

## **Mentoring Compact from Laboratory of Leslie B. Vosshall**

### **HHMI-The Rockefeller University**

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*This compact outlines the goals, expectations, and responsibilities for PhD students and postdoctoral trainees in the Vosshall Laboratory*

#### **The broad goals of my research program**

As part of my job as a Professor and Head of the Laboratory of Neurogenetics and Behavior, I am expected to write grants and initiate research that will make tangible contributions to science, the academic community, and to society. As a trainee in my lab, you will be actively contributing to this goal by carrying out research. It is imperative that we carry out rigorous and highly original science, and conduct ourselves in an ethical way. We must always keep in mind that the ultimate goal of our research is scientific publication. Dissemination of the knowledge we gain is critical to the advancement of our field. I also value outreach and informal science education, both in the classroom and while engaging with the public. I expect you to participate in this component of our lab mission while you are part of the lab group.

#### **What I expect from you**

Another part of my job as a professor is to train and advise students and postdocs. I must contribute to your professional development and training progress. I will help you set goals and achieve them. However, I cannot do the work for you. In general, I expect you to:

- ▶ Learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research
- ▶ Learn how to interpret, analyze, and present your data in text, figures, and presentations
- ▶ Be honest, ethical, and enthusiastic
- ▶ Be engaged within the Vosshall Lab
- ▶ Participate in the academic and social life at Rockefeller University
- ▶ Treat your lab mates, staff, lab funds, equipment, and animals with respect
- ▶ Take advantage of professional development opportunities
- ▶ Obtain your dream position (postdocs) or degree (PhD students),
- ▶ Work hard—don't give up!

#### **You will take ownership over your educational experience**

✓ Acknowledge that you have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of your training at Rockefeller. This includes commitment to your work in the laboratory. You

should maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards.

✓ Ensure that you meet regularly with me and provide me with updates on the progress and results of your activities and experiments. Make sure that you also use this time to communicate new ideas that you have about your work and challenges that you are facing. Remember: I cannot address or advise about issues that you do not bring to my attention. There are several ways to set up these meetings: drop by my office, email me to schedule a MTB (meet the boss) appointment, or check with my administrative assistant about my availability. Graduate students are expected to email me “weekly updates” that contain data, observations, or discussion of scientific setbacks. These are expected on a weekly basis except in cases of illness or vacation. Always notify me in advance if you will not be sending an update, because these help me track your progress. Postdocs update me at lab meeting and scheduled meetings. I am always excited to receive data in person or by email!

✓ Be knowledgeable of the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the graduate and postdoctoral program at the university. Comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones, laboratory practices, and rules related to chemical safety, biosafety, human subjects research, animal welfare, and Title IX.

✓ Actively cultivate your professional development. Rockefeller University and the Tri-Institutional Program have outstanding resources in place to support professional development for students and postdocs. I expect you to take full advantage of these resources, since part of becoming a successful scientist involves more than just doing academic research. You are expected to make continued progress in your development as a scientific communicator; as an ambassador to the general public representing the Vosshall Laboratory, Rockefeller University, and your discipline; your networking skills; and as an engaged member of broader professional organizations. Andreas Morris in the Dean’s Office is available to talk to you about career and professional development plans. The Rockefeller Office of Sponsored Programs organizes a number of training opportunities for successful grant-writing. Attendance at conferences and workshops will also provide professional development opportunities. When you attend a conference, I expect you to seek out these opportunities to make the most of your attendance.

### **You will be a team player**

✓ Attend and actively participate in all lab meetings, our Olfaction and Behavior Journal Club, as well as on-campus and Tri-I seminars. Participation in lab meetings does not mean only presenting your own work, but providing support to others in the lab through shared insight. You should refrain from using your computer and phone during research meetings. Even if you are using the device to augment the discussion, it is disrespectful to the larger group to have your attention distracted by the device. Do your part to create a climate of engagement and mutual respect.

✓ Strive to be the very best lab citizen. Take part in shared laboratory responsibilities and use laboratory resources carefully and frugally. Notify me well in advance if your project requires an expensive reagent or service that I am unaware of. Maintain a safe and clean laboratory space where data and research participant confidentiality are protected. Be

respectful, tolerant of, and work collegially with all laboratory colleagues: respect individual differences in values, personalities, work styles, and theoretical perspectives.

✓ Be a good collaborator. Engage in collaborations within and beyond our lab group. Collaborations are more than just publishing papers together. They demand effective and frequent communication, mutual respect, trust, and shared goals. Effective collaboration is an extremely important component of the mission of our lab.

✓ Leave no trace. I ask that you respect our equipment. If something breaks, tell my lab manager right away so that we can arrange to fix or replace it. Don't panic over broken equipment. Mistakes happen. But it is not acceptable to walk away from something broken or damaged without taking the steps necessary to fix it.

### **You will develop strong research and presentation skills**

✓ Take advantage of your opportunity to work at a world-class university by developing and refining stellar research skills. I expect that you will learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research, and have the skills to interpret the results.

✓ Challenge yourself by presenting your work at meetings and seminars as early as you can, and by working with me to prepare scientific articles that effectively present your work to others in the field.

✓ Keep up with the literature so that you can have a hand in guiding your own research. Block at least one hour per week for active reading within and outside your direct area of investigation.

✓ Participate actively in our weekly journal club by reading the paper well in advance and by preparing questions and bringing insights to the discussion. This is not meant to be a passive activity in which the presenter serves up the content.

✓ Maintain detailed, organized and accurate laboratory records. Be aware that your notes, records and all tangible research data are the property of the laboratory. When you leave the lab, I encourage you to take copies of your data with you. But one full set of all data must stay in the lab, with appropriate and accessible documentation.

✓ Become an expert in statistical analysis of your data.

✓ Develop competency in scientific writing by doing your best to communicate clearly in everything that you write, including emails to me.

✓ Make clear oral communication a priority. Become an expert at giving chalk talks, and slide-based presentations of various lengths (5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, and 45 minutes). I will give you regular feedback on this so that you leave here being an effective communicator.

✓ Be constructive when you ask questions at lab meetings and at seminars. As scientists, we are trained to be critical of the work of others, but express that in a compassionate and helpful way.

- ✓ Develop an effective style in answering questions. Learn to avoid defensive or rambling answers.
- ✓ Maintain detailed, organized and accurate laboratory records. Be aware that your notes, records and all tangible research data are my property as the lab head. Before you leave, be prepared to organize all of your materials and data in such a way that future lab members and external scientists can access them.
- ✓ Be responsive to advice and constructive criticism. The feedback you get from me, your colleagues, other Rockefeller faculty (including those on the PhD student FAC), and external colleagues and collaborators is intended to improve your scientific work.

### **You will work to meet deadlines**

- ✓ Strive to meet deadlines: this is the only way to manage your progress. Deadlines can be managed in a number of ways, but I expect you to work your best to maintain these goals. We will establish mutually agreed upon deadlines for each phase of your work during one-on-one meetings. As long as you are meeting our mutual expectations, you can largely set your own schedule. It is your responsibility to talk with me if you are having difficulty completing your work, and I will consider your progress unsatisfactory if I need to follow-up with you about completion of your experiments or data analysis.
- ✓ Be mindful of the constraints on my time. When we set a deadline, I will block off time to read and respond to your work. If I do not receive your materials, I will move your project to the end of my queue. Allow a minimum of one week prior to submission deadlines for me to read and respond to short materials such as conference abstracts, or to write letters of recommendation for you, and three weeks for me to work on manuscripts or grant proposals. Please do not assume I can read materials within a day or two, especially when I am traveling.

### **You will communicate clearly with me**

- ✓ Remember that all of us are “new” at various points in our careers. If you feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or want additional support scientifically or in your personal life, please overtly ask for it. I welcome these conversations and view them as necessary. I can get you the resources you need to be an effective and productive scientist.
- ✓ Let me know the style of communication or schedule of meetings that you prefer. If there is something about my mentoring style that is proving difficult for you, please tell me so that you give me an opportunity to find an approach that works for you. No single style works for everyone, and no one style is expected to work all the time. Do not cancel meetings with me if you feel that you have not made adequate progress on your research. These might be the most critical times to meet with a mentor.
- ✓ Be prompt. Respond promptly (in most cases, within 48 hours) to emails from anyone in our lab group and show up on time and prepared for meetings, especially lab meetings and journal clubs. If you need time to gather information in response to an email, please acknowledge receipt of the message and indicate when you will be able to provide the

requested information. If you expect to be late to meetings, please email or text me so that I am aware.

✓ Discuss policies on work hours, sick leave, and vacation with me directly. Know that I will keep all of these conversations in strictest confidence. Consult with me and make a note in the Vosshall Lab Google Calendar in advance of any planned absences. I believe that work-life balance and vacation time are essential for creative thinking and good health, and encourage you to take regular vacations. Be aware, however, that there will necessarily be epochs at various points in your training when more effort will need to be devoted to work and it may not be ideal to schedule time away.

✓ Discuss attendance at professional meetings, workshops, and conferences with me before registering. I may have feedback about the value of a specific event, and the appropriateness of being away from the lab at that given point in your training.

✓ Discuss external collaborations with me well in advance. Do not initiate formal collaborations without my knowledge or consent, because this often leads to problems.

✓ Be aware of my policy on authorship throughout your training in my group: <http://vosshall.rockefeller.edu/assets/file/Authorship.pdf> Discuss any concerns with me immediately. Authorship conflicts are among the most corrosive events in the life of a laboratory.

✓ Help other students with their projects and mentor/train other students. This is a valuable experience! You will have the option to mentor high school students and undergraduates in the summer, and I will work with you to develop a constructive mentoring style that nurtures the excitement of these young scientists while also training them in rigorous research, and ideally even producing data that are useful for your project.

### **What you should expect from me**

✓ I will work tirelessly for the good of the lab group; the success of every member of our group is my top priority, no matter their personal strengths and weaknesses, or career goals.

✓ I will be available for regular meeting and informal conversations. My schedule requires that we plan in advance for meetings to discuss your research and any professional or personal concerns you have. Although I will try to be available as much as possible for “drop in visits”, keep in mind that I am often running to faculty and other meetings and will have limited time.

✓ I will help you navigate your training experience. As stated above, PhD and MD-PhD students are responsible for keeping up with deadlines and being knowledgeable about requirements for your specific program. However, I am available to help interpret these requirements, select appropriate coursework, select committee members, and grant and fellowship opportunities.

✓ I will discuss data ownership and authorship policies regarding papers with you. These can create unnecessary conflict within the lab and among collaborators. It is important that we

communicate openly and regularly about them. Do not hesitate to voice concerns when you have them. And again, please read and re-read my statement on authorship, available here: <http://vosshall.rockefeller.edu/assets/file/Authorship.pdf>

- ✓ I will be your advocate. If you have a problem—personal or professional—come and see me. I will do my best to help you solve it.
- ✓ I am committed to mentoring you, even after you leave my lab. I am committed to your education and training while you are in my lab, and to advising and guiding your career development—to the degree you wish—long after you leave. I will provide honest letters of evaluation for you when you request them.
- ✓ I will lead by example and facilitate your training in complementary skills needed to be a successful scientist, such as oral and written communication skills, grant writing, lab management, mentoring, and scientific professionalism. As appropriate for your future career plan, I will encourage you to seek opportunities in formal classroom teaching. I will also strongly encourage you to gain practice in mentoring rotation students, undergraduate, and/or high school students, and to seek formal training in this activity through our SSRP and SURF programs.
- ✓ I will encourage you to attend scientific/professional meetings and will make an effort to fund such activities. I will not be able to cover all requests but you can generally expect to attend at least one major conference per year. Please use conferences as an opportunity to further your education, and not as a vacation. If you register for a conference, I expect you to attend the scientific sessions and participate in conference activities during the time you are there. Use the opportunity to network among peers and introduce yourself to senior scientists in your field. Networking is the single most important thing you can do at a conference! If you have remaining funds in your PhD account or postdoctoral fellowship funds, I may ask you to contribute to the cost of attending. If a particular meeting or society offers travel grants, I will help you identify and apply for these opportunities.
- ✓ I will strive to be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful. I will try my best to understand your unique situation, and mentor you accordingly. I am mindful that each student and postdoc comes from a different background and has different professional goals. It will help if you keep me informed about your experiences and remember that academic research as a graduate student or postdoc is a job with very high expectations. I view my role as fostering your professional confidence and encouraging your critical thinking, skepticism, and creativity. If my attempts to do this are not effective for you, I am open to talking with you about other ways to achieve these goals.

### **Annual Mentoring Meeting**

Each January I will sit down with you to discuss your scientific progress and career goals. At that time, you should remember to tell me if you are unhappy with any aspect of your experience as a graduate student or postdoc here. Remember that I am your advocate, as well as your mentor. I will be able to help you with any problems you might have with other students, professors, or staff.

Similarly, we should discuss any concerns that you have with respect to my role as your mentor. If you feel that you need more guidance, tell me. If you feel that I am interfering too much with your work, tell me. If you would like to meet with me more often, tell me. At the same time, I will tell you if I am satisfied with your progress, and if I think you are on track to graduate by your target date or if you are a postdoc to move on to your next position. It will be my responsibility to explain to you any deficiencies, so that you can take steps to fix them. This will be a good time for us to take care of any issues before they become major problems.