SPĀC Lab
Graduate Student Handbook

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I am providing you with this statement about lab norms and mentorship style to enhance communication and transparency in our working relationship. It can be hard to know expectations in academia, broadly, but also in new spaces where you may feel there are few people learning these norms at the same time you are. My handbook is intended to be a guide, but not be a rigid set of requirements. There is individual variability among students in their backgrounds, aspirations, talents, progress, and accomplishments and there will be growth and change in my own advising over time. My goal is to work with you to maximize your individual strengths and to help you develop the skills to succeed in your career. I am happy to discuss with you any or all of the items in the list below. This is a working document, and I encourage you to help me make it even better as our relationship evolves. It will be updated through feedback and accumulated experiences.

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Mentorship Style

Every advisor has a different approach to mentorship guided by their personality, values, research, and individual work ethic. My mentoring style contains 3 key components which are themes that you will be see echoed throughout this document:

1. *Feedback*: My first role for my students is to be their primary source of critical feedback, not because I don't believe in their capacity but instead because feedback is how you will grow as a scientist and thinker. The colleagues and advisors who have helped me to grow the most are those who have been willing to dig into my thinking, find the weaknesses, and provide me with *lots* of feedback. It is my job as an advisor to do the same for you; I take that role seriously and devote a great deal of time giving my advisees feedback each week.
2. *Support*: At the same time, it is my job to make sure you feel that you can tackle feedback. In other words, that level of feedback is only helpful when paired with equal amounts of support. A key part of my philosophy is to provide students with the support they need to succeed and address the feedback I provide. Accordingly, I typically meet with students weekly for ~1.5 hours to discuss their research/teaching/courses and am in regular communication with feedback throughout the week. The pace of research in the lab is quick because we can collect data quite quickly given the size of the participant pool and the nature of online data collection for pretesting (and experimental work as appropriate).
3. *Flexibility*: Every student varies in their strengths, weaknesses, and goals. Your strengths, weaknesses, and goals will change as you progress in the program. Thus, any mentorship style has to contain a certain amount of flexibility to be effective.

Mentoring Plan

The Social Psychology PhD program has an organized mentoring system to facilitate graduate student success. The system works in accordance with a graduate student's individual needs and interests and involves close collaboration with a faculty advisor and broader oversight by a Student Advisory Committee. The student chooses in the first semester both a faculty advisor, which in your case would be me, and two additional faculty members to serve on their committee. The purpose of this committee is to guide the student through their early graduate career with advice in regard to coursework, research, and professional development. This ensures that the student has multiple faculty members to turn to for advice and problem solving and begins to feel connected to the Department. In the student's later graduate career this committee can become part of the student's dissertation committee. With the faculty advisor, the student begins to work collaboratively on research.

Note: This statement was adapted from a statement of adviser philosophy distributed by Scott Lanyon, and then adapted by Gordon Legge, and then by Moin Syed. Excerpts have also been adapted from mentoring plans from Lowell Gaertner. I am very grateful to them for sharing this resource as a starting point for my own philosophy. I welcome others to use this document or Dr. Syed's version, as long as you credit each of us appropriately. To students: If there is a shift in voice or tone, it likely reflects the change in original writer. However, all content directly reflects my philosophy of mentorship with you.

My approach adapts to each student as their strengths and interests develop. To begin, students will work on an existing project in the lab. This project will be an ongoing study which will familiarize them with project development, conceptualization of a research design, basics of an IRB protocol, ongoing data collection, data analysis, drafting of a manuscript, and the subsequent manuscript review process. Once you feel comfortable with the process (or as soon as you are ready!), we will then have you begin another project. This second project will be one that the student develops around their research interests. Having students develop their own project early is crucial for them to develop their own voices as scientists and scholars.

Grant Applications

In addition to the advisor and advisory committee, we have additional mentoring practices to facilitate student development. In your first or second semester (depending on deadlines), I will encourage and help you prepare a proposal for a *National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship* (NSFGRF), the *Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship*, or the *APA Young Scientist Award* as appropriate. If you already have an MA, we will search for other grant writing opportunities for you. Our Social Psychology area has been remarkably successful procuring these extremely competitive and prestigious fellowships with three awardees in the past 10 years and multiple honorable mentions. As students develop their dissertation ideas, I also encourage them to apply for an NIH pre-doctoral National Research Service Award. Throughout your career as a graduate student, I encourage you to seek out funding opportunities (from the University or elsewhere) that are good fits for your research. I am happy to help you evaluate these opportunities and assess whether they are good fits for your work.

Note: It is your responsibility to keep track of the submission deadlines for any grants you would like to attend and discuss with me whether it is a good fit for you at least 3 months ahead of that deadline. I may find grants that would be a good fit for you and send them your way, but it is ultimately your responsibility to keep track of grant and fellowship opportunities.

Conferences

I encourage students to attend and present their research at professional conferences from their first year in the lab and the department provides some funding for them to do so (~$600 for the first conference and $200 for the second conference). Ideally, you would attend two conferences per year, but minimally you should attend one per year. Attending such conferences is crucial. It helps students meet their future colleagues and feel connected to a field of study beyond their lab. The lab typically attends the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP). Depending on the students' individual trajectory, it may also be appropriate to attend the conferences held by the Society for Research in Child Development, the Vision Science Society, Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA), the Southeastern Society for Social Psychology (SSSP), the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, or the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. I am happy to help you evaluate these options.

Note: Same as with grants above, it is your responsibility to keep track of the submission deadlines for any conferences you would like to attend and discuss with me whether it is a good fit for you and the research at least a month ahead of that deadline. Any abstracts need to be sent to me two weeks ahead of the deadline to allow us adequate time for review.

Community Involvement

It is important that we contribute back to the communities that our work relates to. This is not always easy, but I encourage you to keep an eye out for ways that we can do this as a lab. That might mean partnering with community organizations, sharing findings of our work on social media, or consulting with different campus groups in designing stimuli. As part of our current grant, we will be conducting Vision Science demonstrations at local schools in the Knoxville area beginning January 2024. These demonstrations are a valuable way to give back to the community and to help bolster the pipeline between underserved areas of the city (e.g., schools in South and East Knox) and college. Our goal is to model for students what being a scientist looks like and break down some of the barriers to imagining themselves as future scientists by making science fun and scientific thinking accessible.

Meetings and Consultation

Individual Meetings. I anticipate meeting with each student for 1.5 hour weekly meetings and you may schedule additional ad-hoc meetings as necessary. There is no specific agenda for these meetings – though I do expect that you come to each meeting with an idea of what you need from me and what you want to talk about. These meetings serve as a mutual check-in about progress though the program, on shared projects, and life in general. If students want to discuss specific materials (e.g., drafts of papers, applications for funding) then they should submit them to me at least 48 hours prior to the meeting so that I have time for review. I value time greatly and will do my very best to respect your time so that you can do your best work.

Lab Group Meetings. We will have weekly lab group meetings that we jointly schedule. Depending on the semester, sometimes these are presentation-based lab meetings with the other graduate students and advanced RAs and sometimes these are project-based lab meetings with research assistants.

Social Brownbag Research Group. In addition to the weekly advisee meetings, the area also has a weekly brownbag to facilitate a cooperative and constructive platform for students to receive feedback: (SBRG) on Fridays from 12:30-2pm. The purpose of the group is to a) provide a venue for students to present their work, b) learn how to receive constructive feedback on their work, and c) learn how to provide constructive feedback. This setting is critical because it socializes students into the practice of publicly voicing their ideas and engaging in intellectual debate. You will be encouraged to present your research in SBRG once a year.

Communication. I am available primarily via Slack which is the interface that our whole lab uses. The reason I like Slack for this purpose is so that you can send a message without excessive formality (e.g., a quick question) and know that I will respond when I can. I also value the sense of collegiality it facilitates because we can set up group channels where students can support each other on different projects, answer each other's questions, and share relevant memes, gifs, and exciting news. It sets the tone for the kind of place I want the lab to be. Furthermore, you can set Slack to respect your work hours by limiting notifications to weekdays or when you regularly work. You can also pause notifications for certain amounts of time. You may also email if there are documents that we will want to be indefinitely accessible or you may come by my office. While I try to get back to folx within 48 hours, there may be times where that response is delayed. I anticipate the same may sometimes be true for you.

Guiding Philosophy and Career Paths

My job as an advisor is to help my advisees to be successful in their chosen career. I can't do that if I don't know what career is desired. I want my advisees to let me know the range of career paths in which they are interested as those interests develop. Take the opportunity to go to talks and workshops by people in industry, teaching, policy, and advocacy work. My default advising model is to ensure you are getting experiences in all aspects of training (research, teaching, service) so that you have the background to pursue different options when the time comes. Discussions about your career plans will be included as part of the annual review process, but advisees (you!) should feel welcome to bring up the issue whenever they are compelled to do so (and I will do likewise).

Although our training program is clearly designed to prepare you for an academic career, I am very well aware that not all of you will go that route. *I am excited for whatever career path you choose and will support your progress towards that goal.* I will do my best to help my advisees obtain the experiences and skills needed to succeed in those various careers.

Diversity

We, as a department, brought you into the program not only because you have potential but also because you already have valuable perspective you can bring to the table. I take a growth mindset in my approach to diversity and mentorship and I want to hear what you have to say (if you want to share it). That may not always be easy and there may be times when you want to share information anonymously or consult with other trusted colleagues or faculty

members. I encourage that, too (see section below on Professional Development and Conflict Resolution). Students who I work with represent vast diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, SES, trans status, gender, sexuality, immigrant generation status, nationality, religion, and worldview, among other dimensions of diversity. Indeed, a major aspect of our research pertains to how people learn beliefs about these different groups. As an advisor I strive to understand and respect your position and perspectives and how they inform your work. Continuously reflecting on your positionality, and how it may influence your perspective on the research that we do, is a required aspect of science, teaching, and mentorship. With all of this in mind, one of my goals as your mentor is to help you learn how to communicate the important issues we study and the important perspectives you have with people who do not hold the same knowledge or perspective as you. Unfortunately, I have found that typical efforts to communicate with people across ideological divides falls prey to the human desire to police other people's behavior (Brady et al., 2017), ultimately leading to avoidance rather than approach (i.e., encourages people to *avoid* doing the wrong thing rather than *approach* doing the right thing). We know that doesn't work in terms of reducing implicit bias (Devine et al., 2002). So one of my goals is to work as a lab to develop ways to communicate our science across ideological divides. Within the department, we are proudly supportive of our students. *Everyone* in the department, including peers, faculty, and staff, want you to succeed and want to understand if they present barriers to your success. So I am always happy to help you communicate if you need to have difficult conversations with peers, faculty, etc. Learning how to do this is an important aspect of developing professional conduct. For everyone, learning about others' experiences is critical to creating a safe and welcoming space for everyone in the lab. Therefore, I will applaud not only when you help someone else grow/learn, but also when recognize your own biases and the role that they play in your work.

Personal Life

Work-life balance benefits your mental health *and* your work output. It is important that you develop a schedule for yourself that respects your limits rather than consistently pushes through them. Your limits might vary from another person's limits. The pace of academic life is such that there are sometimes weeks where you work *hard* (e.g., grant deadlines, submitting a manuscript, conference weeks) and then weeks where you work a little less to get back to equilibrium. If you expect yourself to work all of the time or feel guilty when you are not working, you never get the chance to recharge. I encourage you to figure out how to reserve time to recharge and find *balance*. That does not mean only working when you feel like it, but instead figuring out how to work efficiently to get your best output. Graduate school is hard, but how hard you work is up to you. You have to put in the amount of effort to reach the professional goals you want. If you want to be competitive for an academic job, that means between 50-60 hours/week on average in grad school. This number will ebb and flow with the work you have going (some weeks < 50, some weeks >60), but you should be the one pushing yourself to excel. You are balancing being a researcher, a student, and a TA; it takes time to develop efficiency in each of those domains so your workload might be higher in the first couple of years as you figure things out and might take different form in your later years (more writing and analysis, less coursework). I am going to cheer you on, but you have to be the one to push yourself. There are other routes post PhD as well, such as policy work, user experience, statistical consulting, or teaching. I'm happy to chat about the many possibilities you can pursue (see section above on Career Paths).

Many students struggle to correctly calibrate the expectations for graduate school because they base their expectations on how they observe professors behave (e.g., how much time they spend in the office, how much vacation they take). *This is a dire mistake*. Let me explain. Graduate school is a 5-year period, 6 if you are lucky, to demonstrate that you can meaningfully contribute to the field of science. It is a sprint. Once you demonstrate that and secure a job, *then* you can recalibrate from sprint mode to long-distance triathlon mode, where you can set yourself up to succeed in a long career with shifts to focus on different aspects over time (e.g., moving from a research focus to administration to teaching, etc). Professors are navigating an entirely different stage of their career than graduate students. Don't mistake the amount of time you see them working for the time you should spend working. Similarly, don't allow other students' work ethic to cause you to calibrate your own incorrectly. If you want to be competitive for an academic job, you are amidst a 5-6 year sprint (see above). Calibrate to the people around you who help you set high expectations for yourself.

Another related consideration is taking breaks from work. You are in a graduate sprint, but you have to balance that with the needed breaks to make it through successfully. (You need water breaks!) For example, I often need a little time after classes end, over the holidays, and a week during the summer to take a step back from work to recharge. I encourage my students to find time to do the same. You won't be able to do good work without taking some necessary breaks. Thus, I expect students to do their best work and factor in breaks to facilitate that work ethic. Keep in mind though that travel typically *takes* energy. I don't keep track of how much you are working. I consider it your job to modulate how much travel you are doing (e.g., over the summer) so that you can continue to do genuinely good work. One common mistake is to look at the relatively unstructured time you have to work and think there is plenty of time to fit other things in. Be wise about how you spend your time. Three weeks of "breaks" is probably as much as you can afford each year.

Conduct

Open Science. I take the following approach to science in our lab: Our theory is inaccurate. No matter what it is (and how good of a scientists we are), the theory we have devised will not be 100% accurate. Maybe not even 10% accurate. The goal of good science is to figure out how we are wrong. Too often, scientists focus on how to find evidence that they are right and it leads to bad science (e.g., p-hacking, weak methodology, not accounting for alternative hypotheses). Therefore, we take an open science approach in the lab by pre-registering hypotheses, study designs, and stopping rules when appropriate (i.e., the final study in a package or a time-intensive study). The goal of this approach is to reinforce curiosity in science. We do each study to learn something. Sometimes studies do not support our theory and that shouldn't be a failure. We are still learning something. The purpose of a study is not just to find evidence for what you think is right (though that sometimes happens) but to develop knowledge. Sometimes a null experiment is a failure of method or simply support for the null hypothesis. When we take this approach to our scientific work (i.e., to seek out truth), the cacophony of problematic behaviors associated with past work in our field are not a concern.
Note: We typically use R for analyses so that we can ensure greater transparency in our research.

Statistics and Methods. Speaking of R, it is worth noting that I *LOVE* statistics and will help you however possible to share that love for stats. We have a strong statistics program at UT and in the department beginning with ANOVA and regression, followed by more advanced courses in and outside of the department. We typically conduct intensive data analysis with our research including mixed effects models and signal detection analysis. By your second year in the program, we will have talked about these analyses and completed training/reading on them. Thus, by your second year in the program, I expect you will be able to fully understand the models we discuss in the lab. We also do some study programming in Python and (less so) MatLab. This is another area that you should actively seek to develop your skills on. In terms of graduate coursework, the most important courses are your statistics and methods courses, and any Social Psychology seminars. Invest time into those courses so your research can excel.

Relationships with other advisees. You will learn a lot from other students and/or postdocs. I encourage my advisees to develop a strong professional relationship with other people in my lab and in the graduate program generally. This relationship should be supportive, not competitive. Graduate school is hard enough. Keep an eye out for each other and support each other when you can. A supportive environment helps everyone who is in it. Jealousy and doubt are normal human emotions, but I encourage you to acknowledge them and move past them rather than letting them hinder your relationships with folx in the department or lab. Those relationships are oftentimes lifelong. Don't miss out on them. Furthermore, early career students should seek out the advice of late career students and postdocs. In turn, late career students and postdocs should be generous in providing advice/resources where applicable.

Advising undergraduate students. You will begin working with undergraduate students to help with data collection, project preparation, and coding. As such, it is important that you begin developing your own philosophy and approach as a mentor. These students often come with little existing knowledge but tons of potential. Just as it my job to facilitate your growth, it is your job to facilitate theirs. I encourage you to talk with me about this process and verbalize your struggles and concerns as a mentor. I am here to help you grow in that domain as well.

Professional Development Issues and Conflict Resolution. Communication is key to minimizing conflicts. For example, this document is an effort to clearly communicate my expectations to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings between my advisees and me. If you have concerns about your interaction with me or with anyone else, please don't hesitate to come talk with me. Remember, trust is a key foundation to growth. I have learned a great deal from advisees in the past about what they need and hope to continue to approach my mentorship relationships with curiosity, excitement, and openness. I value your feedback and experiences and *want you to feel comfortable talking with me*. Nonetheless, it is critical that you always have people who will hear you and help you work through conflict regardless of whether that is always me. Therefore, I recommend you build relationships with other faculty in the department (e.g., your Student Advisory Council) and that you consider these folks along with others (e.g., the Department Chair, Diversity Council Chair, or University Ombuds Person) as resources in addressing professional and personal issues. The department also has an anonymous portal where you can provide feedback that is read and addressed by the Diversity Council: tiny.utk.edu/ClimateFeedback
Note: If you wish any conversation with me or others to remain anonymous, be sure to indicate that at the start of the conversation.

Publications and Authorship

Publishing is essential for most career paths followed by my advisees. I expect my advisees to work on manuscripts for publication continuously from the beginning of their graduate school career. By your second year in graduate school, you should ideally have a project in each stage: idea formation, data collection, analysis, and writing. By the time they graduate I expect my advisees to have multiple publications in the pipeline (published, in press, in review, in preparation). Ideally, you would have two to three high-impact first-authored paper plus a few additional co-authored papers. Doing so would make you competitive for whatever job you were interested in (assuming the papers are high quality, which is expected). Furthermore, the nature of the papers may shift depending on your individual professional goals (e.g., developing an advocacy workshop or statistics package may take precedence over a paper if you are aiming for policy work or statistical consulting, accordingly).

I am constantly involved in writing several manuscripts at a time, many of which involve colleagues at other universities. Many of these papers will not involve student advisees. My general approach is to invite students to work on such papers when it is clearly related to their expressed interests and I have a sense that they can contribute to the paper. In this regard, it is very important that you communicate your interests to me, those that are both ongoing and emerging. It is difficult for me to direct papers your way when I don't know your interests!

Authorship. Resolving authorship arrangements early is good practice to maintain positive relationships with colleagues. Typically, I take an anchor author approach wherein I take the last author slot and mentor a student in writing and conducting the work as first-author. I prefer to decide roles and authorship early in the collaboration on the project. This decision can be altered by mutual agreement at a later date if roles have changed. Usually, the first author has played the lead role in the project execution and will take the lead in writing the manuscript and overseeing the revision process. If I have had significant involvement in a research project (developing the original idea, collecting data, analyzing data, and/or writing a portion of the manuscript or editing the manuscript), then I expect to be listed as an author (typically last, as "senior" author). I have the same expectations for you and will look out for your best interests. I expect the first author to retain primary responsibility for the publication process even if they leave my lab to take a position elsewhere. The same general procedure applies to authorship for conference presentations as well.

Summer Funding

Summer is an excellent time to get teaching experience or secure internships. If a student has a large fellowship (e.g., NSF, Ford, Tennessee Fellowship for Graduate Excellence), this funding is considered full summer funding so you can focus on research. Summer is critical to data collection with kids, uninterrupted writing, and professional development. I will work to help you try to find funding so that you can focus on your research throughout the

summer. There are some resources for summer funding both within and outside the department for research and for teaching. Students are expected to take the initiative to apply for these funds and I will keep an eye out for them, too. However, they should always discuss their summer funding situation with me, typically at the end of the Fall semester, which is when they should seriously begin looking for opportunities.

Masters & Dissertation Projects

From entry to the program you will be working towards developing a coherent program of research of your own. Which projects become your masters and dissertation depend on what you are currently working on that you want to dig into a little more. You are not expected to know exactly what your research will look like right from the beginning of graduate school! In fact, it is better that you maintain flexibility throughout your career so that you can always be developing new ideas and a set of questions to draw on whenever you have room for a new project.

Coursework and Research Background

I don't have any standard course requirements beyond those of the Psychology graduate program. Instead I expect my advisees to have, or to develop while at the university, a solid background in the concepts and skills that their research and career path require. This could be accomplished in the form of coursework (e.g., Women Gender and Sexuality Studies certificate, Statistics minor) but also workshops and informal arrangements with other individuals (students, postdocs, faculty, or staff).

Original Literature. Regardless of career path, a current knowledge of the literature is one of the first steps in allowing you to generate meaningful research questions and have a working knowledge of methodological tools at your disposal. Therefore, I expect my advisees in their first few years to spend significant hours each week reading relevant literature that is both specific/directly related to their research interests and of broad relevance to the field. Typically, these readings are assigned within relevant courses (e.g., Social Psychology Seminar, Psychology of Prejudice, Cultural Influence, Research Methods, Affective Psychology). To supplement these readings, students can also begin reading the articles on the SPAC Lab Recommended Reading List. From there, they should do the following to stay up to date on current literature:

1) Sign up for journal article alerts. You will receive emails notifying you of new issues and new online articles for the journal. Please talk with me about appropriate journals for which to receive alerts.

2) Google Scholar alerts. You can input custom keywords to receive alerts (usually 2-3 times per week) of matching articles from all across the disciplinary spectrum. You can also set alerts for specific researchers who have a Scholar profile. Additionally, you should set up your own Scholar profile upon entry into the graduate program (even if there is not yet anything in it) so you are easily searchable for other scholars.

3) Download Mendeley (if you don't have it already) and install the Word plug-in. This will help you organize your reading so that when you need to track down papers that you have read in the future for writing and reading, it is easily accessible. Mendeley is free with your .edu address.

Most of all, welcome! I am glad to have you here.

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"Ask not what's inside your head, but what your head's inside of." - Mace (1977)

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