

Template for an agreement between graduate students and advisors

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Why use this template?

In the collaboration between graduate students and their advisors, much is sometimes left unsaid. Student and advisor sometimes enter into a working relation without having a conversation about expectations, obligations, and the practical aspects of working together. How often do we meet? What do we hope to achieve in these meetings? How do we spend our time most effectively? What are the responsibilities of student and advisor for creating the right work environment?

Viewing this agreement as a contract to which all parties are bound likely does not set the right tone for a fruitful collaboration. Instead this template for an agreement can be used as a tool and guide for a conversation between graduate student and advisor. Signing the agreement might help to increase the commitment to what is discussed, but that is up to the student and the advisor.

This document offers ideas that graduate students and advisors might want to discuss. Some aspects of this agreement may not be relevant in some situations; the document may specify more detail or commitments than the student and advisor want. Perhaps other items need to be added or the phrasing could be changed. Please feel free to modify the agreement wherever that might be an improvement for your particular situation. You can download this template from:

<https://www.mines.edu/cpe/advisor-student-agreements/>

Please provide feedback

Your insights and comments are valued, and I look forward to making this sample agreement more useful for our diverse campus community. Please send your feedback to Roel Snieder (rsnieder@mines.edu).

Acknowledgments

This agreement is a modified version of the *Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors* from the Association of American Medical Colleges.¹ The comments and insights of Kamini Singha, Adrianna Kroepsch, Keri Bowling, and Diane Witters helped improve this agreement.

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/download/49868/data/gradcompact.pdf>

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Advising agreement between graduate student and advisor

Commitments of Graduate Student

- **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of my degree.** I will be committed to my graduate education and will demonstrate this by my efforts in the classroom and the research team. I will maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards.
- **I will meet regularly with my research advisor and provide him/her with updates on the progress and results of my activities and experiments.** In preparation for each meeting I will create an agenda and will provide figures and other material in a way that helps the meeting be efficient and productive.
- **I will work with my research advisor to develop a thesis/dissertation project.** This will include establishing a timeline for each phase of my work. It will include extra reading/research/critical thinking above and beyond structured coursework, which I recognize as an opportunity.
- **I will keep a running list of research questions.** As I carry out my research I will write down research questions as they arise, and I will regularly review these questions when planning research. I will consider ways that I can creatively explore potential answers to these questions on my own as well as seek guidance from others who may be able to offer experienced guidance.
- **I will attend and participate in laboratory meetings, seminars and journal clubs that are part of my educational program and of my research group.**
- **I will strive to meet established deadlines.** In situations where I cannot meet a deadline, I will inform my advisor as soon as possible and propose a new deadline, possibly with changes in the work plan.
- **I will work with my research advisor to select a thesis/dissertation committee.** I will commit to meeting with this committee at least annually (or more frequently, according to program guidelines). I will be responsive to the questions, advice, and criticism from my committee.
- **I will be knowledgeable of the policies and requirements of my graduate program, graduate school, and institution.** I will commit to meeting these requirements, including teaching responsibilities. Navigating these policies and requirements is my responsibility.

- **I will review and comply with institutional policies, including academic program milestones.** I will comply with both the letter and spirit of all institutional safe laboratory practices and animal-use and human-research policies at my institution and follow ethics training and seek approval of the Institutional Research Board as required.
- **I will be a good citizen in the research group.** I will agree to take part in shared responsibilities and will use resources carefully and frugally. I will maintain a safe and clean laboratory or work space. I will be respectful of, tolerant of, and work collegially with all personnel.
- **I will use computational resources responsibly.** I will not waste computational resources, and I will follow the school's rules and recommendations for safe and secure use of computers. I will ensure that I always have backups of relevant material.
- **I will maintain a detailed, organized, and accurate research notebook.**
- **I will discuss policies on authorship and attendance at professional meetings with my research advisor.** I will work with my advisor to submit all relevant research results that are ready for publication in a timely manner prior to my graduation.
- **I will take safety training as appropriate for my research or my teaching obligations (such as laboratory work or field work).**
- **I will take advantage of institutional resources that can assist in my research and career development.** Example of such resources are the Writing Center or the Career Center.
- **I acknowledge that it is primarily my responsibility to develop my career following the completion of my doctoral degree.** I will seek guidance from my research advisor, career counseling services, thesis/dissertation committee, other mentors, and any other resources available for advice on career plans.

Commitments of Research Advisor

- **I will be committed to the mentoring of the graduate student.** I will be committed to the education and training of the graduate student as a future member of the scientific community.
- **I will be committed to the research project of the graduate student.** I will help to plan and direct the graduate student's project, contribute to the setting of reasonable and attainable goals, and establish a timeline for completion of the project. I recognize the possibility of conflicts between the interests of externally funded research programs and those of the graduate student, and will not let these interfere with the student's pursuit of his/her thesis/dissertation research.
- **I will be committed to meeting one-on-one with the student on a regular basis.**
- **I will clearly and explicitly communicate expectations and performance standards.** This includes communicating what the student needs to improve as well as what I see as his/her strengths and potential.

- **I will be committed to seeking financial resources for the graduate student as appropriate or according to my institution's guidelines, in order for him/her to conduct thesis/dissertation research.**
- **I will be knowledgeable of, and guide the graduate student through, the requirements and deadlines of his/her graduate program as well as those of the institution, including teaching requirements and human resources guidelines.**
- **I will help the graduate student select a thesis/dissertation committee.**
- **I will lead by example and facilitate and encourage the training of the graduate student in professional skills needed to be a successful scientist.** These skills may include oral and written communication skills, grant writing, lab management and lab safety, animal and human research policies, the ethical conduct of research, and scientific professionalism.
- **I will not require the graduate student to perform tasks that are unrelated to his/her training program and professional development.**
- **I will discuss authorship policies regarding papers with the graduate student.** In publications and external presentations, I will value and acknowledge the graduate student's scientific contributions to the work in my research group where appropriate, and I will work with the graduate student to publish his/her work in a timely manner prior to the student's graduation.
- **I will discuss intellectual policy issues with the student with regard to disclosure, patent rights, and publishing research discoveries.**
- **I will encourage the graduate student to attend scientific/professional meetings and make an effort to secure and facilitate funding for such activities.**
- **I will provide career advice and assist in finding a position for the graduate student following his/her graduation.** I will provide honest letters of recommendation for his/her next phase of professional development. I will also be accessible to give advice and feedback on career goals.
- **I will provide for every graduate student under my supervision an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment.**
- **Throughout the graduate student's time in my research group, I will be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful.** I will foster the graduate student's professional confidence and encourage critical thinking, skepticism, and creativity.
- **When advising students, I will remember the time when I was a graduate student.** When advising students, I will remember my own experience as a graduate student, whether positive or negative, and use this experience to create an experience for my students that is as positive as possible. I will also let my experience guide me in determining reasonable expectations and motivational communication.

- **In case of an emergency, the student can contact me at any time of day at my mobile number <insert number>.**

Commitments of both

- **We will meet <insert: once a week, once every two weeks, other ...>.**
- **In our meetings we will remember the four P's: Progress, Problems, Planning, and Play.** While working together we keep track of what must be achieved, but we leave room for light-hearted conversation and the joy of research.
- **We will discuss policies on work hours, sick leave, and vacation.** We will notify each other and fellow team members, as needed, in advance of any extended planned absences.
- **We will express concerns to each other in a timely and constructive way.**

Student's name:

Signature:

Advisor's name:

Signature:

Program or Department:

Date: