Sample Mentoring Agreement Between an Undergraduate Researcher and a Faculty Mentor

This is a sample mentoring agreement between you and the undergraduate researcher(s) on your team. We understand that not all these expectations will make sense for your team. Please feel free to delete, add, or adjust expectations to fit your team's needs. We attempted to make this document relevant for folks in as many disciplines as possible but recognize that some of the language and expectations laid out below may not apply in certain research contexts. If that is the case, think about what a useful parallel might be in your context. Italicized blue text offers other considerations you may want to include. Make it your own!

As you may know, one key feature of effective mentoring is establishing clear expectations from the beginning (e.g. Hall, Walkington, Shanahan, Ackley, & Stewart, 2018; Shanahan, Ackley-Holbrook, Hall, Stewart, & Walkington, 2015; Walkington, Stewart, Hall, Ackley, & Shanahan, 2019). It is our hope that faculty who use this will be prompted to be clearer about their expectations and more inclusive when establishing them. You may want to go over this agreement with new undergraduate researchers at your first meeting. We recognize that drafting a clear set of expectations can be time consuming. However, clearly articulating these details at the beginning of a student's research experience could lead to a wide range of benefits, including preserving expensive equipment, avoiding miscommunication, contributing to a student's sense of belonging, increasing student productivity and independence, and streamlining the research process. In addition to this agreement, we recommend that faculty mentors communicate, in writing, to their student(s) exactly which research tasks/duties the student will be engaged in prior to placement.

References

Hall, E. E., Walkington, H., Shanahan, J. O., Ackley, E., & Stewart, K. A. (2018). Mentor perspectives on the place of undergraduate research mentoring in academic identity and career development: An analysis of award winning mentors. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *23*(1), 15-27.

Shanahan, J. O., Ackley-Holbrook, E., Hall, E., Stewart, K., & Walkington, H. (2015). Ten salient practices of undergraduate research mentors: A review of the literature. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *23*(5), 359-376.

Walkington, H., Stewart, K. A., Hall, E. E., Ackley, E., & Shanahan, J. O. (2019). Salient practices of award-winning undergraduate research mentors–balancing freedom and control to achieve excellence. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-14.

This document was created at Oregon State University in 2019 by Sophie Pierszalowski (Office of Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, & the Arts) and Kameron Kadooka (Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation).

Sample Undergraduate Research Mentoring Agreement

Welcome to our research team! We are very excited to get to know you and support you both personally and professionally as an undergraduate researcher. This agreement will outline what I expect from undergraduates in my research group and what undergraduates can expect from me.

What I expect from undergraduate researchers:

1. Read background information and complete trainings. I expect that you will read and do your best to understand the information provided in the research manual and supplemental materials (e.g., research wiki and research group website). I also expect that you will bring any questions you have about the background information to our first team meeting so that I and the other research team members can contribute to your learning. *Are there research group protocols or workflows that need to be read? Are other trainings required? Include that here.*

2. Send me an update every Friday by 5 pm describing 1) the projects/tasks you've been working on during the week, 2) any challenges you are facing with your work or questions you have, and 3) what you plan to work on the following week. I expect that you will email me every Friday even if you don't feel that you have made substantial progress. *Is there anything else you need to be updated on? How would you like your undergraduate researchers to update you? Include that here.*

3. Attend our research team meetings. Our research team gets together every week to discuss our individual progress on projects and to work collaboratively to troubleshoot any challenges we may be facing. *Explain how your team meetings are structured. Do people take turns presenting topics or does everyone present at each meeting? Is there work that you expect to be done beforehand? Can they attend virtually? Make that clear here.*

4. Check and respond to email every 48 hours. Email is our most effective way of communicating outside of individual meetings. Please do not ignore emails from the research team. I expect all members of the research team to respond to all emails in a professional manner. *Do you use another communication platform like Slack or Trello? Mention that here.*

5. Be organized. Pay close attention to our team's research protocols and procedures for collecting, processing, and archiving data. Record data using standardized research protocol. Label data files according to our research protocol. Notify a research manager when supplies are low. *Define what level of organization you're*

looking for. What specifically needs to be organized in your research team? Does this involve data tracking, spreadsheets, samples, audio files, supplies, etc.? It may be helpful to provide some background information about why it's important to be organized - Are there multiple people working on the same project? Does data span multiple years?

6. Communicate your work schedule and strive for consistency. The research space is open MWF from 9:00am to noon. Please do your best to schedule your hours within that time frame so you can access our resources. Please email me as soon as possible if your schedule doesn't allow you to make a scheduled research time. To make progress on projects, I expect that students will work on my research team for at least two terms. *Describe the ideal work schedule, keeping in mind that students' schedules are dynamic. Are there any restrictions to when research can be conducted (e.g., do you have access to certain equipment/supplies on certain days)? Make that clear here. Do you need your students to be independent because you're on sabbatical or frequently travel to conferences? Do you expect them to work while you're away? Explain what you need them to do here. Do you expect them to stay with your research team for a certain number of terms/years?*

7. Ask questions. Asking questions is an important part of the research process. There is no such thing as a silly question! You can always email me with questions while you are conducting your research. Other students or post-docs in the research team may also be available to answer your questions as they arise. It is always better to ask questions than it is to move forward without knowing the answers. *Are there specific protocols you would like students to follow when reaching out to ask questions? Make that clear here.*

8. Respect the research space and the people in it. Put things back in their assigned places when you are done using them. Again, don't be afraid to ask questions. Research equipment and other resources are very expensive and asking simple questions about how to use them could help keep them in good working condition. If something breaks, please let me know as soon as possible. I won't be angry – these things happen! *Is there equipment or other resources that shouldn't be used unsupervised or until trained? Make that clear here.*

9. Communicate early and often about any personal or professional concerns you have about the research or research team. It is my hope that all students on my research team feel supported and included. Please let me know if there is anything we can do to better support you. *Are there activities or events that the research team participates in that the student would be included in (e.g. BBQs, departmental seminars)? Make that clear here.*

Other things you may want to add to this section are expectations regarding whether a student will present their work, how they will collaborate with others, how they will balance coursework with research, whether they will engage in professional development opportunities related to research, and what you expect of them during school/religious holidays. Is the position paid or could it transition into a paid position? Are you able to support the student in earning course credit? Do you have an annual or quarterly meeting with students to discuss how these expectations are being met? Make that explicit in this agreement.

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What undergraduate researchers can expect of me:

1. I have an "open door" policy, meaning that you can always come by my office if you need help with anything. *Are you comfortable with allowing the student to call you on your cell phone or text you? In which situations would that be/not be appropriate? Do you prefer that students set up an appointment with you instead of dropping by your office? Make that clear here.*

2. I will provide background information (e.g., readings, protocols) on our research. If you have never used GoogleScholar or online library databases, I will show you how to navigate those sites to download primary literature. *Are there specific journals, databases, or software that students should have access too? Will you provide training on how to use these tools? Make sure your student researcher has the appropriate training in the responsible and ethical conduct of research.*

3. I will attend all research team meetings regardless of whether I am in town. If I am traveling, I will attend via Zoom. You can expect me to give an update on the research progress I have made during the past week. I will also ask you and the other team members for advice and thoughts on how to move forward with my work. I encourage you to contribute to these conversations. *Are there other things you do every week at team meetings? Do you update the team on safety or research protocols? Do you make important announcements about department business?*

4. I will respond to all your emails within 48 hours, unless I am sick or there is an emergency, in which case, I will do my best to communicate to the team that my responses may be delayed. *Do you answer email over the weekend or while you're on vacation? How will students know if you leave for vacation? Do you need more than 48 hours to respond to emails? Do weekends count? Make that clear here.*

5. I will advocate for you! If there are any challenges (personal or professional) that you are facing, I will do my best to empower you and/or help you resolve them. As a member of my research team, I care about you as an individual, not just as a researcher. *Are there other ways you advocate for your students (e.g., by writing letters of recommendation and encouraging conference presentations)? This would be an appropriate place to articulate your expectations/norms for student authorship on conference presentations and/or publications. Do you walk with students to support services on campus? Articulate any student advocacy here.*

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