Factotum Student Investigator Contract

## Role and expectations

In this lab, we are working under a junior colleague model. We will treat you like the adults that you are, which comes with both benefits and consequences. We will expect great things from you, but we won’t expect that you’ll know how to get there on your own – we will help you to get there. We expect that you can choose your own level of commitment and stick to your commitments, and we’ll help you by providing you with the necessary tools to meet your goals.

Being a part of this lab is an active, not a passive experience (factotum: DO everything!). The first and foremost expectation is that if you commit to being in this lab, you do the work to be in this lab. We will provide tools, resources, and of course mentoring to help you meet your objectives, but this is a self-sufficient experience – it’s up to you to meet your objectives, and to ask for help when you need it.

You are expected to be responsive to communications. Communication is an important skill both within the research setting and in professional relationships. This means especially responding to emails within 48 business hours within the lab.

You are expected to attend and be prepared for lab meetings the majority of the time, or to work with your primary mentor if you cannot make the lab meeting time. Missing a lab meeting about once per semester might be appropriate, and no notes or excuses are needed (again, you’re an adult, and we’ll treat you like one). However, it is expected that you will treat lab meetings like something you’re committed to, and will miss only when sick or something unexpected comes up, etc. (note that lab meetings may be attended either in person or via web conference).

It is expected that you will speak up when you need help. Factotum mentors are here to mentor you, but they cannot solve problems that they do not know exist. It’s up to you to let them know early and often if you don’t understand something, if you’re stuck, or if you’re struggling to meet your commitments. We want to work with and for you, but can’t if you don’t tell us what you need. It may be difficult to weigh being self-sufficient and asking for help, but this is an important part of doing research – doing everything you can to work hard self-sufficiently, but knowing your own limits and knowing when you need help. It’s so important in fact, that often graduate schools will ask their references how applicants are able to do on both of these tasks and balancing them.

You are expected to be extremely precise and thorough when it comes to all parts of research. This means making sure that if you’re working on an IRB protocol, that you check, double-check and triple-check that everything is consistent between the study materials and the protocol in every single aspect. That if you’re working off a previous study, that all aspects of the new study still belong in the way they are there, and if you’re not 100% sure you know, asking questions. This means seeking additional resources, like looking for how other studies have done things or asking for other protocol examples. This means making sure that every single required question or area of an IRB is accounted for if you say it’s done. It means making sure that you say study materials are complete, that they are actually completed (and if they are not, asking for any help you need BEFORE turning them in). This means writing, following, and reporting any incidents that might come up regarding adverse events or protocol violations (and knowing a protocol backwards and forwards to be able to recognize if something is violating a protocol). And again, you are expected to get in touch with Jenn or Crissa IMMEDIATELY if there is so much as a question regarding an adverse event or a protocol violation. We like humans, let’s agree to keep them safe!

## Time Commitment

If you are accepted and then decide to join the lab, you are expected to be in the lab for a minimum of one year to be a full “student investigator.” If this is too big of a commitment, you are always welcome to look into a research assistant role, which would be a one-semester commitment. However, a meaningful contribution to research realistically cannot be done in a single semester. One semester is also not realistically long enough for a meaningful letter of recommendation, or for any tangible outcomes on your curriculum vitae that you might want if you’re looking at graduate school. And if you’re committing to one year of a lab, then we’re guessing that you are either aiming for or curious about graduate school.

That said, one year is the minimum for meeting these goals. If your goal is to do your own research project, where you come up with your own idea, we require an 18-month minimum commitment for example (it’s actually quite difficult to get done in two years – you have to move quickly to do so).

## Lab Engagement

Note that, as a student investigator, you are in the minority in the lab – you are an advanced member of our group. The majority of the lab will be RAs. And the lab meetings will generally be focusing on the less advanced work that the RAs are working on, which will be developing a literature review for the student investigators like you to use the next semester. This may seem at times like it’s not useful for you to attend. This is however, not true in our estimation. If you are a Student investigator, then we expect that you are aiming for graduate school. If you are aiming for graduate school, then these lab meetings are simply great practice, whether they’re on the topic of the study you’re working n or not. They are practice in reading and engaging. In thinking and discussing the process from one study that has been written, to where a lab might take that study and turn it into something new, to thinking about what limitations there might be in one study, and how we might be able to account for them. To think about what aspects of a study are feasible, and what aspects of a study are less feasible to run with no budget and what we would hope would be a 2-year timeline. These discussions and practice with this way of thinking is a valuable practice for any research experience, regardless of the topic. For this reason, you are expected to engage in the lab, even if or when it’s not directly related to the topic you might be working on as your main study.

## Expectations

Most people who join a lab will eventually be asking for a letter of recommendation from their advisor. This is a reasonable expectation. However, a good letter of recommendation is based on ultimately meeting the expectations listed above, as well as ultimately understanding the content of the given study you’re working on, and engaging in any lab discussions, etc. Ultimately, the main thing that we look for when writing a letter of recommendation is hard work and making your commitments. The second thing is critical thinking. The third thing is basically following the rules (like making sure you follow IRB protocols, which of course NOT doing so can undo all of the other things).

Many students may also be looking to get presentations or publications out of their research. That’s a great goal, and we absolutely we’ll help you with it, but note that depends largely on you – how much work you’re willing and able to do. And note that the majority of students may not be able to meet that goal in one year (so if this is important to you, you might want to consider a longer commitment if you’re able to do so). However, so long as there is more than one student investigator working together, that means that there are other people depending on you to meet your commitments too – you guys have to be able to depend on each other so that we can help you meet these goals!

Many students will do some or all of their student investigator time as part of a course (often beginning or ending with 4950 or 5910). If so, you will be graded on the following objectives. Even if you are not graded (volunteering in the lab) note that these objectives will be important for success in your work as a student investigator (although you’re free to contact your primary mentor if you would like to modify your specific objectives for course credit; if not you may just re-state the following on your 4950 form):

1. Display timeliness and professionalism, including meeting deadlines and showing self-motivation.
2. Prove acquisition of scientific skills, including displaying self-sufficiency in seeking information and critical thinking.
3. Apply scientific skills that are acquired, including displays of thoroughness and precision of details provided in all instructions/tutorials, and asking for informed help.
4. Clear scientific communication, including appropriate terminology, style and references.
5. Display skills of leadership, organization, creativity and problem-solving in meeting the team’s goals.

The first objective refers largely to the importance of only committing to deadlines that you are able to meet. You are able to say no to any and all task commitments in this lab, but when you commit to something you must be reliable – your team is relying on you. Be professional by being both timely, working with your team, and providing your own motivation or seeking help if you cannot find your own motivation.

The second objective refers largely to the idea that you are responsible for figuring out how to figure out a lot of unknowns. This is a surprisingly large part of research – looking to past research, or even google at times to see how other people have done things and then walking oneself through steps. Alternately it can be about simply reading a lot about a topic and thinking critically to determine what ideas about the next steps would be. This does not mean that you are working alone or without mentors; it means that questions to mentors should be informed with researched options for examples, or with steps of where you might have gotten stuck. Note that **The IRB is not a place for this self-sufficiency; please have the mentors talk directly to the IRB, or to any direct (email/phone) formal entities.**

The third objective refers to your ability to display what you are learning, in the materials that we are providing you, those that you are finding on your own, and those that we are asking you to find. Ultimately, your work should be thorough and precise, and if you’re not sure how to display thorough and precise work, then you likely need to return to objective two.

The fourth objective refers to the fact that informal scientific communications need to include citations and appropriate terminology. Formal scientific communications, such as abstracts, conference presentations, or formal papers, should be using appropriate APA style, references as well.

The fifth objective encapsulates many behaviors that we might generally refer to as goal-oriented behaviors. These include details like always assuming that you are every bit as capable and responsible as your teammates, and never relying on them to have done anything or to know more than you know. This also refers to the idea that ultimately, this project is *yours as much as anyone else’s.* If you want it to get done, you will need to take ownership of all problem-solving that will come up, and problems will come up!

## About You

Now we want some information about you. First, how many semesters do you think you have left before graduating with your undergraduate degree? (If you’re unsure, check more than one answer)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes |  | No |  |

Are you currently in the honors program? (Check one)

How confident are you that you’d like to go to graduate school? (Check one)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all Confident |  | Moderately Confident |  | Completely Confident |  |

What types of graduate school are you currently considering? (In the second line, fill in what type of specialization you are interested in in the given graduate degree [Example: Phd 🡪Clinical].)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Masters |  | PhD |  | MD |  |
|  |  |  |

What type of career would you like to have (primarily)? [Please fill in the blank if ‘other’ is your selection.]

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research |  | Clinical |  | Teaching |  |
| Other |  |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes |  | No |  |

The minimum commitment is one year (two semesters, not including summer). Can you commit to a minimum of one calendar year?

 (If not, please consider looking into the RA contract)

What is your goal by the time you finish in the lab? (Common answers include letters of recommendation, poster presentations, and simply gaining research experience, but please note what YOUR goals are):

In a short paragraph, what are one or two topics of research that particularly interest you, whether or not you will be able to study them in this lab?

## Commitments

Please re-write all of the following if you commit to these expectations. It is expected that you’ll simply rewrite them exactly if you agree, to ensure that you’ve really read and thought about what you’re committing to. If you cannot realistically commit to them, modify as you write to show what you can realistically commit to and we’ll consider the modifications:

I will choose my commitments to the lab carefully and follow through with all commitments I make (outside of emergencies of course).

I will be responsive to communications, including responding to lab emails within 48 business hours and participants within 24 business hours.

I will attend and prepare for lab meetings.

I will speak up when I need help.

I will be precise and careful when it comes to all study development, study protocols, analysis and any presenting or writing.

I understand the stated objectives, and will work towards those objectives over my time in the lab.

I have read this contract in its entirety – every word of it.

I have asked all questions I have about the contract before signing it (and I will ask additional question as they come up).

Please type your name below to confirm that you have read the contract, and that you agree to your commitment to the above statements:

Below, please enter the email address you’ll use for lab-related communications, and (if you’re willing) a phone number you would like us to add to the contact list that will be public to all current lab members: