



Mentor-Mentee Advising Agreement (Revised 8-6-2021)

Our Mission: The Applied Wildlife Ecology and Spatial Movement (AWESM) lab focuses on developing innovative solutions to the growing wildlife conservation and management needs in multi-functional landscapes where there are competing interests for agricultural production, wildlife conservation, and ecosystem services.

Our Vision: Our research and extension activities will promote a holistic conservation ethic in intensive agricultural landscapes by providing constituents with relevant, high-quality science-based information to achieve landscape-level conservation success.

Lab Overview: As an Assistant Professor in the School of Natural Resources, Dr. Little is expected to develop a high-impact, nationally and internationally recognized extension/research program in landscape ecology, habitat and wildlife management. As a student in my lab, you will be assisting in carrying out these activities, which requires we conduct ourselves in an ethical manner while conducting high impact scientific research and extension activities.

What should you expect from Dr. Little?

- **I will 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 comes from a different background and has different professional goals. It will help if you keep me informed about your experience and remember that graduate school is a job with 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.
- **I will work tirelessly for the good of the lab group.** The success of every member of our lab is my top priority, no matter their personal strengths and weaknesses, or career goals.
- **I will be available for regular meetings and informal conversations.** This is a time to discuss innovative ideas that you have about your work and challenges that you may be facing.
- **I will help you navigate your graduate program of study.** While you are responsible for keeping up with deadlines and being knowledgeable about requirements for your specific program, I am available to help interpret these requirements, select appropriate coursework, and select committee members for your comprehensive exams.



- **I will be your advocate.** If you have a problem, please come talk with 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 recommendation 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.** I will encourage you to seek opportunities in teaching and mentoring, even if not required for your degree program, and help you find these opportunities when possible.
- **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 expect to attend at least one major conference per year when you have relevant information to present. If you register for a conference, I expect you to attend the scientific session and participate in conference activities during the time you are there. I will help you identify and apply for these opportunities and will ensure that your oral or poster presentation is ready for the conference.

What Dr. Little expects from you?

While carrying out this research, I will contribute to your professional development and progress in your degree. I will help you set goals and hopefully 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 present and document your scientific findings.
- Be honest, ethical, and enthusiastic.
- Be engaged within the research group and programs on campus.
- Treat your lab mates, lab funds, and equipment with respect.
- Take advantage of professional development opportunities.
- Obtain your degree.
- 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 degree.** This includes commitment to your work in classrooms and the laboratory. You should maintain an elevated level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards.

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- **Communicate regularly with me and provide me with updates on the progress and results of your activities and experiments.** My busy schedule requires that we plan for meetings to discuss your research and any professional or personal concerns you may have. I will try to be available as much as possible, but keep in mind that I have my own responsibilities and I will have limited time, so plan accordingly. During the school year, we will hold weekly lab meetings to communicate updates on your work. In addition, I am happy to set aside weekly or bi-weekly one-on-one meetings with you to stay on track with your research and extension activities.
- **Be knowledgeable of the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the graduate program, the graduate school, and the university.** Comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones, laboratory practices, and rules related to fieldwork safety. If you cannot find the answer, please contact me or talk with your lab members.
- **Actively cultivate your professional development.** The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has outstanding resources in place to support professional development for students. It is expected of you to take advantage of these resources as needed, since becoming a successful scientist involves more than just doing academic research. 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 group meetings, as well as seminars that are part of your educational programs.** Participation in group meetings does not mean only presenting your own work but providing support to others in the lab through shared insights. Do your part to create a climate of engagement and mutual respect.
- **Strive to be the best lab citizen.** Take part in shared laboratory responsibilities and use laboratory resources carefully and frugally. Be respectful and work together 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. This includes acknowledging the efforts of fellow collaborators within and outside of the lab.
- **Leave no trace.** You may be using equipment that does not belong to our lab. You should respect this equipment and treat it even more carefully than our own equipment. Always return it as soon as possible in the same condition you found it. As part of the spatial movement portion of this lab, you may be accessing private land for research



purposes. Do not damage any property and be respectful of closed gates, no trespassing, and anything you may find on the land.

- **Return all equipment.** At the completion of your field season and/or project completion, please return all lab equipment, computers, external hard drives, etc. These items must be returned before you leave the University system.

You will develop strong research skills:

- **During your program you will learn how to plan, design, and conduct high quality scientific research.**
- **Challenge yourself by presenting your work at meetings and seminars as early as you can and by preparing scientific articles that effectively present your work to others in the field.** I push you to publish your research as you move through your training program, not only at the end.
- **Be responsive to advice and constructive criticism.** The feedback you get from me, your colleagues, your committee members, and your course instructors is intended to improve your scientific work.

You will strive to meet deadlines:

- **Work to meet deadlines: this is an essential way to manage your progress.** Deadlines can be managed in several ways, but it is expected of you to work your best to maintain these goals. You will establish mutually agreed upon deadlines for each phase of your work during one-on-one meetings with committee members. For graduate students, there is an important balance between time spent in class and time spent on research, outreach and teaching. If you are meeting expectations, you are free to set your own schedule. It is your responsibility to talk with me if you are having difficulty completing your work.

You will communicate clearly:

- **Remember that all of us are “new” at various points in our careers.** If you feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or want additional support, please ask for it. I welcome these conversations and view them as necessary.
- **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. Do not cancel meetings if you feel that you have not made adequate progress on your research, these meetings might be the most critical in times of confusion or stress.
- **Be prompt.** Respond promptly to emails from anyone in our lab group and show up on time and prepared for meetings. 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 information.

- **Discuss policies on work hours, sick leave, and vacation time with me directly.** Work-life balance and vacation time are essential for creative thinking and good health, and I encourage you to take regular vacation. Be aware, however, that there will be a period when more effort will be devoted to work and it may not be ideal to schedule time away; this includes field seasons. Consult with me and notify fellow lab members and colleagues in advance of any planned absences.
- **Help other students with their projects and mentor/train newer students.** This is a valuable experience! Undergraduates working in the lab should be encouraged to contribute to the writing of manuscripts. If you wish to add other individuals as authors to your papers, please discuss this with me early on and before discussing the situation with the potential co-authors.

Publications and data:

- **You will be first author on any publication that comes directly from your research project.**
- **Data storage:** I require all data for your research project to be backed up in multiple locations such as your desktop computer, external hard drive, OneDrive, etc. If you need an external hard drive, please contact me and I will provide you one for data storage, but this unit will need to be returned upon completion of your project.
- **Prior to graduation, you will provide me with your research data files to ensure access to it after you leave the University.** This makes it possible for future lab members to build off your research once you have completed your degree. These files must be named appropriately including a document that contains a description of all file names and data column names.
- **You're expected to publish the findings of your research in a relevant scientific journal within 1 year of the completion of your degree.** Life after graduation can be busy and publishing old work may no longer be a priority. As such, if you have not submitted your research for publication within one year of graduation, I reserve the right to submit the manuscripts for you. Authorship in this situation will be dependent on the situation.

Questions:

How would you describe your learning style?



How often do you prefer to meet to discuss your project and progress? You can change this at any time, as necessary.

Yearly evaluation:

Each year we will sit down to discuss progress and goals. At that time, you should remember to tell me if you are unhappy with any aspect of your experience as a graduate student in this lab. Remember that I am your advocate, as well as your advisor. 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 advisor. If you feel you need more guidance, I am interfering too much with your work, you would like to meet with me more often, etc. please tell me during this time. At the same time, I will tell you if I am satisfied with your progress and if you are on track to graduate by your target date. It will be my responsibility to explain to you any deficiencies so that you can take steps to address them.

Student Signature: _____

Advisor Signature: _____