

Aquatic Ecosystems Lab at WCU: Expectations and Guidelines

The goal of this document is to clarify the roles and expectations for me, the advisor/supervisor, and you, the student scientist. Research in our lab asks how human-induced changes like urbanization, emerging contaminants, and stream/watershed restoration affect ecosystem processes in streams, lakes, and wetlands. My job as an assistant professor is to build a research program that builds understanding of the natural world while including and educating Biology students at WCU. As a student member of the lab, your work will directly contribute to these goals. Your success is my success and vice-versa. I aim to work with you to foster an open, collegial, equitable, and productive environment in the lab. I hope you will enjoy working in the lab, will learn from me and your other colleagues in the lab, and gain skills and knowledge that will help to advance your chosen goals.

I want you to work hard while you are in the lab and expect you to make significant progress toward your goals each week. The size and type of your goals will vary depending on your role in the lab (Master's thesis student, 591 student, 491 student, hourly lab tech, etc.). We will work together to identify reasonable goals for your work that will help you accomplish what needs to get done while contributing to your development toward your chosen career path(s).

I recognize that you have a life outside of your work in the lab. I can be flexible to accommodate your needs and responsibilities outside the lab; please maintain open communication to help me do so. If you plan to miss time you normally work or be away for a trip, please give me as much notice as possible. If you are struggling with physical or mental health, you are welcome to discuss this with me and I am happy to discuss strategies with you or to refer you to various services available on campus. You should be aware that I am a mandatory reporter, which means that I am required by law to report any instances of harassment or abuse. This is to facilitate the University offering victims the support and resources they may need; all information remains confidential unless the victim chooses to release it.

To be the best lab we can be, all members of the lab are expected to:

- Be resourceful and think critically.
- Be honest and ethical.
- Be respectful and kind.
- Come to work with a good attitude, a willingness to work hard, and enthusiasm for your own work as well as the larger group's projects.

General lab philosophy

Communication

I do my best to maintain an open door policy and encourage you to stop by my office with questions as they arise. All members of the lab have my contact information and are able to contact me through multiple channels (email, office phone, cell phone, Slack). I expect you to contact me with any questions or issues as they arise, but also note that I follow the same guidelines for work-life balance and will be delayed in responding (if I respond at all) outside of the normal work week.

I hope to meet with students individually each week to catch up on progress from the previous week and make a plan for the next week. I expect you to come to these meetings having completed your weekly progress report, prepared to discuss what you've done in the previous week, what your goals are for the next week, and what I can do to help you meet those goals. Coming into these meetings well prepared will ensure a productive, efficient meeting.

Teamwork

The lab is a shared environment that everyone needs to use cooperatively in order to succeed. It is up to everyone to keep it clean and tidy, and to take responsibility for and to communicate safety issues, dirty dishes, etc. You are responsible for ensuring that you have the materials you need for your experiments when you need them. With the guidance of me and/or other mentors you should identify what materials need to be ordered for your work as far in advance as possible and communicate those needs to me for us to order them and have them delivered in a timely fashion. This degree of planning and organization will ultimately make you a better scientist.

Collegiality

I believe it is important that we treat one another with respect, kindness, and professionalism - no gossiping, no projecting bad moods onto others, no cruel comments. Your lab members are your current and future colleagues and collaborators. I expect that each of us will respect and maintain healthy colleague-colleague & mentor/supervisor-advisee/employee boundaries while working as a mutually supportive team.

Equity and Inclusion

Promoting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is a fundamental goal of the lab. All members of the lab should be committed to creating an environment where individuals of any background and identities feel safe and supported. I am a member of the Biology Department's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee. If you have any suggestions, concerns, or questions that you feel will make our lab, department, or university a more inclusive environment, please share them with me or reach out to other members of the Biology Department's DEI committee or the [University's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#). Ultimately, the equity and inclusion of the lab is up to all of us. I am committed to recruiting and maintaining a diverse group and expect you all to be supportive of all the members of the lab regardless their statuses and identities.

Feedback and professional development

I will help you edit and prepare grants, thesis chapters, manuscripts, posters, and talks. I require a minimum of 7 days before I am expected to return drafts of papers or grants. Unless I explicitly say so, I want to see everything that you submit before it is submitted, no matter how minor you think it is (conference abstract, poster, paper, grant, etc.).

Ultimately, my goals are to advise you to successfully and accurately complete your work and to help prepare you for the career goals that you choose. I expect to have open conversations with each member of the lab early and often regarding their career goals. I will do my best to connect you to professional development opportunities and resources for you to pursue related to your goals, but I also expect you to try to find these opportunities on your own.

What I expect from you

1. I expect you to be **honest, open, and timely with communication**. I will not judge you for not knowing something, making a mistake, or breaking something in the lab; everyone has different educational backgrounds and everyone breaks something from time to time. But I can't do anything to help solve a problem if I don't know about it. **If you are a research or capstone student in the lab (Masters thesis, Bio591, Bio491, Bio492, & Bio391), I expect you to complete weekly reports about your progress** using the [link on the lab webpage](#).
2. I expect you to be **resourceful**. You are all here to learn. If you knew all of the answers, you wouldn't need to be in school. Educational research indicates that people typically learn things better when they must work through the problem on their own. So before asking me, see if you can find the information you need. Of course, feel free to verify your answer or ask for help if you are stuck!
3. **Failure**. That may sound harsh, but failure is an important part of science. Experiments don't work. Papers get rejected. Grant proposals get declined. It's not always fair, and there's some real jerk reviewers out there, but you should try [celebrate each failure](#) because it means that you're learning and trying new things.
4. I expect you to **respect my time as I respect yours**. If we have a meeting scheduled, I expect you to be on time or to let me know if you will be late.
5. I expect you to be a **contribute to a positive, collaborative, and productive environment in the lab**. Running a lab is a huge collective effort, and we all contribute to the success of the lab. For example, you might notice that there are dishes that need to be put away. You might see that a colleague needs a hand with a new experiment. You might notice that filters need to be ordered. No one else is going to do these things for us, so look around, see what needs doing (and realize that others are probably doing things for you already) and pitch in. We are a team and should encourage and support each other. We should celebrate one another's successes and failures.
6. I expect you to **keep on top of your coursework and degree requirements**. Research is an important learning opportunity, but your coursework should come first.
7. If you are collecting or analyzing data as part of your work in the lab, **you are required to provide a full copy of the data and metadata you collected as part of your work in the lab**. When you move on to your next adventure, we want to be able to build on your work. We can't do that without knowing what you've done. You should expect to be offered co-authorship on any scientific papers that are written using data you've collected. To facilitate this, I ask that you provide me with contact information so that we can get in touch after you've moved on from WCU.

What you can expect from me

1. You can expect to **meet with me regularly** (~weekly) throughout the year.
2. You can expect me to **ask for your honest feedback** about the lab, your student experience, and your thoughts of me as a mentor. I am still learning how to do this, too, and I can't improve anything if you don't tell me about it.
3. You can expect me to **give you honest and constructive feedback** about your work, your progress, and your strengths and weaknesses. If you receive a lot of comments on your written work, this isn't a sign that your work is bad – rather, it's a sign that your mentor is committed to helping you learn and succeed. Try to remember that feedback is a good thing! That said, the feedback that you receive should give clear indications of how problems can be improved – comments that just point out a problem aren't constructive.
4. You can expect me to **provide timely feedback** on your written work and presentations. Although, I will get feedback to you as soon as I can, you should plan to send me your work at least **7 days** before you need feedback so that I can read, digest, and comment on your work. If there is a set deadline, it is your responsibility to have your documents to me at least one week in advance of the deadline.
5. You can expect me to **listen to your concerns and help you solve problems. I am your advocate** and will do whatever needs to happen to solve problems. I'm happy to step in and support my people, because we're a team and we're in this together.
6. You can expect me to **send you opportunities for funding and professional development**. I will send you all sorts of opportunities, and you will decide what to pursue.
7. You can expect me to **work as hard towards your success as you do**.
8. You can expect me to **serve as a reference and write letters of recommendation** for you. But if you do need a letter from me, I expect that you will provide at least **2 weeks notice** and instructions on how the letter should be submitted.
9. You can expect me to **ensure a safe and supportive lab environment** for you to succeed. If you have any concerns about the lab culture, I want to know as soon as possible. You should be aware that as a faculty member I am a mandatory reporter, which means that I am required by law to report any instances of harassment or abuse. This is to facilitate the University offering victims the support and resources they may need; all information remains confidential unless the victim chooses to release it.
10. You can expect me to **act as a model of professionalism in academia**, and you can look to me for guidance on issues related to conflicts of interest, equity and fairness, ethics, or mentoring.
11. You can expect me to **provide you with networking opportunities** through my collaborative network, scientific meetings, workshops, and other professional venues. I will do my best to tailor this to the career goals and interests you tell me about.
12. You can expect me to **help you find other resources or other mentors** when you need additional support beyond my abilities.

I have read through the expectations and guidelines in this document and I agree to the information herein. I have had the opportunity to discuss the contents of this document with Dr. Fork before signing.

Printed name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dr. Megan Fork

Signature: _____

Date: _____