

Advising Guidelines for Immunobiology Trainees and Mentors Yale University

Introduction

This document outlines the expectations of graduate students and thesis advisers in our graduate program and serves as a companion to our Department handbook (<https://medicine.yale.edu/immuno/graduate-program/>). We strongly recommend that all students and thesis advisers read our handbook.

Selecting a Thesis Adviser

Our handbook provides guidance on finding rotation advisers and conducting lab rotations in the first year of study. By the end of the rotation period, on May 31st, each student will select a formal thesis adviser. A student may declare two faculty to serve equally as co-advisers if the research project will benefit from the combined expertise of both faculty.

The Student and Adviser: Your Shared Responsibilities

- a. *Communication.* The student and adviser share responsibility for establishing and maintaining a respectful advising relationship. A mutual agreement on expectations for how often to meet should be set early on in the relationship. Prior to submitting the BBS adviser form, students and potential mentors are expected to discuss the Department's mentorship compact, which will guide you through various topics that are important to discuss prior to officially joining a lab.
- b. *Research.* You both share responsibility for carrying forward the thesis project. You should reach a mutual agreement of how the adviser and the mentee will share responsibility on selecting the project, designing the research plan, planning experiments, interpreting results and keeping up with the relevant literature. You are both responsible for the design of rigorous and reproducible experiments and for ensuring that the research is conducted ethically. While the student has the ultimate say in who becomes a member of their thesis committee, you are expected to work in partnership to make those decisions. More guidance on selecting a thesis committee can be found in our handbook.

The Adviser: Your Responsibilities

- a. *Communication.* It is important to maintain regular communication with your student and to alert your student to anticipated delays in responding. You are expected to help your trainees identify individuals outside your lab that can help advise, guide and/or provide expertise.
- b. *Research.* You are responsible for overseeing the overall research plan for your student, for securing funding to conduct the research, for providing guidance through the Immunobiology prospectus and for providing general feedback and mentorship regularly. Importantly, you are expected to provide sufficient guidance throughout your student's Immunobiology prospectus and to review and sign the annual Dissertation Progress Report each May, beginning in the student's 3rd year of study.
- c. *Research findings.* A student's thesis research is expected to result in at least one first-author manuscript which should be submitted prior to the student's graduation. Provide guidance on writing manuscripts and review drafts in a timely manner. Provide other authorship opportunities for your student to consider, such as review articles or lab

collaborations, aside from the publication(s) that result from their thesis work. Additionally, you are encouraged to provide financial support for your student to present research at regional, national or international meetings and to provide them with opportunities to practice these presentations before you and your lab. Senior students are expected to present their research at various forums.

- d. *Career and professional development.* While Yale offers many resources for students to develop their skills and prepare for careers both within and beyond academia, the thesis adviser can profoundly influence a student's development, career trajectory and professional identity. You should be available to meet with your student to discuss career goals, assist with networking, and assist with student's development of skills relevant to their career goals. Encourage the use of the Office of Career Strategy resources and help your student network with individuals who work in various career paths. To the extent possible, you are expected to help your trainees stick to a reasonable graduation timeline.
- e. *Time.* Share the norms for typical hours of operation in your lab, explain that some experiments may require deviating from these norms, and note to what extent you encourage in-person attendance vs. remote research activities. You are expected to provide the time for your student to devote to their academic responsibilities such as coursework, teaching, qualifying exam preparation, required seminar attendance and the Department retreat. Likewise, know that your student will need to devote time to career and professional development activities outside the lab. These activities are essential to career development and the overall training experience of the PhD. You are encouraged to brainstorm with your students about the best way to optimize their time management to balance all their PhD responsibilities.
- f. *Letters.* You are expected to write letters of support for your student's fellowship applications and job applications. Let your student know how far in advance letters should be requested.
- g. *Health and well-being.* In an effort to support the health and well-being of all members in your lab, you are expected to actively participate in fostering a welcoming and positive lab culture. If at any point any member of your lab needs to take a leave of absence, have them contact Yale Mental Health & Counseling and the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) for guidance on next steps and a detailed overview of Yale's leave policies.
- h. *Seeking help.* Please reach out to the DGS, the thesis committee, the Vice Chair of Diversity, the Department Chair, the GSAS Dean's office or the Title IX office if you have concerns that you are unable to resolve directly with your student. As a mandatory reporter, PIs are immediately required to report any Title IX violations to a Title IX Coordinator.

The Student: Your Responsibilities

- a. *Communication.* You are expected to maintain regular communication with your adviser, to alert them when either personal or academic obligations may cause delays in communication or result in an unanticipated absence and to keep them informed of upcoming academic milestones like research in progress (RIP) presentations, your prospectus and your advancement to candidacy meeting.
- b. *Research.* You are responsible for driving forward your thesis project, managing your research and academic obligations, completing your annual Dissertation Progress Report on time, and scheduling annual thesis committee meetings. You should submit an update

to your Thesis Committee members at least 7 days in advance of the meeting. Be open to critical feedback from your adviser and thesis committee members and follow up with a plan to address any issues they raise.

- c. *Research findings.* You should work closely with your adviser on scientific writing for your prospectus, grant proposals, manuscripts, and your thesis. Other resources can help you develop your writing and presentation skills, such as BBS grant writing courses and/or workshops and resources provided by the Poorvu Center and the Graduate Writing Lab. Seek opportunities to share research findings in departmental seminars and at national or international meetings. Students who are covered by the Immunobiology Training Grant may have access to funds that they can use to cover conference presentation costs. Reach out to the Department registrar to check if you qualify for this funding. Travel awards can be obtained from external entities and limited funds are available from the Graduate Student Assembly's Conference Travel Fund (CTF).
- d. *Career and professional development.* Begin mapping out your career plans early in graduate school through an individual development plan, such as the AAAS myIDP (<https://myidp.sciencecareers.org>). You are encouraged to provide annual updates to your adviser and thesis committee about potential career plans and obtain guidance to determine which professional skills you should develop in anticipation of your desired career path. Look for career and professional development opportunities through the Poorvu Center, Office of Career Strategy, graduate student organizations or by networking with Yale IBIO alumni. You are encouraged to maintain a robust long-term conversation with your adviser about career development and to work together to identify individuals to network with, especially as you near the end of your PhD.
- e. *Time, Health and Wellbeing.* You should plan to conduct research according to the expected hours of operation of the lab, meet the academic deadlines of our graduate program, and notify your adviser in advance of academic time commitments and deadlines. A thesis project is a time-intensive years-long endeavor. While you're expected to devote hard work and time to your project, time away from the lab is critical for overall health and for preventing burnout. You are encouraged to talk to your adviser about maintaining proper work-life balance and to let them know of any personal or health-related developments that may require taking time off. If you notice a significant decline in mental health or wellbeing, we encourage you to reach out to Yale Mental Health & Counseling and/or your mental health provider to discuss options such as leaves of absence that may be necessary for your health and wellbeing. Yale Mental Health & Counseling and the DGS can offer a detailed overview of Yale's leave policies. Several resources dedicated to supporting your health and wellbeing are also available to you such as [Yale Health](#), the [Payne Whitney Gym](#), and the [Wellness Center](#). Finally, we ask that you let your adviser or DGS know if any health problems arise that require you to take time off.
- f. *Letters.* Discuss with your adviser your need for letters of support for fellowship applications and/or job applications with plenty of time in advance. Ask your adviser how far in advance these letters should be requested in the future. If needed, ask your adviser to help you identify other individuals who can write additional letters of recommendation for you.
- g. *Seeking help.* Your DGS, thesis committee members, the Vice-Chair of Diversity and/or the Department Chair are available if you encounter issues that you are unable to resolve

with your adviser or for which you need additional assistance. Turn to these individuals as well for mentoring to supplement the guidance offered by your adviser. You can also reach out to the GSAS Dean's Office, the Title IX Office, the Yale School of Medicine DEI Office, the OGSDD, the IWGDI, the Graduate Student Assembly and/or Local 33.

Below is additional information for the student and adviser about the roles of the thesis committee and Director of Graduate Studies.

Thesis Committee

A full description of the composition and roles of the committee are described in our handbook. Important responsibilities noted here include the following:

- a. At the student's request, committee members should make themselves available to meet one-on-one to discuss reading lists and the prospectus, offer research guidance, career advice, and/or assistance in navigating conflicts with the adviser.
- b. Committee members should review the progress report documents provided by the student in advance of each committee meeting.
- c. Committee members are expected to attend all thesis committee meetings and strongly encouraged to attend and give feedback at the student's RIP presentation.
- d. At the committee meeting, members should provide constructive feedback as well as complete a formal evaluation form. The prospectus is responsible to provide copies of the formal evaluation forms to the student after the prospectus meeting. For other thesis committee members, the adviser is responsible to provide copies of the formal evaluation forms. Students can also contact the Department registrar to obtain copies of the evaluation forms.
- e. The committee will determine when all experiments necessary for writing the dissertation have been completed so that the student may commence the thesis writing process.
- f. Committee members should thoroughly review the written dissertation and provide written comments.
- g. Committee members may sometimes serve as readers of the final version of the dissertation.
- h. Committee members should attend the thesis defense.

Director of Graduate Studies

The DGS oversees the overall academic program, and more information about the DGS' role is noted in our handbook. Responsibilities related to advising include the following:

- a. The DGS approves the student's course schedules, rotation forms, thesis adviser selection, qualifying exam form, annual thesis committee forms, and departmental recommendation form for degree conferral.
- b. The DGS also tracks overall academic progress, ensures proper understanding of academic milestones by students and faculty and meets with the student to provide advice/guidance as needed. The DGS also acts the liaison between the student in the program and the Office of the Dean.
- c. At the student's request, the DGS will meet with the student to help resolve problems with the thesis adviser and/or with thesis committee members and may also provide academic and career guidance.

- d. The DGS hosts annual Department-wide Town Halls and meets with every cohort of 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year students.
- e. As appropriate, the DGS will direct the student to other resources such as GSAS deans, Title IX office, Office of Institutional Equity and Access, Student Accessibility Services, and Yale Health.

Our Commitment to our Trainees' Success

- a. Students who struggle at any point during the PhD, but who are determined to see their PhD through completion should expect reasonable support from their DGS, adviser and thesis committee members in the form of guidance, mentorship, a detailed experimental plan, and/or the possibility of a leave of absence.
- b. If a student needs to switch to a new thesis adviser (due to faculty departure from Yale, change in student's research interests, mentor/mentee conflicts, etc.), the student must consult the Director of Graduate Studies, the Vice Chair of Diversity and/or the Department Chair as soon as possible to get guidance on how to look for a new lab.