Michigan State University Plant Biology Department Discussion Document of Expectations for Graduate Student/Advisor

Instructions: Maintaining a productive working relationship between an advisor and a graduate student is crucial for success. **The following document is intended to guide a conversation between the graduate student and the advisor during their first few weeks after joining a lab, and yearly thereafter**.

Below is a list of topics the graduate student and the graduate student's supervising faculty should discuss and write a written response for before signing the mentorship document of expectations form. While there are no right answers to these questions, agreements must fall within PLB Handbook guidelines. The items that the graduate student and supervising faculty agree are not applicable can be indicated with a "NA". The student and faculty member should both keep this form for their records and should be revisited yearly.

Another helpful resource for discussions of expectations is available through the MSU Graduate school (here).

Frequency and Methods of Communication between Advisor and Student:
How often will the student and faculty meet one-on-one, and are there preferences for modality (in-person, zoom, etc.)? Will this be consistent during the summer and academic year? How should updates to these methods or expectations be communicated?

Frequency and mode of feedback: How often should the student expect feedback on their degree progress, and how will that feedback be given? How often should the student expect feedback on their research? How early in advance should students ask for important documents (e.g. letters of recommendation, departmental forms, etc).? What ways does the advisor prefer to give feedback (written, verbal, etc.) and does this align with the preferences of the student? When given something to provide feedback on, how will the advisor and student discuss turnaround times? How quickly should students be expected to respond to advisor feedback?

Adapted from Texas A&M "DEFINING STUDENT AND SUPERVISING FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS" document

Funding and Financial Support: How should the student expect to be funded for the entirety of their degree (indicate years in which funding is uncertain), including during the summer? If the student is responsible for funding themselves, what avenues should the student investigate to obtain this funding and what resources will the advisor provide to support this effort? If funding is not known for all years, how far in advance of each semester will funding be discussed?

Research and Training of the Student - Within and outside of MSU/PLB: Are there specific people who will oversee training other than the supervising faculty and to what degree will the student assist with other projects in the lab or working group?

Funding source for dissertation work. If the student will be paid through a project grant that is not their dissertation work (e.g., during a rotation), what proportion of weekly work time should they expect to be able to work on their dissertation project?

Graduate Training Milestones: Discuss the requirements for graduation in the PLB graduate program (Refer to PhD checklist in PLB handbook, pg 15) and a potential timeline to meet those milestones. What resources does the student need to meet these goals (accommodation for comprehensive exams, caregiver support, etc)? Discuss the typical time-to-degree completion for members of the lab (for students in PLB, the average is ~5.5 years), does it align with the student's expectations?

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Work Hours: What are the typical working hours in the lab? For example, some labs recommend students not work for more than 40hr/wk on average, including teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Do those working hours vary by task, project type, or time of year? Are there times when students are not able to work alone or work outside typical business hours?

Maintaining work–life balance. As a member of the lab community, what are some strategies to maintain work–life balance given the nature of the student's expected research projects, career goals, and professional development? What can lab members do if they feel that work–life is out of balance (e.g., are there regular check-ins on work–life balance)?

Work location/Attendance on site. Is there flexibility for working from a location other than the lab (working from home, a coffee shop, etc.)?

Time off for Illness, University Holidays, and Vacation: What is the policy for vacations, holidays, sick days, and personal days (in instances that do not fall within the PLB Graduate assistant illness/pregnancy/leave policy and/or GEU teaching assistant contract).

Career Development / Job Search and Placement: What career(s) is/are the student interested in? Does the advisor have knowledge and experience placing students in this career? If not, are there additional resources the student should consider to maximize their preparation for their intended career? What arrangements can be made to allow the student to participate in courses, workshops, etc. for their particular interests without compromising their research or scholarly training?

Attendance at Professional Meetings: Under what conditions can or should a student travel to a regional, national, or international meeting? For example, only if the student is presenting? Who covers the cost and what will be covered?

Conflict Resolution and Complaint Policies: Aside from formal grievance policies, how will conflicts be resolved and what processes are preferred (e.g. Student-supervisor discussions or discussions that include other parties)? What ground rules should be followed in these conversations to ensure both parties are heard? What ground rules should be instituted that acknowledge the power differential between graduate students and PI's?

Evaluating mentorship relationship: How will the student and advisor evaluate their working relationship (e.g. formal conversations, documentation, etc.) and how often will this evaluation take place? How can either party initiate a meeting about the relationship outside of those scheduled evaluations?

Authorship and Contributor Policies: What is the policy that constitutes authorship on a project on which the student contributed? How is the order of authors determined in a manuscript or abstract? In what other ways, besides authorship, might the student's contribution be acknowledged, and what avenue exists for contesting authorship decisions based on the policy above?

Common Laboratory or Working Group Responsibilities - within the student's PLB and/or MSU laboratory space: Which tasks and duties are shared among all lab or working group members (e.g. lab meetings, cleaning/organizing spaces, mentoring undergraduates, etc.), including the student, and how often should students expect to be working on lab responsibilities or helping other lab members with their projects (unrelated to their dissertation work). To what degree are students encouraged (or discouraged) from engaging in projects in other labs or working groups?

Notebooks, Data, Media: What is the policy of the laboratory or working group related to the storage, backing up, and sharing of data, notebooks, media, or other information relevant to ongoing or completed projects? This should include a discussion of funding agency and university records retention expectations along with disciplinary norms.

Professional Development: What constitutes professional development (see page 16 of PLB graduate student handbook for examples of professional development). What activities would enhance the quality of their graduate education outside of required PLB graduate program requirements? How much time should students expect to pursue professional development opportunities compared to the amount of time they spend on other activities?