

# Graduate Student Expectations and Advisor Responsibilities

## Research Group of Megan R. Gunnar, Institute of Child Development

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Welcome to graduate school and the Institute of Child Development! I am delighted that you are interested in becoming a member of my research group. However, I have started a phased retirement and will be fully retired by the Spring of 2026. For this reason, I am not taking in students who want me as their primary advisor. I am happy to co-advise. That means I would be the secondary advisor.

I currently (Fall, 2021) have five students who started last year or before for whom I am the primary mentor. I also have 4 students who I co-advise, one with Ann Masten, one with Dan Berry, one with Canan Karatekin, and one with Katie Thomas.

Below I discuss how I work with students. At the end I discuss the few differences for those for whom I am a co-mentor.

Regardless of whether you are a primary mentee or co-mentee, I plan to treat you as a **junior colleague**. I hope that this document will provide you some guidelines in managing your graduate school experience and research, and help you towards becoming an independent and successful developmental psychologist. This document should also give you an idea of what support you can expect from me.

### **Active Organism**

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We know that development involves the child being an active creator of their own experiences, rather than a passive recipient. The same goes for doing well in graduate school. **You cannot just sit and wait to learn.** You must be an active participant. If you want to meet with me, email me. If you have a research idea, begin to flesh it out and talk with me or others in the lab to hone your ideas. If there is a technique you want to learn, volunteer to help on a project using that technique. Then read up on how to use it so that you come to the experience with some knowledge already gleaned. Most of what you learn about doing research you will learn by doing research. So, get active. But, remember to think about what is on your plate. Don't overcommit. Need advice on how much to take on? Ask any of your peers, but don't be afraid to ask me, too.

### **Collaboration**

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**Research is a team sport.** You are entering a research group. This group includes paid staff, maybe a post-doc or two, and other Ph.D. students. I expect you to both receive

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support from your fellow research group partners and to provide support to them in their work. Collaboration is an integral part of the research environment. Not only does it bring benefits to the individual researcher, it also ensures that science is done in the most open and productive environment. I expect you to be open to not only sharing your ideas and knowledge with your peers and colleagues, but also receiving feedback (critical or positive).

I also am very happy when you connect with other faculty and lab groups, whether that merely means attending their lab meetings/journal clubs or designing research that integrate our two areas. This is our community model and I am very happy to be part of a department where we encourage such collaboration. My only concern will be that you don't spread yourself too thin and take on too many projects across too many labs. You should always let me know what you are doing so that I can advise you best.

### **Being Present**

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Students who get the most out of my lab, spend time in the lab. You will have your own desk/office at ICD and may prefer to work there. But, spending some time working at the work table in the lab every week will provide you with opportunities to get help from others and to know what is going on in the lab. There is also food and often sweets to lure you there, and companionship and support. [Note that we hope post-COVID to get back to this pattern. For now, we try to get together at least once a week.]

Certainly, you should plan to make all lab meetings that do not conflict with other classes and coming to staff meeting too can help you learn about the nuts and bolts of running a research lab.

### **Time Management**

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Time management is a very critical skill that you will need to develop, especially if you have had personal struggles with it in the past. I am very open to you selecting your own working hours, but **I expect deadlines to be firmly met**. On the other hand, things come up. Health issues and emotional issues and COVID-19 has certainly exacerbated this. I want you to succeed, and sometimes that means taking one step back in order to go 3 steps forward! But if you need this, I want you to be proactive. Don't miss a deadline and then tell me why. Ask to have the deadline extended before you are in danger of missing it.

In the beginning of your graduate studies you will have to climb a learning curve that will take more hours than you expect. Once you develop a regular schedule you will find it easier to get tasks accomplished efficiently. Create an outline of tasks that you will need to accomplish in order to achieve your objectives. Estimate how much time you will need to complete those tasks, and set your own personal deadlines. I do work with students in setting or designing their schedules when they ask. And when you begin, you can use

standing meetings with me as a way of keeping yourself on track. **However, you will need to get beyond using a meeting with me as the reason to get a task done. I won't be with you throughout your career and good time management is critical to success.**

**I expect you to regard graduate school as at least a full time job.** The successful graduate student spends way more than 20 hours per week on research (planning, executing, analyzing, writing up manuscripts, submitting, and revising). If I am paying you on a grant, I expect (and must justify to granting agencies), that you are spending your paid hours working on that grant. (GRA of 50% time=20 hours; 25% time=10 hours). Because my grant work might not lead to your independence, I will work with you to help you find fellowships that free your time for research you generate. I also have a nice slush fund that I can use to help support your independent research. My goal is that by year 2 you are doing studies that we have co-designed!

**Summer isn't a holiday, nor are Winter and Spring Breaks.** In academia, while you might take a vacation in the summer, the real reason for summer is to get lots of work done because you do not have class and teaching responsibilities.

### **Ideas (Intellectual property)**

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My friend Chris Coe's mentor once quipped, "If you have to worry about people stealing your ideas, you don't have many". While that may not be wholly true and science does award prizes to those who get their ideas out first, I expect that the people in my research group will be generous with one another and will share their ideas freely. I also expect people to be aware of those who have contributed to the development of their ideas and to acknowledge them accordingly.

You will have many opportunities to work on papers and chapters with me and your peers. It is very important to decide up front when designing a project and planning a paper who the authors will be and their order. Authors and order depend on input, thus this can change during a project and when it does there should be open and honest discussions about changing authors and/or order. Every decision should be kept in writing, if only in a group e-mail. This is because memory is always re-constructed and constructed differently by each of us. A paper trail makes good colleagues, just like a fence makes good neighbors.

NEVER include someone on a paper or poster who has not agreed to be on the paper or poster and who has not been given time to comment on it.

### **Building Your CV**

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I pay close attention to your CV, both publications and presentations. Whenever possible, in your first year I will accept a request to write a chapter or encyclopedia entry and will ask you

to take the lead, with my help, in the writing. This should allow you to have an authorship in your first year. You will be doing a first-year project. While this does not have to be publishable, my hope is to find you a project (typically analyzing data we already have) that is publishable. Then my expectation is that you submit that project for publication by the end of summer of your first year. Indeed, your goals should be to have one paper or chapter for every year of graduate school. That doesn't mean they will all have been published by the end of your 5<sup>th</sup> year, nor does it mean you will be first-author on all of those papers/chapters.

### **Goals for a Career**

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I want to be training researchers. I presume that this is why you came to an R1 university and to the premier research program in Developmental Psychology. However, I am happy to train both basic and clinical researchers. I know that when you are in the clinical track you will have to spend more time in practica. However, I expect you to manage that and to still put in 20+ hours in research. I also know that sometimes students change their minds about their career goals after they get to graduate school. Sometimes that means deciding that policy becomes more important and sometimes it means really wanting to teach at a small school. Do not be afraid of sharing your changing goals with me. At my core I want to train people who are the best at what they do and you cannot be the best if your heart isn't in what you are doing.

### **Keeping a Record**

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I train my students to keep a record of our meetings. After we meet, I want you to go away and write me an e-mail summarizing what we talked about and any actions items we decided on. Then I will review that e-mail, make any comments or corrections, and send it back to you. I expect you to keep those e-mails so that later they can form a record of our meetings. This can come in very useful when you write up what you have done for the year, reflect on your goals, or find out that my memory of the decisions we made a year or so ago is different from yours.

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

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I grew up in the 60's where we learned that if we weren't part of the solution, we were part of the problem. I want to work with you to improve the diversity of voices in our field including diversity in race/ethnicity, cultural background, and disabilities. I want to help reduce inequalities, and create greater equity amongst students who are seeking degrees in our field, whether undergraduate, graduate or postdoc. I know that students who come from non-academic (i.e., first gen) and/or non-research intensive college backgrounds sometimes need a bit more time or support to become the best developmental scientist they can become. I know that what seems obvious about graduate school and academia to some is opaque to others. I also know that there is much I don't know about how to best support students from different backgrounds and with different world views. I want to learn and am very open to being told what I can do better.

### **Using our Science to Do Good (or at least try to)**

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The work of my lab is NOT what would be considered participatory research with the community. However, I do this type of work on a volunteer basis and students often also get involved. I am working with the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery to improve staff training and to test what the call “The Nursery Way” as a model of how to work with families in crisis. I sit on the board of Think Small, an organization dedicated to improving early care and education. We are currently collaborating with the teachers in the Child Development Lab School to understand how variations in experience during COVID is related to how the children are adapting to coming back to preschool. I am also part of the RAPID-EC national team who are assessing (weekly and then bi-weekly) families with young children during COVID and rapidly pushing the information out to the public and policy makers. Several students are also taking part in this work. I am also on the National Scientific Council for the Developing Child where our goal is to continuously translate developmental science for use in the policy arena. So, if you are in my lab, you will know that I value this type of service and will support you in doing this type of work, as well. [Though at your stage of career, you should be doing some but not too much.]

### **Non-Primary Advisor**

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Probably the biggest difference from me being the primary advisor is that I do not feel obligated to be sure that you have a stipend. That doesn't mean that I will not work hard to help you get fellowships and small grants. It does mean that if you do not have funding, I will not feel obligated to put you on one of my grants or pay you out of my non-sponsored funds. Your primary advisor should feel such obligations as does the department as a whole.

I will also insist that twice a year your primary advisor, you and I meet to be sure we are on the same page. The goal is to be sure that we are supporting your academic life well and not pulling you in two different directions.

### **My Commitment to You**

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I take my role as an advisor very seriously. To me that means my job is to help you with your career both before and after you get your Ph.D. I am not a babysitter, however. You are responsible for asking me for help. I promise to respond as quickly and as helpfully as I can. Generally speaking, if you e-mail me you can expect a response within 12-24 hours.(if not, something has happened; email me again). If you send me a manuscript for feedback, if at all possible I will get it back to you within 2-3 days. If you need to meet with me, I will try to get you on my calendar within a week of your request, if not sooner. If it is urgent, then we will somehow meet that day. If you need a standing meeting, we can do that. However, my goal is to move you to “meet on demand” as I view standing meetings as generally less productive and more designed to keep the student moving towards defined goals. I want my students to move beyond needing that kind of structure, because you won't find it once you are out in real world.

There are things I will not do. I will not remember which program requirements you have due and when. That is your job. I will not come looking for you to make sure you are on track, though I will probably worry if I don't see much of you.

We will have a “life meeting” where we talk over your goals, plans, and activities at the beginning of the year and prior to yearly student evaluations. You are responsible for getting on my calendar for those meetings. We can have “life meetings” at other times during the year, of course, just set up an appointment.

**Please sign below and return to me a copy indicating that you have read this guideline completely and understand your obligations and expectations. Also, if you have any suggestions on issues you would like me to include in this document, please feel free to share it with me.**

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

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_