

GRADUATE STUDENT MENTORING STATEMENT

Raymond A. Mar
Department of Psychology, York University

This statement of mentoring philosophy is intended to enhance communication and transparency with respect to my working relationship with graduate students. It is intended to supplement informal discussions and is not a set of rigid requirements. Students differ in their backgrounds, aspirations, talents, progress, and accomplishments. My goal is to work with you to help you develop your individual strengths and the skills required to succeed in your career.

Note: This statement was adapted from a statement of advisor philosophy distributed by Scott Lanyon (University of Minnesota; Dean of the Graduate School), and then adapted by Gordon Legge (University of Minnesota; Psychology DGS). Scott and Gordon invited faculty to edit and use their text in their own statements of advisor philosophy. It was subsequently adapted by Moin Syed, and Colin DeYoung adapted it further. Anyone is free to borrow from this document as they wish, so long as they provide this attribution.

Guiding Philosophy and Career Paths

Everyone in the lab, from the undergraduates to myself, is here to learn. As a graduate student, there are a great many things that you must learn, and it is important to focus on this learning and not get distracted by other things (e.g., demonstrating competence to myself or others). If you already knew how to do all the things required of you, there would be no reason for you to be in graduate school. Learning entails several things, but chief among them are: (1) making mistakes, (2) receiving feedback, and (3) incorporating this feedback. Honest mistakes are inevitable during any learning process. Errors will occur with some frequency, are completely normal, and to be expected. They are nothing to be embarrassed about. To benefit from these mistakes, it's important that you become aware of them as a result of feedback, or explicate them to myself if you realize them on your own (so we can correct them together). In this lab, we all attempt to assist one another's learning by providing as much constructive feedback as possible. This feedback must always be delivered in a courteous and respectful fashion, and entail pointing out both strengths and weaknesses. If myself or any other lab members appears to be falling short of expectations in this regard, please do let me know. You can expect to receive a lot of feedback from me, on all aspects of your work (e.g., writing, coding, presentation skills). To maximize the benefit of this feedback, and develop as a researcher during our time working together, it is important that you strive to improve upon your weaknesses by incorporating this feedback. If you notice that you are getting similar comments from me on repeated occasions, that might be a sign that you should work a bit more on this aspect of your work. I am always happy to discuss concrete strategies for how you can improve upon something. Lastly, you are ultimately the one responsible for your development and growth during graduate school. No supervisor, and no program, can provide all that you will need to be successful in your chosen career. To that end, you should seek out other learning opportunities to fill any gaps that you perceive in your training.

My job as an advisor is to help my advisees to succeed in their careers. By default, I assume that students are interested in a career that involves scientific research in some form or another. However, I know that different

students desire different careers, and that career aspirations can change during graduate school. Ultimately, what I care about most is that you find a career path that works well for you and that you find engaging. Please tell me as soon as possible about the range of career paths that interest you, and do tell me if your career interests change. I will support you as best I can to pursue whatever career path you choose, no matter what it is.

My typical advising model is to ensure you are getting a diversity of training experiences related to research, teaching, and service. This should provide you with the background to pursue different career options upon graduation. Inevitably, this training will include doing things that you may not be enthusiastic about at the time, but which you may come to see as a viable career path years down the road (e.g., teaching, mentoring). We should aim to discuss your career plans as part of the annual review process, but advisees should bring up the issue whenever they feel compelled to do so. Although elements of our training are clearly designed to prepare you for an academic career, I know that not all of you will go that route. It is my goal to do my best to help advisees obtain the experiences and skills needed to succeed in their chosen careers, whatever they may be.

Diversity

My students have represented considerable diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, SES, gender, sexuality, immigrant generation status, nationality, religion, disability-status, and worldview. It is important to reflect on our own backgrounds, perspectives, and positions, and on how they may influence the perspectives we take in our research and other aspects of our work. As an advisor, I strive to understand and respect your position and perspectives, and how they inform your work. Additionally, I may occasionally encourage you to recognize your own biases and the role that they play in your work. Similarly, I expect you to inform me when you believe that I am unaware of my own biases and their influence.

Personal Life and Well-Being

I expect my advisees to have a personal life outside the lab, and to take breaks from working: short breaks often, and longer breaks when appropriate (e.g., during winter break or over the summer). Overwork makes people less productive and less creative, and causes unnecessary stress. Failing to put sufficient effort and time into the central relationships in your life (e.g., with a romantic partner, family, friends) is bound to cause you serious problems. Additionally, people should not have to abandon their other interests in order to pursue their graduate training.

At the same time, graduate school is a good opportunity to figure out how hard you can work and how much you can get done if you push yourself a bit. Getting an academic job has a great deal to do with one's success in publishing high quality scientific research. Awareness of this fact can be stressful and often leads students to neglect their personal lives. Remember that pushing yourself does not mean working all the time. It means taking on challenging but feasible goals, expressing your commitment to them (both to yourself and to others such as myself), figuring out effective strategies for overcoming obstacles to those goals, and then following

through until they are achieved. Developing a good work-life balance can be complicated, but it is very important. Please feel free to talk to me if you have concerns about how much (or how little) you are working, or if you are having trouble managing your time and prioritizing your goals.

If you are someone who has trouble deciding not to work for a day (or an afternoon, or an hour) without feeling guilty, one good strategy is to adopt a schedule that includes regular downtime. There is no one-size-fits-all schedule, but feeling that you have to be working during every waking hour—or anywhere close to that—is a recipe for disaster. Deciding in advance not to work on Saturdays, or after 6 PM, or whatever works best for you, is likely to encourage guilt-free downtime.

Maintaining a good work-life balance is crucial to one's overall well-being. Similarly, if you are not feeling well, either physically or mentally, take the time off that you need to take care of yourself and seek help if necessary. You should let me know if you need to take time off for physical or mental health reasons, but do not feel obliged to reveal the details of your challenges to me. If you would like to tell me about them, you are welcome to, and I will do my best to provide advice and point you to helpful resources. The same goes for any other personal emergencies that arise, such as the loss of a loved one or a friend in need of help. Take the time that you need to deal with stressful situations. My goal is to help you succeed in your career, but not at the expense of your well-being more generally. A great many things are more important than graduate school, and these things should not be sacrificed for your graduate training.

Lab Conduct

Open science. We endeavour to conduct research in a transparent and reproducible manner. This includes pre-registering our studies, and publicly sharing data, materials, and analysis code whenever possible. A great many procedures have been developed so that we avoid engaging in questionable research practices (e.g., selective reporting of variables, post hoc removal of cases, inclusion of unjustified control variables), and can demonstrate convincingly that this is the case. All research in the lab must adopt these procedures, to safeguard the integrity of the lab and its research.

Relationships with other members of the lab. My advisees learn a great deal from other lab members. Therefore, I expect my advisees to develop good professional relationships with others in the lab, and in the graduate program more broadly. These relationships should be supportive, not competitive nor demanding. All interactions should be governed by an ethos of interpersonal respect. Early-stage students should seek out the advice of late-stage students and postdocs. In turn, late-stage students and postdocs should be generous in providing advice. Members of the lab are encouraged to collaborate with one other and to contribute to each other's projects. Additionally, graduate students gain valuable experience by mentoring undergraduates working in the lab, and I encourage graduate students to consider when any of their projects might be usefully assisted by undergraduate research assistants. This can include entering, processing, and conducting quality control of data, coding, performing literature reviews, and scheduling and administering studies.

Ethics. My advisees should familiarize themselves with, and abide by, York University's "[Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)." Sexual misconduct is not tolerated and must be reported. Academic and scientific dishonesty are also not tolerated, and must be brought to my attention. Further, advisees must abide by all University requirements for working with human participants. It is essential that all lab members are respectful of our participants and comply with the principles of informed consent.

Resolving conflicts. Communication is key to minimizing conflicts. If you have concerns about me or anyone else, please don't hesitate to come talk with me. If you are uncomfortable speaking with me, you can speak to the Social-Personality Area Head, the Graduate Program Director, or the Department Chair. If you wish a conversation to remain anonymous, be sure to indicate that at the start of any conversation.

Meetings and Consultation

Lab Meetings. I expect my advisees to attend weekly or bi-weekly lab meetings that we jointly schedule, unless they are traveling or have some other unavoidable conflict. Please inform myself and the lab manager if you cannot attend a meeting. In addition to these meetings, feel free to propose an additional lab meeting if you think it would be useful for any reason (e.g., practicing a talk).

Individual Meetings and Communication. You are always welcome to schedule an individual meeting with me for any reason. If you want to discuss specific materials (e.g., drafts of papers, applications for funding) make sure you send them to me in advance, at least the day before but more lead-time is always better. For anything that requires my feedback or action, email is preferred as my Inbox serves as my to-do list. We use Slack for most other communication, especially when seeking the input of the lab at large, or when a brief, quick response will suffice. In urgent cases, you are also welcome to text or call me. All lab members are asked to provide their phone numbers in case of meeting cancellations or emergencies.

If I have agreed to do something for you by a certain date, there is no harm in reminding me as the date approaches. I will almost always tell you once I have completed a task for you, so if you haven't heard from me then it likely hasn't been done. Reminders are always appreciated. If I have agreed to do something with an open-ended time frame, and more time has gone by than you expected, you are also welcome remind me.

Independence

Although we will have frequent contact, I expect my advisees to work without daily input or guidance from me. Learning to solve problems on your own is a key goal of graduate school. Ultimately, my hope is that you will graduate with the confidence that you can learn to do anything you set your mind to. That said, you should contact me for support if you become stuck. I am happy to initially provide more regular guidance to advisees who are not accustomed to working independently, but by the time they leave the program I expect them to be able to function as independent researchers and teachers. It requires ambition and hard work to be successful in research, but it also requires initiative. A crucial part of graduate school is figuring out how to be self-motivated, self-disciplined, and self-organized.

Working in Other Labs and Switching Advisors

You are welcome to work in other research labs, paid or unpaid, during your time in graduate school. In fact, I encourage it, as working in other labs helps you diversify your research experience, exposes you to different mentoring styles and lab procedures, and helps you to build relationships with other faculty who might serve on your committee and write recommendation letters. Generally, the best way to get involved in another lab is to contact the PI directly to express your interest. Be clear about your goals, and the parameters of any collaboration (e.g., initiating a research collaboration, sitting in on lab meetings).

You may wish to change advisors for personal or professional reasons. Similarly, I may come to the conclusion that I can no longer supervise your thesis or dissertation. Ideally, any change would occur relatively early in a student's graduate career (e.g., after the MA, but before the PhD), but this need not be the case. If you would like to change advisors, please discuss this with me and I will do the same should I have concerns about continuing to be your supervisor. You can also discuss this with other faculty first, if you would be more comfortable doing so (e.g., the area head, graduate director, or another trusted faculty member).

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 (or close to it) from the beginning of their graduate school career. By the end of your first year, and from then on, you should attempt to have at least one manuscript in some stage of completion. By the time they graduate, I expect advisees to have multiple publications in the pipeline (published, in press, under review, in preparation). Ideally, you would have several first-authored publications (under review or published), plus a few additional co-authored papers. This is aspirational and not often achieved, but doing so would make you competitive for academic jobs (assuming the papers are high quality, which is expected for all work in our lab).

Almost all my efforts go toward supporting student publications, but I also occasionally collaborate with colleagues on additional projects. I will always look for opportunities for students to get involved in these projects, when they fit their interests and expertise.

Authorship. Resolving authorship arrangements is essential if we are to maintain positive relationships with our colleagues. If I have had significant involvement in a research project (developing the idea, designing the study, analyzing the data, and/or writing/editing the manuscript), then I expect to be listed as an author (typically last, as “senior” author). Discussion regarding roles and authorship should occur early in the collaboration, and occur on an ongoing basis if these roles change. Everyone involved should have a clear idea of their authorship status early, and there should not be any surprises later. Please do not hesitate to bring up the possibility of changing authorship if you believe that the initially agreed upon roles have changed. Usually, the first author has played the lead role in the project's execution and takes the lead in writing the manuscript and overseeing the revision process.

Professional Meetings. Developing a professional network is essential, regardless of career path. Therefore, I expect all my advisees to present their research at national and international meetings. Ideally, you would attend at least one conference per year (hopefully two), pending available funds. Funding from the lab is contingent on giving a presentation at the meeting (i.e., poster or talk). I am happy to chat with you about strategies for conference attendance.

Funding

Graduate Student Stipends. The Psychology Department guarantees some funding during full-time enrollment in the graduate program. The nature of that funding (TA, RA, stipend) can vary from year-to-year, depending in part on the lab's resources. Advisees are expected to apply for fellowships whenever possible. Writing such proposals is excellent experience and receiving such fellowships increases a student's competitiveness for future fellowships and jobs.

Resources for Research. Ensuring the viability of your research is a joint responsibility. I will work with advisees to find the necessary data and/or funding to collect new data. Often, such funding comes from research grants from the University, or an external funding agency (e.g., SSHRC). Writing funding proposals is a critically important skill regardless of your career path. Therefore, I encourage all advisees to be involved in writing proposals for both university and external funding opportunities. In addition, York boasts a robust Undergraduate Research Participant Pool (URPP), and a great deal of data can be collected using this resource without any cost.

The PhD Dissertation

Generally speaking, I expect students to be reasonably clear about their research focus by the end of the second year of the PhD. The topic of the dissertation will be determined by the student, in consultation with myself. The dissertation should comprise at least one large study, preferably a programmatic set of studies, that clearly addresses gaps in the existing research base or initiates a new topic of inquiry.

Your dissertation is an opportunity to ensure that you have conducted a program of research in sufficiently impressive depth to make you competitive on the job market. This means demonstrating that you can pursue at least one research program in depth. It is beneficial to show some breadth as well, but depth is essential. Publishing even a large number of unrelated papers is unlikely to lead to success in academia. Publishing several thematically related papers, plus a few more that may be more tangentially related or branch out into different areas, will increase your odds of landing an academic job. It is also possible to complete your dissertation as a series of published papers, book-ended by an Introduction and Discussion. If you are interested in going this route, please do discuss this with me in advance.

If an advisee chooses not to publish any of their research, I will work to have this work published, often in collaboration with other lab members. It is important that the time and energy that participants contribute to

our research be conveyed into publicly-available knowledge that can benefit all. Naturally, I will always discuss this with you in advance.

Coursework and Research Background

I don't have any other course requirements beyond those of the graduate program. Instead, I expect my advisees to develop a solid background in the concepts and skills that their research and career path require. Developing these skills is not limited to coursework, but will likely also involve workshops, self-directed learning, and ad hoc mentoring from other faculty and peers. At minimum, by working in our lab, you are expected to gain expertise with quantitative methods, R, and OSF.

Regardless of your career path, a current knowledge of the scientific literature is essential. Therefore, I expect advisees to spend time reading relevant literature, both what is directly related to their research interests and what is of broad relevance to the field.

Teaching

Teaching is a tremendous way to learn to communicate complex concepts to a non-specialist audience. In some ways, learning how to teach is one of the most generalizable skills you will gain during graduate school. I encourage all advisees to take opportunities to teach, in the form of guest lectures, workshop leaders, informal lab sessions, as well as TAs and as course instructors when possible. Further, any career path requires balancing multiple diverse responsibilities (such as teaching and research). Graduate school is a great opportunity to learn how to juggle a large number of diverse obligations.

Updated June 17, 2024