

# Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors\*

*A framework for aligning the graduate student mentor-mentee relationship*

December 2022

\*Adapted from the American Association of Medical Colleges Compact Between Biomedical Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors (2017) .

## Introduction

*The UNMC Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors* represents a modification of *The Compact Between Biomedical Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors*, a document published by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). The AAMC document was prepared in collaboration with the AAMC Group on Graduate Research, Education, and Training (GREAT Group) and is modeled on the AAMC's *Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors*, available at [www.aamc.org/postdoccompact](http://www.aamc.org/postdoccompact).

The *UNMC Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors* presents guiding principles and discussion points intended to support the development of positive mentoring relationships between predoctoral students and their research advisors. **Before** a faculty member agrees to serve as a student's research advisor, the faculty member and the graduate student are required to review the compact together, discuss the issues raised, and complete and sign the document where indicated. If the parties do not agree or cannot come to terms upon the Compact, then the student should work with their program director to identify a more compatible mentor. The agreements made during the discussion of the compact should be presented in the student's first supervisory committee meeting. The student must upload a completed and signed copy of the Compact in Seguidor within 2 weeks of selecting an advisor. Student and the advisor are encouraged to review and update this document together annually and discuss any necessary modifications to the agreement. If the parties do not agree or cannot come to terms during this annual review of the Compact, then the graduate program director is encouraged to mediate. If, after due diligence the matter is deemed irreconcilable, then the student can decide to switch research advisors.

## Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors

Predocutorial training entails both formal education in a specific discipline and research experience in which the graduate student trains under the supervision of one or more investigators who will mentor the student through graduate school. A positive mentoring relationship between the predoctoral student and the research advisor is a vital component of the student's preparation for future careers and mentoring roles.

Individuals who pursue a biomedical or health science graduate degree are embarking on a path of lifelong learning and are therefore expected to take responsibility for their scientific and professional learning and development from the onset. Graduate students must be in charge and take ownership of their progress through the graduate program. This means seeking guidance on and knowledge about course requirements and program requirements, policies, and procedures. Students must also commit to working on an individual development plan. Faculty members who advise students— with the backing of the graduate program and institution—are expected to fulfill the role of mentor, which includes providing scientific training, guidance, instruction in the responsible conduct of research and research ethics, and in some cases, financial support. The faculty advisor also serves as a scientific and professional role model for the graduate student. In addition, the advisor offers encouragement as the student prepares an individual development plan and facilitates the experiences and professional skills development essential for a broad set of career paths.

## Quality Mentoring

Effective mentoring is crucial for graduate students as they begin their scientific careers. Faculty mentors must commit to dedicating substantial time to the scientific, professional, and personal development of the graduate student. Whether a faculty member acts as the primary research advisor or sits on a student's advisory committee, a relationship of mutual trust and respect between mentor and graduate student is essential for healthy interactions and to encourage individual growth. Effective mentoring should include teaching the scientific method, providing regular feedback in the form of both positive support and constructive criticism to foster individual growth, teaching and modelling professional behavior, clarifying the process of the scientific enterprise, and promoting diverse careers by providing or directing students to appropriate opportunities to appreciate, navigate, discuss, and develop career choices. Effective and regular career guidance activities should be offered. The best mentors are careful listeners

who actively promote and appreciate diversity. They possess and consistently maintain high ethical standards, acknowledge and recognize the contributions of students in publications and intellectual property, and have a record of research accomplishments. Finally, it should be recognized that mentoring does not end with a student's completion of the graduate program but continues throughout the student's professional life.

## Graduate Student-Research Advisor Discussion: Matching Expectations

- **We (research advisor and graduate student) have discussed our mutual expectations regarding the student's research schedule.** "Research" does not include outside employment (for part time students) or time spent teaching (for students whose program requires teaching) or non-thesis/dissertation-related research activities (for BIOS students).
    - We discussed to what extent time spent beyond generating and analyzing data, in activities such as searching and reading scientific articles, attending class and studying, writing papers or fellowships are included in the "research" schedule
    - We discussed the research schedule expectations and:
      - ❖ It is **expected** that the student will adhere to a specific "research" schedule as follows: Generally speaking, the student is expected to conduct "research" from \_\_\_\_AM to \_\_\_\_PM on weekdays or these specific hours and days (specify below):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
There may be occasional exceptions due to experimental constraints.
  - OR:**
    - ❖ It is **not expected** that the student will adhere to a specific "research" schedule. Instead, the student will meet "research" expectation by (specify details below):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
(insert description of how it will be determined if the student is dedicating sufficient time and effort to his/her/their dissertation research).
  - Weekend "research" hours are  /are not  expected. Specify details below:  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- **We have discussed expectations for reading the scientific literature**
  - This discussion included details such as if the supervisor expects the student to spend time outside of work hours reading research papers and how/if this will be assessed.
- **We have discussed expectations regarding maintaining a laboratory notebook.** Prior to this discussion the student viewed a video on this topic: <https://www.training.nih.gov/oite-yt/keepingalaboratorynotebook>
- **We have discussed laboratory policy regarding the conditions, and anticipated frequency, for attending regional and national meetings.**
- **We have discussed the laboratory policy regarding authorship on manuscripts.** For discussion purposes, the International Committee on Medical Journal Editors recommends that every author has:
  - ❖ "made substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
  - ❖ been involved in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
  - ❖ provided final approval of the version to be published."
- **If the student intends to obtain teaching experience, undertake an internship, or take business courses during his/her/their PhD studies, this has been discussed with the mentor.** If these interests change during graduate school, then this will be discussed in a timely manner.
- **The mentor and the mentee will meet regularly to discuss research progress/recommendations,**

**publications, goals, and professional skills/career development.**

- We agree to meet one-on-one at least \_\_\_\_\_ times per month and
  - We agree to meet in group meetings approximately \_\_\_\_\_ times per month.
- **We have discussed the expectations regarding the submission of intramural and extramural fellowship applications.**
  - **We have discussed the general expectations regarding the number and/or nature of publications required to satisfy the PhD requirements.**
    - The student understands that the research advisor's expectations, and those of the Supervisory Committee, may exceed the minimum expectation articulated by Graduate Studies and/or his/her/their graduate program.
  - **We have discussed cultural, religious, and other personal considerations that might impact the student's schedule, professional activities, and/or interactions (e.g. religious holidays and customs, cultural differences, and family responsibilities).**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor Signature\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Co-Advisor Signature\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\*Signatures are to acknowledge discussion of mutual expectations. This is not intended to be a legally binding document.

## Commitments of Graduate Students

- **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of my degree and of my professional development.** I will be committed to my graduate education and will demonstrate this by my efforts in the classroom, the research, and all other related academic and professional activities. I will maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, initiative, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards, including complying with institutional and research group standards for contributing to an inclusive research environment. I understand that professionalism is important for my reputation and credibility as a scientist, and thus important to career success. Professionalism includes being reliable, accurate, and truthful. People will learn how well they can rely on what I say. Professionalism also means consistently meeting commitments, being a good citizen (e.g. lab maintenance), and being respectful of others.
- **I will work with my research advisor to develop a thesis/dissertation project.** This will include discussing and, to the extent possible, establishing a timeline for each phase of my research. I will strive to keep engaged with the work, discuss experimental findings and any pitfalls, and meet the established goals and deadlines. When I have a deadline, I will discuss completion timelines with my advisor and provide them with materials for review (e.g. presentations or fellowship drafts) well in advance to give them time to provide meaningful feedback.
- **I will work with my research advisor to select a thesis/dissertation committee.** I will commit to meeting with this committee every six months. I will discuss my progress to date and be responsive to the advice and constructive criticism from my committee. Between these biannual committee meetings, I will seek out the guidance and support of individual thesis/dissertation committee members to leverage their expertise as needed.
- **I will be a good lab citizen.** I agree to take part in shared laboratory responsibilities and will use laboratory resources carefully and frugally. I will maintain a safe and clean laboratory space. I will be respectful of, tolerant of, and work collegially with all laboratory personnel. I will be an active contributing member to all team efforts and collaborations and will respect individual contributions. I will also contribute to an environment that is safe, equitable, and free of harassment.
- **I will demonstrate respect for my research advisor as an individual without regard to gender, race, national origin, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and will promote a culture of tolerance among the entire research group.**
- **I will maintain detailed, organized, and accurate research records.** With respect to data ownership, I acknowledge that original notebooks, digital files, and tangible research materials belong to the institution and will remain in the lab when I finish my thesis/dissertation so that other individuals can reproduce and carry on related research, in accordance with institutional policy. Only with the explicit approval from my research mentor and in accordance with institutional policy may I make copies of my notebooks and digital files and have access to tangible research materials that I helped to generate during my graduate training.
  - I watched the below webinar on how to keep research records on \_\_\_\_\_ (insert date).  
<https://www.training.nih.gov/oite-yt/keepingalaboratorynotebook>
- **I will be knowledgeable of the policies and requirements of my graduate program, graduate school, and institution.** I will commit to meeting these requirements in the appropriate time frame and will abide by all institutional policies and procedures.  
<https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/current-students/index.html>
  - If I anticipate a challenge in meeting a requirement or adhering to a guideline/policy, I will notify my graduate program director as soon as possible so that he/she/they can assist me.
- **I have reviewed the information regarding university holidays, personal vacation time, and parental leave in the guidelines for graduate assistant work and study and, if needed, will discuss any clarifications with my graduate program director or research advisor.**  
<https://catalog.unmc.edu/graduate-studies/guidelines-assistant-work-study/>

- I will consult with my advisor in advance of any planned absences and apprise my advisor of any unexpected absences due to illness or other issues.
- **I will knowledgeable of all institutional research policies.** I will comply with all institutional laboratory safety practices and animal-use and human-research policies. I will participate in my institution's Responsible Conduct of Research Training Program and practice the guidelines presented therein while conducting my research.  
<https://www.unmc.edu/vcr/policies/index.html>  
<https://www.unmc.edu/irb/resources/PoliciesProcedures.html>  
<https://www.unmc.edu/animalsinresearch/policies/index.html>  
<https://www.unmc.edu/ibc/policies-procedures/index.html>
- **I will attend and actively participate in laboratory meetings, seminars, and journal clubs that are part of my educational program.** To enhance research, leadership, and additional professional skills, I will seek out other enrichment opportunities (e.g. attending professional development activities, participating in professional organizations and meetings, serving as a student representative on institutional or program committees or as a leader in a student organization, and/or coordinating departmental/program events). I will take advantage of the learning opportunities that these events provide for my research and professional development.
- **I will dedicate time to my professional and career development.** I will strive to balance my professional/career development activities with my research. Before committing to significant professional/career activities, I will discuss the matter with my research advisor.
- **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the development of my own career.** I recognize that I need to explore career opportunities and paths that match and develop my individual skills, values, and interests to achieve my desired career goals. I understand that there are tools such as the individual development plan that I should use to help me define my career goals and develop my training plan. I will seek guidance throughout my graduate education from my research advisor, career counseling services, thesis/dissertation committee, other mentors, and/or any other resources that can offer advice on career planning and the wide range of opportunities available in the biomedical workforce.

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Student Name

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Student Signature

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date

## Commitments of Research Advisors

- **Throughout the graduate student's time in my laboratory, I will be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful.** I will foster the graduate student's professional confidence and encourage intellectual development, critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity. I will continue my interest and involvement as the student moves forward into a career.
- **I will be committed to meeting one-on-one with the graduate student on a regular basis.** I will regularly review the student's progress and provide honest and constructive feedback to my graduate student. I will also help define appropriate milestones and provide goal-setting advice. I will work with the student to build on his/her/their strengths as well as address areas for improvement. I will not belittle, humiliate or demean the student in this process.
- **I will be committed to the graduate student's research project.** I will work with the student to plan and guide the research project, set reasonable and attainable goals, and establish a timeline for project completion.
- **I will provide timely and constructive feedback to students on written work such as manuscripts and oral research presentations.** I will provide a date when he/she/they can expect preliminary feedback from me. I will work with the student to help develop his/her/their professional communications skills. I will provide detailed, constructive feedback to the extent possible and not simply redo the paper/PowerPoint.
- **I will help the graduate student select a thesis/dissertation committee.** I will ensure that this committee meets every six months to review and discuss the graduate student's progress and future directions. I understand that the function of this committee is to help the student complete the doctoral research, and I will respect the ideas and suggestions of my colleagues on the committee. I support and will encourage the student to seek input, advice, and mentorship from the thesis/dissertation committee members outside of the biannual meetings as well.
- **I will provide an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, equitable, and free of harassment and bullying,**
  - I read the AAMC Appropriate Treatment of Research Trainees document below on \_\_\_\_\_(insert date). <https://www.aamc.org/media/56841/download>
  - I understand and will abide by the expectations outlined in this document with regard to leadership, professionalism, and equity.
  - I understand and will refrain from the incompatible/inappropriate behaviors outlined in this document including loss of personal civility, infringement on autonomy, professional and career development abuses, discriminatory behavior based on race, gender, religion, or other identity, and excessive pressure to meet unrealistic expectations.
- **I will demonstrate respect for all graduate students as individuals without regard to gender, race, national origin, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and I will require a culture of tolerance among the entire research group.**
- **I recognize that the student should strive to maintain a healthy work/life balance.** I will respect the student's need for personal time and time to complete his/her/their course and other program requirements. I appreciate that a healthy work/life balance improves learning, productivity, and well-being.
- **I will comply with the guidelines for graduate assistant work and study** (<https://catalog.unmc.edu/general-information/student-policies-procedures/graduate-assistant-workstudy-guidelines/>)
  - I will allow the student flexibility in the case of short-term illness. I will recommend that if the student is ill, then he/she/they should stay at home.
  - In the event that the student has a long term illness, I will contact the student's program director for guidance.
  - I will be flexible if there are family emergencies such as a death of a parent or serious illness in the immediate family. UNMC policy states that up to 5 consecutive workdays for

funeral/bereavement leave may be granted in the event of the death of an immediate family member. Notice of the need for this leave must be communicated to the supervisor in advance.  
[https://wiki.unmc.edu/index.php/Guidelines - Employee Leave#Bereavement.2FFuneral Leave](https://wiki.unmc.edu/index.php/Guidelines_-_Employee_Leave#Bereavement.2FFuneral_Leave)

- **To the extent that is appropriate based on the student's program, I will be committed to providing financial resources for the graduate student to conduct thesis/dissertation research.** The resources provided will be consistent with the student's program and the institution's guidelines. I will not require the graduate student to perform tasks that are unrelated to the training program, professional development, or common laboratory responsibilities.
- **If appropriate, I will discuss with the student intellectual property policy issues regarding disclosure, patent rights, and publishing research discoveries as it impacts patent rights.**
- **I will be knowledgeable of and guide the graduate student through the requirements and deadlines of his/her/their graduate program and the institution, including teaching requirements (if any), and UNMC Human Resources guidelines.**  
<https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/current-students/index.html>  
<https://www.unmc.edu/human-resources/>
- **I will encourage the graduate student to attend and present his/her/their research at scientific/professional meetings to learn, gain communications skills, obtain broad feedback, and to network.** I will make an effort to facilitate funding for such activities. In addition, I will provide opportunities for the student to discuss science and his/her/their research findings with colleagues and fellow scientists within the institution and broader scientific community—for example, at lab meetings, on-campus research presentations, and seminars.
- **I will promote the training of the graduate student in professional skills needed for a successful career.** These skills include but are not limited to oral and written communication, grant writing, management and leadership, collaborative research, responsible conduct of research, teaching, and mentoring. I will work with the student to help them balance his/her/their research responsibilities with these career and professional development activities.
- **I will create an environment in which the student can discuss and explore career opportunities and paths that match his/her/their skills, values, and interests and be supportive of his/her/their career path choices.** I will be accessible to give advice and feedback on career goals. I will work with the student on an **individual development plan (IDP)**, to help define career goals and identify training milestones and/or encourage the student to utilize additional career mentors with the appropriate expertise. If asked, I will provide letters of recommendation for the student's next phase of his/her/their career.

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Advisor Name

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Advisor Signature

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date

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Co-Advisor Name

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Co-Advisor Signature

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date

## Links to Resources

### For the student:

#### For disagreements regarding expectations or concerns regarding lack of civility or inappropriate behavior

1). As a first step and to the extent possible, it is recommended that the student seek to resolve such matters through conversation with the research advisor directly.

- If the student would like assistance regarding how to approach this conversation or wants to explore options for resolving the situation, the student is encouraged to contact the ombudsperson.  
<https://catalog.unmc.edu/general-information/campus-services/ombudsperson/>
- In addition, the student may also seek guidance from the following individuals: The graduate student wellness advocate, Dr. Terry Donohue (402-559-8331 or [tdonohue@unmc.edu](mailto:tdonohue@unmc.edu)), the Graduate Studies Office (<https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/education/contact-us/index.html>), a member of the student's supervisory committee, or the student's graduate program or umbrella program director (see list below).

2). If the above step is not possible or effective, **then before the situation becomes irresolvable**, the student is recommended to seek the assistance of one or more of the following individuals to help effect a solution:

- The student's graduate program director and/or umbrella program director.  
See the list of graduate council members for names of the graduate program and umbrella program directors  
<https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/education/leadership.html>
- The advisor's department chair or college-level leader.
  - College of Allied Health Professions <https://www.unmc.edu/alliedhealth/about/departments/index.html>
  - College of Dentistry <https://www.unmc.edu/dentistry/about/departments/index.html>
  - College of Medicine <https://www.unmc.edu/com/about/departments.html>
  - College of Nursing [https://app1.unmc.edu/nursing/conweb/FSDirectory\\_Exec.cfm](https://app1.unmc.edu/nursing/conweb/FSDirectory_Exec.cfm)
  - College of Pharmacy <https://www.unmc.edu/pharmacy/faculty/index.html>
  - College of Public Health <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/departments/index.html>
  - Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer <https://www.unmc.edu/aboutus/leadership-mission/eppley-director.html>
  - Munroe Meyer Institute <https://www.unmc.edu/mmi/departments/index.html>
- Students requiring assistance with determining who is an appropriate contact at the departmental or college level should reach out to Dr. Karen Gould, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Success (402-559-2456 or [kagould@unmc.edu](mailto:kagould@unmc.edu)).

3). If the above step is not possible or effective, then the student has a number of options:

- The student may choose to identify another research advisor using the Guidelines & Procedures for Graduate Students Changing their Research Advisors. <https://catalog.unmc.edu/graduate-studies/process-for-changing-research-advisors/>
  - Students choosing to change research advisors should notify their graduate program and/or umbrella program director as well as the Director of Graduate Studies and the Assistance Dean for Graduate Student Success about this decision. <https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/education/leadership.html>
  - The student may also choose to file a confidential, informal written complaint with the Director of Graduate Studies or the Assistance Dean for Graduate Student Success. Confidential, informal complaints will be kept in a central repository in an effort to identify trends and patterns of potentially inappropriate behavior.  
<https://www.unmc.edu/gradstudies/education/leadership.html>
  - The student may also choose to file a formal complaint by following the step outlined in Section 4.2 of the Graduate Student Grievance Resolution Procedure.  
<https://catalog.unmc.edu/graduate-studies/student-grievance-resolution-procedure/>

### For the research advisor:

#### For disagreements regarding expectations or concerns regarding lack of civility or inappropriate behavior

1). As a first step and to the extent possible, it is recommended that the research advisor seek to resolve such matters through conversation with the student directly.

- If the research advisor would like assistance regarding how to approach this conversation or wants to explore options for resolving the situation, the advisor is encouraged to contact the student's graduate program director or the ombudsperson. <https://catalog.unmc.edu/general-information/campus-services/ombudsperson/>
- In addition, the research advisor may also seek guidance from the following individuals: The graduate student wellness advocate, Dr. Terry Donohue (402-559-8331 or [tdonohue@unmc.edu](mailto:tdonohue@unmc.edu)), a member of the student's supervisory committee, the student's umbrella program director, the advisor's department chair or faculty mentor, or Dr. Karen Gould, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Success (402-559-2456 or [kagould@unmc.edu](mailto:kagould@unmc.edu)).

2). If the above step is not effective, then **before the situation becomes irrevocable**, the advisor should take the following steps:

- Proceed with documentation of the problems and resolution efforts beginning in section II of the Guidelines & Procedures for Graduate Students Changing their Research Advisors. <https://catalog.unmc.edu/graduate-studies/process-for-changing-research-advisors/>

#### For the student and research advisor

For concerns regarding sexual misconduct, including discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity

- Contact Carmen Sirizzotti (Title IX coordinator) <https://www.unmc.edu/titleix/about/sexual-misconduct.html>

For concerns regarding research integrity, such as plagiarism, data falsification, and/or data fabrication

- Contact Gary Yee (Research Integrity Officer) or Karen Gould (Deputy Research Integrity Officer) <https://www.unmc.edu/academicaffairs/compliance/research-integrity.html>

For concerns about other legal or compliance matters, such as human subjects research, conflict of interest, or foreign influence

- Contact Sarah Gloden Carlson (Chief Compliance Officer) <https://www.unmc.edu/academicaffairs/compliance/report.html>

