**Dirksen Lab Advising Statement**

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**Purpose of This Document**

I am providing you with this statement of my advising philosophy and lab policies to enhance communication and transparency. This is intended to be a “living document” that will inform, and be informed by, our ongoing interactions. It is not intended to be a list of rigid requirements and will be updated as necessary. Finally, this document is not meant to substitute for existing program, department, or university policies. It is your responsibility to be aware of such policies as applicable, and if needed, I will gladly direct you to the relevant resources.

**Mentoring Philosophy**

My mentoring philosophy has been shaped by my own experiences as a trainee in the labs of two incredibly talented academic scientists (Drs. Shey-Shing Sheu and Kurt Beam), who both shared a deep passion and devotion for promoting the growth and development of their trainees.

In my view, there are two major legacies of an academic researcher: 1) the quality/impact of our publications and 2) the success/contributions of our trainees.

My long-term goal as a mentor is to provide my trainees with a highly enriched and nurturing environment that maximizes their overall development into careful, critical-thinking problem-solvers and effective scientific communicators. I feel strongly that learning is most effective when it occurs as an active process in a learning environment that engages, challenges, and stimulates students to think for themselves, ask questions, challenge accepted paradigms, and seek answers by integrating information acquired from multiple sources. I further see “mentoring” as a lifelong two-way street, where the mentor needs to tailor advice/guidance to the ever-evolving needs of their trainee, while the trainee needs to feel comfortable to approach their mentor at any time for help and assistance in navigating a wide-range of research- and career-related decisions.

I am committed to providing all of my trainees with a work environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment. Members of the Dirksen laboratory are expected to always maintain the highest level of professionalism, integrity, and treat others with kindness, understanding and respect. Trainees will always be given credit for their work as is appropriate given their respective contributions. I am fully invested in the success and advancement of my trainees throughout their careers. I provide each trainee with individualized career advice, honest letters of recommendation and assistance in identifying positions that best suit their needs and career goals.

**Specific Guidelines**

**Working hours**

Research is hard. Completing a comprehensive body of work that comprises a PhD thesis in 4-5 years requires considerable effort, persistence, patience, creativity, and sometimes, even luck. At a minimum, this involves spending at least 40 “productive” working hours in the lab each week (e.g. 9 am – 5 pm or equivalent) designing experiments, optimizing assays, conducting research, and completing analyses. Additional time is needed to read the literature, develop collaborations, write scientific documents (e.g. thesis proposals, manuscripts, grant applications, thesis), as well as assemble research posters and presentations. As a result, the most successful students often dedicate up to 60 hours/week. Research is not always a 9-5 job. Sometimes research activities require working on weekends/evenings. When trainees in the Dirksen lab need to work on off hours, it is acceptable to adjust normal daytime work hours accordingly. The priority is to be efficient in your use of time working in the lab.

There are exceptions to spending 40 hours/week in the lab including time needed to complete coursework and prepare for exams (usually in the first/second year), work on important writing tasks (e.g. thesis proposal, manuscripts, fellowships), and present at national meetings, as well as needed attention to personal needs (e.g. doctor/dentist visits) and unexpected life events. However, beyond these type of exceptions, trainees in the Dirksen lab are expected to work full time in the lab completing their experiments/analyses, reading papers, learning, and developing essential professional skills.

Given the amount of time and hard work involved in conducting cutting-edge research, it is equally important for each person to establish a healthy work-life balance. Trainees are encouraged to use their time outside the lab to pursue other interests and hobbies. Eat well, get rest and prioritize your mental health. Take advantage of your vacation time and university holidays to recharge. This will enable you to bring your best effort to the lab each day and to ensure that you do not feel as if your lab work is the only thing in your life.

**Time off**

*Vacation time*. Trainees in the Dirksen laboratory in are encouraged to take their permitted two weeks of vacation time (10 business days) each calendar year, plus all seven official University holidays. Semester breaks and summers are not holidays. All reasonable vacation requests will be honored as long as trainees contact Dr. Dirksen at least 2 weeks in advance so that any needed lab accommodations can be arranged. Any given vacation requests should not exceed 2 weeks.

*Personal time (illness, mental health, family emergencies, short-term disability)*. Trainees in the Dirksen lab are provided personal time for illnesses, mental health needs, family emergencies and short-term disability. If you are not feeling well, you should remain at home and send me an email. If you have a family emergency, prioritize your family, and when you find an opportunity, please send me a message so that I am informed.

Trainees can access [University Health Services](https://www.rochester.edu/uhs/) at several locations, including in the Medical Center (Room 1-5077, UR Medical Center) the [UR Employee Pharmacy](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/pharmacy/pharmacies/employee.aspx), which provides common over-the-counter medication and prescription medicines. Trainees can also access mental health counseling at the [University Counseling Center](http://www.rochester.edu/uhs/ucc/) Medical Center, Room 1-5091A.

*Family Leave Policy.* Graduate students are provided up to 8 weeks of paid leave following the birth or the adoption of a child. For more information, see the [family-friendly policy page](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/education/graduate/trainee-handbook/policies-benefits/family-friendly-policies.aspx). Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Fellows (PDAs/PDFs) who are the primary caregiver are provided up to 8 weeks of paid leave following the birth or adoption of a child. Time off for Parental Leave will also count towards the annual entitlement for Paid Family Leave (PFL) and Family Medical Leave (FMLA). All leaves will concurrently. Additionally, both parents are eligible for Paid Family Leave. More information about PFL and FMLA can be found on the Office of Human Resources [leave administration web page](http://www.rochester.edu/working/hr/leave/).

**Conduct of Research**

*Research practices and lab culture*. All trainees are expected to explicitly reject questionable research practices, and conduct their research in a way that is transparent, rigorous, and ethical. Trainees should be familiar with, and abide by, the University of Rochester’s [Policy on Research Misconduct](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/education/graduate/trainee-handbook/policies-benefits.aspx). Academic misconduct can be reported online at <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/about-us/values-culture.aspx>.”

The Dirksen lab is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment where diverse groups of individuals feel valued and respected. We strive to create a climate of collaboration trust, openness, advocacy for others, and mutual respect, free from bullying, harassment, or any other type of harmful behavior. With this in mind, trainees are expected to embrace collaboration and contribute to a climate of collegiality, belonging, and acceptance by acknowledging and honoring the diverse histories and life experiences of all lab members.

*Record keeping.* All trainees are expected to keep and maintain meticulous lab notebooks that provide sufficient details, dates and analyses needed for others to reproduce their work. Writing should be clear and legible for others. All lab notebooks (electronic or physical) and data collected are the property of the Dirksen lab, not the student, postdoc or staff. Trainees are permitted to makes copies of their notebooks/data to take with them when they leave the lab, but all original notebooks, data and analyses must be left with the lab.

*Data management.* All lab-related electronic materials (e.g. original data, analyses, protocols, manuscripts, fellowship applications, etc.) should be backed up in at least two places: 1) the trainee’s personal or lab computer and either 2) Box, an external drive or the Dirksen shared drive. If you are unsure how to implement this for new data types, please let me know and we will work out a solution.

*Communication.* The default method for electronic communication with me is through my university email address ([Robert\_dirksen@urmc.rochester.edu](mailto:Robert_dirksen@urmc.rochester.edu)). Responding to messages outside of work hours is optional and no one in the lab is under any obligation to respond to me outside work hours. However, please be sure to remember to respond to any inquiries received outside of normal work hours as soon as possible the next day you are back in lab. If there is an emergency (e.g. lab fire or flood), please call or text me, regardless of time, at 585-313-3077.

*Cleaning.* Everyone in the Dirksen lab is responsible for cleaning their immediate area, whatever major equipment they use, emptying unneeded items from the fridge/freezers, defrosting, backing up data, and other tasks as needed. Periodically, the lab will agree on a date where everyone will spend the day working together to clean and organize the lab. I will provide pizza (or other appropriate enticements) for everyone on these dates.

**Relationships**

*Advisor-trainee relationship.* I consideradvising trainees in their research activities, promoting their professional development, and helping them achieve their short- and long-term career goals among my most rewarding and high-priority activities as an academic scientist. My door is always open. I encourage my trainees to come find me whenever they have a question, problem, unexpected finding, small victory, or if they just need advice or a confidant to listen to their concerns. If there is anything you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to stop me in the lab/hall or come to my office. If I am not in the lab or my office, please shoot me a text or email.

I also ensure that my trainees receive opportunities for structured input and feedback. The Dirksen lab has a long history of Monday morning lab meetings, where a given meeting is allocated to one member of the lab to present their recent findings, current struggles and/or future plans to the entire group. The idea is to create a safe environment to talk about our work and to get helpful suggestions and feedback from colleagues. This also provides an opportunity for trainees to refine their presentation skills, quick thinking, and clarity of expression. In addition to lab meetings, I also schedule weekly one-on-one meetings with each person in the lab to go over their most recent experimental results and to provide feedback regarding upcoming experimental priorities. Trainees are expected to show up for all lab and one-on-one meetings on time and ready to discuss their results. I am committed to doing the same for you. If unexpected circumstances come up that make it impossible to attend a scheduled meeting on time (or at all), please just let me know and we will make any needed changes.

*Trainee relationships*. As mentioned above, all members of the Dirksen laboratory are expected to maintain the highest level of professionalism, integrity, and to treat others in the lab with kindness, understanding and respect. All members of the lab are also expected to good lab citizens, embrace collaboration and be willing to support one another when assistance is needed. Trainees will be expected to train others. There is no better way to crystalize your own understanding of a complex concept or experiment than when you are teaching it to another person. Being able to train and mentor others is an important transferrable skill that will be needed in whatever career path you take. Now is an ideal time to develop and refine these skills.

Consensual intimate relationships sometimes develop between trainees. When this happens, while personal privacy needs to be respected, it is also important to be open and transparent about any such relationship so that the individuals can be protected and any potential conflicts of interest mitigated. Individuals are not permitted to enter into an intimate relationship with any person over whom that exercise academic authority. I expect all lab members to follow the guidelines of the [Faculty Policy on Intimate Relationships](https://www.rochester.edu/college/gradstudies/graduate-handbook/conduct/faculty-senate-policy-on-graduate-student-faculty-intimate-relationships.html#:~:text=Faculty%20members%20shall%20not%20enter,and%20postdoctoral%20scholars)%20over%20whom).

*Participation in department activities.* Communication and networking are essential professional skills needed for all science-related positions. Thus, trainees should take every opportunity to continually develop and refine their written and oral communication skills. This means asking questions during classes and seminars, presenting posters and talks at retreats or other departmental functions, presenting papers in journal club, giving live lab demos to incoming students. Trainees are expected to participate in department-sponsored activities including student recruitment weekend, attending lunches with speakers, as well as the department picnic and holiday party. These activities not only provide excellent opportunities to learn, talk science and network with others, but also help to cultivate friendships and professional references needed for future job searches. Trainees in the Dirksen lab are expected to participate in all lab and department activities whenever possible.

*Conflict resolution*. Conflicts within a group are sometimes inevitable, and when they occur, early communication is key to minimizing these conflicts. If you have any concerns about your interaction with me or with anyone else, please do not hesitate to come talk with me. If you wish a conversation to remain confidential, please be sure to indicate that at the start of the conversation. If you are uncomfortable speaking to me about an issue of concern, you can find a list of other available trainee support resources and individuals whom you can speak with in the [URMC trainee handbook](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/education/graduate/trainee-handbook/trainee-support-resources.aspx).

*Student’s thesis committee meetings and completion of annual evaluation.* Students in the Dirksen lab are expected to arrange formal meetings with their PhD Advisory Committee at least once per year, and more often if needed or as requested by their committee. Typically, the annual committee meeting is scheduled to coincide with the student’s yearly research seminar. Students are responsible for contacting each committee member to determine their availability to meet and to reserve a conference room for the meeting (e.g. Fenn Room). Students must complete their section of the Annual Evaluation document and circulate this to all members of their committee at least 24 hours before the meeting. After the meeting, Dr. Dirksen will complete a draft of the committee’s section of the form and then circulate that to the other faculty members on the committee for their review/revisions. Once finalized. Dr. Dirksen will share the completed report with the student, their program director, and GEPA.

**Professional Development**

In addition to completing a comprehensive body of research, there are a number of other important professional skills that need to be developed during your training. These skills include keeping abreast of new findings, research tools, and approaches in the field, developing strong oral and written communication skills, publishing your original research results in top-tier scientific journals, being a valued member of a larger collaborative research team, refining your teaching and mentoring skills, and developing/expanding your professional network. These skills are refined in the Dirksen lab in part as described below.

*Literature*. A broad and comprehensive knowledge of the past and current scientific literature is critical for a successful career in research. Therefore, I expect my students to spend significant hours each week reading scientific literature that is both directly related to their research project and of broad relevance to the field. Students should begin by reading articles published from the Dirksen laboratory. Trainees should also be sure to stay on top of current advances in the field by regularly searching the PubMed database and signing up for article alerts using Google Scholar, MyNCBI, or PubCrawler (<http://pubcrawler.gen.tcd.ie/>). These resources allow you to set up regular (e.g. weekly) searches using custom keywords and then receive alerts about matching articles. While not all retrieved articles will be relevant, this is an excellent way to make sure you keep on top of the ones that are important.

*Publications*. Publishing your research is essential for all career paths in science. I expect my advisees to publish multiple articles by the time they graduate. Ideally, you would have 2-3 first-authored papers plus several additional co-authored papers. While aspirational, this level of productivity will make you competitive for whatever career path you ultimately choose to pursue. In the Dirksen lab, first authors of each study are expected to generate the figures and an initial draft of the manuscript. I will then work with the first author to revise the manuscript as needed. Input from all others co-authors will be collected and then we will work on a final version and where to submit the manuscript. When the manuscript comes back from review, a collaborative decision will be made as to what is needed to resubmit the paper (e.g. new results, revisions to text, etc.) or if it would be more appropriate to submit to another journal. Each trainee’s publication record is ultimately their own responsibility; they will get out of it (i.e. number and impact of publications) exactly what they put in (i.e. hard work and diligence).

Whenever possible, authorship is determined as early as possible in the process. Anyone who makes a significant contribution to the study (e.g. developing the original idea, experimental design, collecting data, analyzing data, and/or writing the manuscript, assisting with resubmission) will be listed as an author. Usually, the first author of the study played the lead role in project execution, data collection/analyses, coordination of other contributors, writing the manuscript and overseeing the revision process. I expect the first author to retain primary responsibility for the publication process even if they leave the lab. If reviewer comments require new experiments and the first author has left the lab (and is unable to return to complete the new experiments), then an individual in the Dirksen lab may be recruited to complete the required studies. In this case, any potential revisions of the author list/order will be openly discussed between the parties involved. The corresponding author will make all final authorship decisions based on the respective scientific contributions made by each individual.

*Conferences/Meetings*. Trainees are expected to present their research results in the form of a poster or talk during at least one conference per year. Funds will be made available to cover registration, travel, and associated costs, but trainees are expected to apply for travel grants/awards if eligible. The decision to present at a national or international meeting will be mutual. However, I do reserve the right to determine whether it is an appropriate time to present your findings given concerns for competition for research funding may preclude presenting certain unpublished or incomplete findings.

*Grant writing/funding*. It is my responsibility to maintain funding to support the research and stipends/salaries of my advisees and staff. However, grant proposal writing is a critically important skill regardless of career path. Therefore, trainees are expected to apply for fellowships when they are eligible. Trainees are also expected to assist in the preparation of federal grants and progress reports from the lab.

*Teaching*. At a minimum, all students are expected to complete their program’s teaching requirement prior to graduation. Students who are interested in potentially pursuing a career in education should pursue additional teaching experience. I am always happy to help trainees identify potential teaching opportunities both within and outside the institution.

*Tapping professional development opportunities*. Participation in activities and events sponsored by the Center for Professional Development ([myHUB](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/education/graduate/myhub-professional-development.aspx) and [URBEST](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/education/graduate/myhub-professional-development/urbest-career-services.aspx)) is strongly encouraged, particularly for those interested in pursuing pharma, biotech, and/or non-traditional science careers. Students are expected to discuss with me their evolving career aspirations so that I can help them identify potential opportunities or internships that would be minimally disruptive to their research progress.