slack messages, within regular working hours. I will often respond in evenings or during weekends, but that's not guaranteed (and shouldn't be taken to imply that I expect the same from you).

Research & Learning

What I expect of you: **I expect students to take ownership of their own dissertation project,** which includes devising a project in the first place (this is super hard!). Theses can be on any topic, using any group of organisms, provided that I can be a meaningful advisor, and should be students' primary focus (after quals); **side projects are encouraged**, but the dissertation project should be the main effort. As part of this "ownership", I expect lab members to produce work plans for each semester, and to discuss those plans with me at the beginning of the semester. I expect students to take the classes that they need to build the academic skills they want to obtain (but few more than that), and to be proactive in their classwork as in all other elements of their graduate work. If lab members have unfinished projects upon leaving the lab, I expect them to complete them in a reasonable time period (within something like a year, with lots of flexibility for circumstances) and if that is not possible, to "release" those projects for completion by other lab members.

I expect students to solicit my advice, and to consider it carefully, before **ultimately using their own judgment** as to the best route forward. I expect students to be reading actively, and to be working deliberately on building reading and note-taking skills; reading a minimum of two papers a week is probably appropriate in most cases (early-career students should aim for more than this). And lying somewhere on the encourage/expect spectrum, I think students should develop a broad suite of skills, including lab skills, field skills (at least some fluency with a focal group of organisms), programming skills (at least rudimentary Python, BASH, and R are highly encouraged, as is familiarity with computing clusters), teaching/mentorship skills, and science communication and outreach skills. Finally, each student should have experience mentoring undergraduates (or high school students), both because it builds mentoring experience, and because it is a community service, helping to build a scientifically engaged future generation.

What you can expect of me: **You can expect to be able to take any research program that you have generated with you when you leave the lab**—i.e., to work on as a postdoc, or in your own lab. There may be less clear-cut cases (such as when a student is working on a system that I have a significant prior investment in); these will need to be discussed in advance, in a case-by-case basis. In addition, I will provide any assistance I can in the development of your skills, including direction to outside-of-lab resources.

Data/lab work

What I expect of you: **I expect students to strive for maximum reproducibility in their work.** Reproducibility may seem strange as a core expectation, but it brings with it all sort of important features beyond the general broad benefits of allowing your results to be verified independently. First, it is extremely useful to the individual researcher (you!), in that it greatly eases manuscript

preparation and coming back to a project that you have stepped away from for a period, and provides a level of rigor to your results that is very important. In addition, reproducibility is very important to the lab (me, and other lab members who may seek to follow in your footsteps) in that it allows others to build on your work after you've left the lab.

In the context of this Compact, reproducibility includes:

- following the lab workflows outlined in the lab "constitution" (ie, protocols for consistently naming wetlab steps, etc)
- maintaining a complete "lab notebook" (this can be digital or hardcopy or both, but needs to be sufficiently clear that an outside person can follow what you've done). This "notebook" expectation isn't limited to wet lab work—all analysis steps need to be described somewhere so that they can be reproduced
- entering material in the Fern* Labs Database prior to molecular lab work
- archiving all core datafiles (sequence files, etc) in our data archive Box directory.

Many of these elements are greatly eased by using script-based approaches (e.g., R, python, jupyter, R markdown) and version control (git), and these tools are greatly encouraged (but are not mandatory).

In terms of data, ownership ultimately lies with me/USU, but students (and postdocs) can expect to maintain practical ownership over data for the period that they are working with them (including for projects and publications after they have left USU).

What you can expect of me: **I will strive for full reproducibility in my work, and I will work with individual lab members in building reproducible workflows for their research.** In addition, I will provide some tools to support reproducibility (such as updating the lab constitution, maintaining our box archive, etc.).

Publications/Presentations

What I expect of you: **I expect students to publish their research in peer-reviewed journals and to present at national conferences**. I don't have a strict minimum number of papers that are required for a dissertation, but students should aim for at least one paper if at all possible. I also expect students to produce a cohesive thesis, and to present a finishing talk to the department. I expect that you will **discuss** with me issues of authorship of publications and presentations before presenting/submitting (and ideally considerably before that). Typically, I will have contributed intellectually and monetarily/logistically and would be listed as the senior author. However, if a project did not involve my effort in these ways, I do not expect authorship. For publications in which I am involved, I expect to comment on/edit drafts, and for you to wait for my approval (and those of all other coauthors) before submission. Similarly, I expect to have the opportunity to comment on/edit conference abstracts, grant applications, presentations, etc., on a similar timeline; this means that conference talks should be in an advanced stage at least a week before the conference so that I (and ideally the rest of the lab group) can give comments on a practice version.

What you can expect of me: **You can expect me to provide guidance in the paper-writing process and to read and edit (sometimes heavily edit!) drafts**. I will endeavor to return edits within a week of receiving a draft. Unless I am completely swamped, when proofs arrive, I will

participate in the "Pryer Protocol" (one person reads the submitted version out loud and the other follows along on the proofs to look for typos).

Funding

What I expect of you: **I expect students to proactively search out and apply for funds to support their research**. I expect to be given the opportunity to comment on and edit grant applications; to do so I must receive the applications (in at least an advanced draft form) at least a week before they are due.

What you can expect of me: **All students actively applying for outside funds can expect me to cover reasonable costs associated with their research**, while I am able (e.g., while I have startup funds). Specifics may have to be negotiated (but could include data generation, conference attendance, etc.); I will require a thoughtful plan for how the funds will be used and how they will forward your graduate education. Similarly, if lab members are actively pursuing funds to attend conferences, I will cover any outstanding expenses for one conference per year (provided that the individual is presenting at the conference).

Misc. advising

What I expect of you: **I expect students to take responsibility for their education**, including the administrative components (forming committees promptly, completing required paperwork—Annual Development Plan, Individual Development Plan, etc.), and to be proactive in determining what those requirements are. I expect to be notified in advance of the need for reference letters (see below), supplied with the necessary background materials, and for you to remind me regularly in advance of the deadline (don't worry about overdoing it—I get a lot of email, and things can skip through the cracks. If I haven't told you that your letter is written, then it's not written! **Please remind me**.)

What you can expect of me: **I will seek to assist you with the preparations for whatever career you are interested in post-dissertation, to the extent that I have expertise to offer**. I will seek to put you in touch with professional contacts (introduce you via email, in person at conferences, etc.), and to promote your work. I will write you letters of recommendation for grants, jobs, etc.; to do so I ask for a minimum of a week's notice for letters plus a copy of your application materials so that I can tailor the letter to the particular situation.

Time management, scheduling & availability

What I expect of you: I expect all students to aim to complete their dissertation in five years. In some cases this will not be possible or desirable, and that's fine, but five years is the default expectation. I do not expect you to report your hours to me, but I do expect you to expect to work more than 40h per week in order to complete your PhD; you should not be surprised to be regularly working on evenings and weekends, but you should also be diligent to ensure that you're taking time for yourself (I realize that's vague—if anyone requires more precise guidance we can talk it through together). I expect students to be comfortable taking time off (going on long weekends, etc.). For periods of unavailability during "work hours" (which includes the summer, etc), I expect advance notice (and for the period to be noted in the lab calendar), unless that's not feasible. I expect students to produce a rough draft of their goals and plans for the

upcoming semester (with specific targets) at the beginning of each semester (to be stored in our shared "meetings" Box directory), and to prepare in advance of our one-on-one meetings (i.e., to know what you want to talk about and to have any necessary documentation available).

I expect students to be available through email or slack in a punctual manner, during work hours (with exceptions for things like fieldwork, etc). "Punctual" here is fuzzy, but something on the order of a 24h max to respond—if you can't respond fully in that time period, send me a quick note to say that you received my query and will respond when you're able. Also, there will be times—pre-conference crunches, etc—when I will expect replies outside of regular working hours, but those times will be few, and should be clear (i.e., the need for communication will be felt mutually).

These general expectations apply throughout the period of a graduate degree, whether a student is supported by a TA or an RA. For students funded by RAs, a typical expectation would be that 10h a week would be focused on the project that is funding the RA.

What you can expect of me: I will respond to email/slack within 24 hours, barring unusual circumstances such as international travel. I will not schedule official lab events for statutory holidays, so that students know they can plan non-work activities during those periods. In addition, I will talk to students if I feel that they are under- or over-working, with the caveat that it is hard for me to tell if that is happening.

Mentor-Mentee meetings

What I expect of you: I expect all students to be proactive in taking advantage of mentorship opportunities (i.e., to solicit meetings when you want or need them). I expect students to prepare in advance a brief (point form) draft agenda of the things to talk about at the meeting, and to come prepared (to have the relevant files accessible, etc.). The agenda, and any notes from the meeting, will be in a "meetings" googleDoc that I'll create and we'll both have access to. This doc can also be useful for other shared discussions.

What you can expect of me: You can expect me to be available for weekly meetings (or less frequent ones, at your discretion), of at least half an hour in length. These meetings are for you—they will probably mostly involve discussion of research, papers, logistics, etc, but anything is fair game, including things that aren't necessarily work related. In addition, I am available for additional meetings as warranted.

Resources beyond this document

This Compact is intended to describe what I see as healthy standards of conduct; it does not provide tools for responding to serious infractions, and it could be unreasonable to apply in cases where I am the transgressor. Below are some resources to help in such situations.

Sexual assault or harassment

If you experience sexual harassment or assault (including stalking), it is not your fault, and it is not something that you should just "deal with." If you are comfortable speaking with me, I will be available unless it is not physically possible. It is important to be aware that I am a "**responsible employee**"—if I become aware of a case of sex- or gender-related harassment, assault, stalking, or relationship violence I am required to report that information to the Title IX office, and thus I cannot promise confidentiality.

For confidential resources, there are two primary options:
- Counseling and Psychological Services (**CAPS**)-- https://www.usu.edu/aggiewellness/mental-health
- Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information Office (**SAAVI**)-- https://www.usu.edu/saavi/. SAAVI offers victim advocacy—they can help with reporting, offer support service, assist with navigating the after-effects of harassment, etc.

The **Office of Equity** (https://www.usu.edu/equity/) has extensive resources and easy/straight-forward reporting functionality (if you have been assaulted or harassed, you can make a report here—equity.usu.edu/report). Similar resources and reporting options are also available from the **Title IX office** (https://www.usu.edu/equity/sexual-misconduct/Title-IX-Coordinator).

Additional resources are available at **sexualrespect.usu.edu**.

Racism and other forms of discrimination

The **Office of Equity** (https://www.usu.edu/equity/) also has extensive resources and easy/straight-forward reporting functionality about non-sex-based harassment and discrimination. In addition, USU has a newly developed Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (https://www.usu.edu/dei/) that provides resources.

Departmental issues related to equity and inclusion

The departmental Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, chaired by Sara Freeman and Noelle Beckman, is available as a resources. The student members of this committee are Helen Plylar, Chinedum Anajemba, Lauren Craige, and Mary-Kate Williams. (See https://www.usu.edu/biology/about/standing-committee-service for a full list of committee members)

Health resources

Mental health is a huge challenge in academia, and particularly so within the student population. The university recognizes these challenges, and provides a wide range of resources through "aggie wellness": https://www.usu.edu/aggiewellness/mental-health. Included is USU's

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), which offers crisis services, therapy, confidential counseling, etc. Also consider the **SafeUT App**, with which you can talk to a confidential therapist 24/7.

More generally, **usu.edu/wellness** offers lots of non-crisis-oriented resources and tools for promoting both mental and physical health. And links to the list of **lactation rooms**, etc.

I,   , do hereby pledge to adhere to the Rothfels Lab Community Compact, to the best of my abilities, for ever and ever (or approximately five years), and ferns are great.

Meta

Other documents like this one, and discussion of related issues:
https://www.colorado.edu/smithlab/all-about-expectations
https://paleantology.com/lab-conduct/
https://paleantology.com/against-the-code-of-conduct/