Appendix B: Toward Best Practices for Graduate Students and their Research Advisors

(UI Graduate College, August 2010. Adapted from "Compact Between Biomedical Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors," Association of American Medical Colleges)

The progress, development and success of a graduate student hinges on the commitment of both the student and the research advisor. Basic principles of best practices in mentoring and graduate student life appear in the two lists that follow. Graduate students should be aware of what is necessary for their success and their advisors likewise should be aware of practices that promote their students' best interests.

Although the concepts of commitment and responsiveness underlying the lists of expectations apply to all disciplines, the specifics of these principles vary considerably among the biological sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Thus, these guidelines are intended to be modified, appended or reduced to fit specific departments, programs and disciplines.

The Graduate College feels that graduate programs and their students can benefit from a concerted effort to incorporate these best practices, but we do not intend to mandate, monitor, or enforce them in any particular way. Some potential uses of these lists of expectations could include:

1. Presenting these expectations in orientation sessions for new graduate students.
2. Introducing expectations at orientations of new faculty members.
3. Incorporating the expectations into a program's graduate student handbook.
4. Discussing the expectations during graduate seminars and faculty meetings.
5. Creating a formal agreement that is signed by both the student and the advisor when the mentoring relationship commences.
6. As guidelines for the regular evaluation of graduate student progress.

Expectations of Graduate Students

1. A graduate student has the **primary responsibility for successful completion of his or her degree.** A graduate student should be committed to his or her graduate education and should demonstrate this by efforts in the classroom and in research. A graduate student is expected to maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, excellence, scholarly curiosity, and ethical standards.

2. A graduate student should **meet regularly with the research advisor** and provide updates on the progress and results of ongoing research.

3. A graduate student should be **knowledgeable of the policies and requirements of the graduate program, the graduate college, and the institution.** The student should strive to meet these requirements, including teaching responsibilities.

4. A graduate student should **work with the research advisor to develop a thesis/dissertation project.** This will include establishing a timeline for each phase of the work. The student should strive to meet the established deadlines.

5. A graduate student should **work with the research advisor to select a thesis/dissertation committee.** The student should meet with this committee at least annually (or more frequently, according to program guidelines) and be responsive to the advice of and constructive criticism from the committee.

6. A graduate student should discuss **policies on authorship and attendance at professional meetings with the research advisor.** The student should work with the advisor to submit all relevant research results that are ready for publication in a timely manner prior to graduation.

7. A graduate student should **attend and participate in meetings, seminars and journal clubs** that are part of the educational program.

8. A graduate student should **contribute to maintaining a research environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment.**

9. A graduate student should **participate in the institution's Responsible Conduct of Research Training Program and practice those guidelines** in conducting thesis/dissertation research.

10. A graduate student should **discuss policies on work hours, sick leave and vacation with the research advisor or graduate director.** The student should consult with the advisor in advance of any planned absences.

11. A graduate student should **acknowledge primary responsibility to develop a career following the completion of the doctoral degree.** The student should seek guidance from available resources, including the research advisor, career counseling services, thesis/dissertation committee, and any other mentors.

12. A graduate student should **comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones.** The student should comply with both the letter and spirit of all best practices and policies of the institution.

Expectations of Research Advisors

1. The research advisor should be **committed to the education and training of the graduate student as a future member of the research community.**
2. The research advisor should **meet one-on-one with the student on a regular basis.** The advisor should provide timely feedback on the student's written work to facilitate ongoing progress on the thesis/dissertation.
3. The research advisor should be **knowledgeable of the requirements and deadlines of his/her graduate program as well as those of the institution**, including teaching requirements and human resources guidelines. The research advisor should guide the student in these areas to ensure academic and professional success.
4. The research advisor should **help to plan and direct the graduate student's project**, set reasonable and attainable goals, and establish a timeline for completion of the project. The research advisor should anticipate conflicts between the interests of externally funded research programs and those of the graduate student, and should help keep these interests from interfering with the student's thesis/dissertation research.
5. The research advisor should **help a graduate student select a thesis/dissertation committee.** The advisor should assure that the committee meets at least annually (or more frequently, according to program guidelines) to review the graduate student's progress.
6. The research advisor should **discuss authorship policies regarding papers with the graduate student.** The advisor should acknowledge the graduate student's contributions and work with the graduate student to present and publish his/her work.
7. The research advisor should **encourage the graduate student to attend scientific/professional meetings** and make an effort to secure and facilitate funding for such activities**.**
8. The research advisor should **provide an environment for his/her graduate students that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment.**
9. The research advisor should **discuss intellectual policy issues with the student** regarding disclosure, patent rights and publishing research discoveries.
10. The research advisor should **not require the graduate student to perform tasks unrelated to his/her academic and professional development.**
11. The research advisor should **provide career advice and assist in finding a position** for the graduate student following his/her graduation. The advisor should provide honest letters of recommendation and be accessible for advice and feedback on career goals.
12. The research advisor should **lead by example and facilitate the training of the graduate student in complementary skills needed to be a successful researcher**, such as oral and written communication, grant writing, lab management, animal and human research policies, the ethical conduct of research, and scholarly professionalism. The advisor should encourage the student to seek opportunities in teaching, if not required by the student's program.
13. In disciplines where it is customary, the research advisor should provide financial resources for the graduate student to facilitate the student's thesis/dissertation research.