



## **Micropaleo Lab Code of Conduct**

### **Dr. Chris Lowery**

This document summarizes my expectations of you as a student/postdoc and the things you can expect from me as a supervisor. Although some of the things here may seem obvious, it is important to lay out expectations clearly from the beginning so that we all know where we stand. This is a living document and will be updated from time to time; such updates will be clearly communicated to all lab members.

#### **My goal as your supervisor is to help you:**

- 1) Plan and achieve productive educational (at UT and beyond) and career (within academia or without) paths with clear objectives.
- 2) Develop important “soft skills” like maintaining work-life balance, dealing with setbacks and adversity, working in a group, etc.
- 3) Develop fundamental “hard skills” like taxonomy, paleoecology, statistics, programming, writing, speaking, problem solving, etc.
- 4) Share your research with the scientific community via research conferences and peer-reviewed papers

We will work together to achieve these goals, but you should also recognize that my opinion is just one of many, and that your labmates, peers, committee members, and other faculty and staff are also important partners through your time as a student/postdoc.

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

- **Contribute to making the lab a welcoming environment**
- **Communication**
- **Advocate for your goals and interests**
- **Work and write independently**
- **Don't Burn Yourself Out**

#### **What you can expect from me:**

- **Ensure the lab is a welcoming environment for all members**
- **Clearly defined goals and expectations, honest feedback**
- **Advocacy for your goals and interests**
- **Training in micropaleontology, writing, speaking, etc.**
- **Respect for your work life balance**

### **MAKE THE LAB A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT**

**Science cannot contribute to society if it is exclusionary.** It is essential to maintain a laboratory environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and honors the identities of all members of and visitors to the lab, including race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, religion, etc. The Jackson School has developed workplace expectations for students, faculty, and staff, which you can find [here](#). This document covers bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, hostile work environment, interpersonal violence, academic integrity, and advisor-student relationship

issues. The Institute for Geophysics Code of Conduct, which covers the above and also has specific reporting mechanisms for field work, can be found [here](#). If you don't feel comfortable bringing any of these issues to me, you can contact any of the people or offices below:

**UTIG Level:** Susanne Morrison (HR coordinator)

**JSG level:** Graduate Coordinator (Philip Guerrero), Graduate Advisor/GSC Chair (Brian Horton), Department Chair (Danny Stockli), Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (Chris Bell).

**University level:** [Dean of Students](#), [Ombuds](#), [UT Counseling and Mental Health Center](#). *Note: All three university level offices offer confidential services. You should be aware that as an academic advisor I am a mandatory reporter for Title IX violations.*

The document begins: *"The faculty, Research Scientists, Students, and Staff of the Jackson School are dedicated to creating a positive, inclusive work environment that embraces diversity in all forms and rejects any form of hostile work place, discrimination, or bullying. This web page is set up to inform you of your options if you have encountered issues that create a negative work environment."* I would like to emphasize that the Micropaleo Lab is also dedicated to those things, and that discrimination, bullying, and harassment will not be tolerated. Moreover, I want everyone to feel like they belong here.

- All communication (both online and in person) should be appropriate for a professional audience, and considerate of people from different cultural backgrounds. Sexual language and imagery is not appropriate at any time.
- Remember that sexist, racist, and exclusionary jokes are not appropriate.
- Harassment (including comments related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, race, religion; sexual images in a public place; deliberate intimidation, following, stalking; harassing photography or recording; sustained disruption of discussions; unwanted physical contact; unwelcome sexual attention) will not be tolerated, and anyone asked to stop harassing behavior will be expected to comply immediately
- Please share your chosen name and pronouns with the lab if you are comfortable doing so, and please feel welcome to update us to any changes.
- Please honor the chosen names and pronouns of your labmates (and, indeed, everyone).
- If someone calls out something you said or did as being objectionable, please resist the urge to get defensive, and instead apologize and reflect on it (and, ideally, grow).
- We are all still learning and growing (this definitely includes me); if something is said that makes you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome please say so, if you feel comfortable (or come to me privately, if you feel comfortable).
- If you are the kind of person who often speaks up in meetings make sure that you are making room for other people to contribute as well. Don't talk over other people, and make sure to recognize people who originate ideas. Make sure all voices are heard.

More generally, the micropaleo lab is a workplace, and this is a job, but it's a fairly unique and sometimes stressful one. Graduate school will be easier with a strong support network of peers. For that reason, one of my goals is to have a good lab dynamic. We will have social activities on occasion (always optional!). You should strive to be supportive of your labmates. Always treat their scientific ideas with respect, and make sure that any critiques are also constructive. Help each other out with problems, attend each other's talks, etc.

## MENTAL HEALTH

There is increasing evidence that certain attributes of academia, effecting everyone from undergrads to full professors, may challenge your mental health. Specific factors driving this include:

- Low pay and quality-of-life issues, particularly as a function of living in an expensive city as Austin
- Feelings of isolation in your research; e.g. everyone has their own topic and it can often feel as if you are working on your own
- Uncertainty in your research, although it should be noted that, in research of all kinds, it is not just the outcomes that are uncertain, but the questions themselves!
- Uncertainty in your post-PhD career
- So-called “negative results”; i.e. at some point in your research it is likely that certain questions will be more challenging to answer than anticipated, or that you will feel you have spent days/months/years toiling with little to show
- Burnout; i.e. feeling the need to work endless hours to make up for the above issues, and the subsequent exhaustion

All of us come across most of these issues at some level. I strongly encourage everyone in the group to take an active and pre-emptive approach towards the maintenance of their mental health. It is important that you have the time and resources needed for a highly successful PhD. If there is anything that is placing undue stress, or preventing you from performing at your potential, please do not hesitate to let me, Graduate coordinator Philip Guerrero, or anyone else know how we can help. You should also be familiar with mental health resources on campus: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>. Every effort will be made to help you access the right support networks.

## COMMUNICATION

Being a student is hard, being a postdoc is hard, and advising students and postdocs is also hard. Every advisee is different and has different needs, and there is no perfect approach to advising. I am doing the best that I can, and my constant fear is that I’m somehow messing up in a way that negatively impacts my students and postdocs. For both of our sakes, then, it is important that we have we clearly communicate our expectations to each other, and to say speak up when something isn’t working. I am still learning all the time and welcome feedback on what’s working and what isn’t. The student-advisor relationship is a two-way street. This article, titled “[The care and maintenance of your adviser](#)” describes this very well:

*“Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or is too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and so on. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must address the deficiencies.”*

I don’t have anything to add to that except that it rings true to my own graduate school experience and you should read the whole thing yourself.

## WORK LIFE BALANCE

[Do not burn yourselves out](#). It can be very easy to overwork in lab environments. Samples are always there, forams don't pick themselves, it feels good to make progress. But there is a limit to how long you can work effectively, and if you repeatedly push past it you will burn out. There is a culture of overwork in academia, and especially in grad school, and I expect you to actively fight against it. You will be happier if you do. As a bonus, you will also be more scientifically creative, have better ideas, and be more resilient to set-backs. You'll also be better prepared for the times that you do need to briefly push (going into the field, preparing for conferences, etc.).

- Please only work 40 hours a week (including classes and TA duties, if any)
- You should feel free to work whatever hours you like, although you are expected to attend lab meetings, seminars, etc. Of course, your hours will need to overlap with mine (generally ~9-5) if you need my help with something. This will probably be more important early on.
- Meetings will only be arranged during normal working hours (with exceptions for conference calls across time zones, etc.)
- I check my e-mail between ~ 8-5 on weekdays; if you e-mail outside of these hours you should expect a reply the next weekday morning. (I am very happy to help with urgent matters that might arise, and you should feel free to call/text if necessary).
  - A corollary to this: if I don't get back to you in a day or so please feel free to send me a reminder
- Along those same lines, you don't need to be constantly checking your e-mail, and if I do happen to e-mail outside of normal work hours I do not expect an immediate reply. If something is time sensitive, I will indicate that clearly.
- Be mindful of taking on too many commitments/side projects. If you can't get all your work done in 40 hours a week you've taken on too much.
- Take vacations! Don't feel guilty about it. It's important to recharge. I usually take a week at winter break and a couple weeks over the course of the summer, in addition to random days/half days here and there. Please let me know if you'll be out for more than a day.

## WORK AND WRITE INDEPENDENTLY

Not *totally* independently, I expect us to have regular meetings to discuss progress and next steps, and for you to ask questions when they arise, but the ability to be a self-starter is an important one. Graduate programs, hiring committees, and private employers love candidates who can be described as "motivated" "self-starter" "independent" "having initiative." The degree to which I expect you to work independently will increase depending on the stage of your career. I expect postdocs and late-stage PhD students to be the most independent, early stage PhD students to be less so, but more independent than masters students, who in turn should be more independent than undergrad researchers. You might think of graduate school as the process of slowly removing your science training wheels; by the time you're done with your PhD you should be ready to ride your "bike" all alone. None of which is to say you shouldn't ask for help when you need it, but you should become better at answering your own questions as time goes on. Likewise it shouldn't be up to me to keep you on track making progress toward finishing your project.

- Write early and often. Writing always takes longer than you think and it is impossible to start too early. You can always write up your methods as you work them out in the lab. You can write a few pages of background as you read papers related to your project. Don't wait!
- ***We will work together to establish a plan and set goals but you are ultimately responsible for the completion of your project and your degree. You need to find your own motivation to accomplish your goals and I consider it counterproductive for me to be too much of a task master. I am here to help along the way but you're the only person who can get yourself across the finish line.***

## AUTHORSHIP

My general philosophy on authorship is to err on the side of inclusion, but co-authors must make a real intellectual or material contribution to the work.

- Intellectual contribution includes original ideas, helping put ideas into the context of existing work, revising the intellectual content of a draft, etc.
- Material contribution includes providing unique samples or datasets. Collaborators who provide their own collected material or data for a project should be asked if they want to be co-authors. Scientists in external labs who run samples should be asked if they want to be co-authors, unless it is a commercial lab that we are paying to run samples for us, in which case it should be acknowledged. People who provide assistance in the field or in the lab (e.g., washing samples, helping take cores) but did not participate in turning those samples into data should be acknowledged.
- All authors must read the manuscript or conference abstract **and all authors must provide their approval before the manuscript/conference abstract is submitted.**
- Conference abstracts should be provided to co-authors well before the deadline.
- Be mindful of other people's intellectual property, and make sure that you don't steal someone's ideas after a conference talk or a conversation. If you want to include something in your own work and you're unsure, you can always ask them.
- I will be co-author on any papers that come out of your project. If you come up with a cool unrelated side idea with some friends and want to turn it into a paper, you don't need to include me (but please tell me so I can be proud).

## SOCIAL MEDIA

In your work-related life, you may wish to engage with social media (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Please be considerate of others when using these platforms, and respectful for how others may wish to use them. You must therefore bear in mind the very public nature of interactions on social media, and that many people (who may not be on a specific platform) will read and hear of online correspondence. You are not compelled to engage with any social media or use any such media for work-related purposes, and we should never pressure each other to 'friend' or 'follow' each other, engage with each other on social media, etc.

## OTHER

- Please don't borrow books, lab supplies, 3D forams, etc. without permission.
- JSG Litserve: e-mail lists where opportunities and seminars are shared, etc. You should be able to add yourself to lists here: <https://utlists.utexas.edu/sympa>.

You may want to join:

- Water, Climate, and the Environment: [wce-all@utlists.utexas.edu](mailto:wce-all@utlists.utexas.edu)
- JSG Seminars: [jsg\\_seminars@utlists.utexas.edu](mailto:jsg_seminars@utlists.utexas.edu)
- Geobiology: [paleontology-geobiology@utlists.utexas.edu](mailto:paleontology-geobiology@utlists.utexas.edu)
- Paleo: [utpaleo@utlists.utexas.edu](mailto:utpaleo@utlists.utexas.edu)
- Planetary Habitability: [habitability@utlists.utexas.edu](mailto:habitability@utlists.utexas.edu)

You should be automatically added to relevant UTIG lists that advertise UTIG specific opportunities and seminars, but if you aren't getting those e-mails let me know.

*This document borrows heavily from lab codes of conduct by Rowan Martindale and Christopher Jackson.*