# Umpierre Lab: Mentoring Philosophy and Expectations

## I. My Overall Mentoring Philosophy

### A. On the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

**The role of the mentor is to steer the project**. This does not mean that the mentee does not have agency in determining project direction. Instead, as a mentor, it is my job to guide project development and provide guidance in many forms. Depending on your experience level, my guidance may vary.

The role of the mentor is also to foster an environment where people are passionate, excited, and engaged. That includes creating a workplace staffed by people who are willing to work together and be supportive, not competitive. That also means the PI must provide appropriate latitude between projects so personnel are not required to compete. When it comes to projects, the goal is to pair an individual with a project they can be excited about. No one works hard on something they do not find interesting. My hope is that through interviews or rotations, we can identify if a project will be a good, long-term fit. The mentor also needs to be involved throughout the life of the project. The extent of that involvement (hands-on vs. hands-off mentorship) will be tailored to the trainee's personality and experience level.

My role should not (and will never) involve the use of verbal abuse, threats, direct peer competition, pressure to produce quantity over quality, or a requirement for certain outcomes.

**The role of mentee (post-bacc or early graduate):** I will likely propose the initial project and even provide an outline of the first experiments. I do feel that early trainees need a concrete project at first, but they should have the latitude to make a project their own and propose new directions with time. Particularly with techniques, I may provide direct training, but I would like early trainees to gradually phase in more and more independence after ~6 months in the lab, when they have more concrete project goals and necessary training.

**The role of the more experienced mentee (post-doc or other):** These trainees may be given the starting point and the project goal with the understanding that they will design experiments to address the question and build the project along the way. This does not mean the mentor is absent. On the contrary, as I mentor, I will want to meet and discuss your plans along the way. In these meetings, I would like you to take the lead and I will provide feedback or tailor experiments when necessary. Part of achieving independence is learning how to build a larger plan (series of experiments, anticipation of pit falls, knowledge of where to go next).

**Tailoring expectations and providing direct feedback:** Everyone in a lab has a unique set of abilities and a variable amount of experience. I'm here to train you and help you reach your goals. Be honest with me about your experience and skill set. With that information in hand, I can do a better job of anticipating what you will need. Please also understand that I am new at mentoring. I may not always do a perfect job. However, I do give you my word that if you have an issue with my approach or something I do, I would like you to be direct and let me know. Neither a mentor or a mentee can improve without honest feedback.

### B. When to Ask for Help

When considering when to ask for help, balance the following principles:

- **Always ask for guidance and clarification when a risk could be involved**. These are scenarios in which any uncertainty or something going wrong could lead to the following:
    - Improper equipment use or equipment damage

- A risk to your safety (and others)
- A chance for animal harm
- A chance that a procedure is not authorized or against protocol

- The purpose of training at all levels is to build our critical thinking and resourcefulness. This helps us gradually achieve our independence. **When the risks above are not present**, try to independently approach the question and seek out information. Come to me when you've hit a roadblock or want to explain what you've learned to get confirmation or clarification. Here are some concrete examples:
  - **For lab procedures**, I would generally recommend that a trainee individually learns the theory behind the procedure with some autonomy (reads the protocol in our shared drive, watches JOVE videos, reads CSHL protocols). This has the added benefit of allowing you to learn at your own pace. After reading, if something is unclear, feel free to ask the PI or an experienced lab member for clarification. Once you have a sense for the procedure, you would then be trained in-person on the details.
  - **For theoretical or scientific questions** (e.g., "do microglia produce CCL2?" "what is an absence seizure?") please also spend some time looking into these questions in the primary literature (or other sources) as a first pass. It is then good to come to the PI with a synthesis of what you've found and the questions that still remain (e.g., I see CCL2 levels in my tissue. I thought they came from microglia, but it turns out many cells produce it and its very context dependent. How could we better investigate microglial contributions to tissue CCL2 vs other sources?). These tailored questions are a great starting point and the PI may then be able to direct you to some good resources.

**C. Mentorship and Project Meetings**

- Meetings between the mentor and mentee will be kept confidential (so long as nothing disclosed requires mandatory reporting).
- I pledge to never seek reprisals if you provide me with honest, open feedback in good faith.
- My feedback is likely to include both positive and occasional negative feedback. Negative feedback is not given to be demeaning. Part of our growth and development requires knowing what we are doing well and where we could improve. Often, these areas can be seen well from a 3$^{rd}$ party vantage point. I will never provide negative feedback that is abusive, cruel, or personal. I will always strive to be objective and give context for this feedback.
- How we meet: At minimum, we will have a weekly lab meeting and a major meeting every 2 months to thoroughly go over projects and prospective experiments. For new trainees, I also do a check-in meeting every 2 weeks. In addition to these meetings, I have an open-door policy and we can build in additional meetings as needed.

## II. My Views on Work Hours and Work-Life Balance

**-Productivity matters more than hours**
**-Efficiency should always be the goal**
**-Organization and planning pay dividends**

- When you have an independent project, you get to decide your timing: when you arrive and how many hours you need to spend in lab
  - I will only bring up your hours and time in lab if quality and productivity are not ideal
  - If you are producing good work, I will not pay an ounce of attention to your hours

- My hope is that you come in to work every day with a plan for the day and execute it efficiently. In fact, I highly recommend that you schedule out experiments (particularly in vivo experiments) on a 2- or 3-month horizon.
    - The point of being in lab is to get things done (finish tasks, make progress). The 'need to be seen' or prove you are a hard worker by constantly being in lab is not something that resonates with me.
    - Do your job well, complete what you need to, be efficient, then go home for the day.
    - This is my best suggestion for achieving work-life balance: have a plan, come in with a purpose, get your work done, then leave and spend the rest of your time doing other things you enjoy.

- To re-iterate: If you are getting sufficient work done and it is of sound quality, I do not care how many hours you work. Have a plan and make consistent progress.