GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISING STATEMENT

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Purpose

I am providing you with this statement of advising philosophy to enhance communication and transparency in our working relationship. It is intended to supplement our ongoing interactions and informal discussions and not to stand as a set of rigid requirements. My goal is that you can use this document to help guide you during your time in the SEFS lab. I view our professional relationship as a collaboration, with my role as your advisor to provide you with opportunities to develop your skill set, further establish your research interests, and establish new collaborations that help you to achieve your ultimate career objectives. As in all aspects of life, I recognize that each lab member will vary in their backgrounds, aspirations, interests, progress, and accomplishments. This is especially true given the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary work we do in the SEFS Lab. In your first week, we will talk through this document together to establish expectations, discuss each other's goals for your graduate program, and adjust the document in order to put you on the best path towards your short-term and long-term career objectives. This is a working document that will be updated through feedback and accumulated experiences. Any and all feedback on the document is thoroughly appreciated!

Note: This statement was adapted from a statement of adviser philosophy distributed by Scott Lanyon, Gordon Legge, and Moin Syed (University of Minnesota). Further, material here was adapted from the Quantitative Ecology Lab groups at NC State led by Krishna Pacifici and Nathan Hostetter. The statement incorporates philosophies discussed in the Mentoring Matters Faculty Training Program at NC State University in February 2025.

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Guiding Philosophy and Career Paths

As an advisor, my job is to help my graduate students achieve short-term and long-term career objectives. Having joined a graduate program, you have already made the first step towards an eventual career path. You may be entering graduate school with knowledge of exactly what type of position you want, or you may have a few different career paths you are potentially interested in, or you may not have any sense of potential career paths and are in graduate school because you like learning and research (this was me back in the day). In order for me to be the best advisor I can be, I need to know early on what your career objectives are and what you want to get out of graduate school. Of course, those objectives may change during the duration of our

time working together, which is completely okay! Discussions about your career plans and objectives can always happen during both formal and informal conversations that we have.

My advising style is “adaptive” in the sense that I strive to adapt my mentoring style to meet the needs and desires of each individual mentee. A common theme of my advising philosophy is a foundation of strong communication. Establishing an open and honest communication at the onset can go a long way towards an effective collaboration. We will discuss your overall interests, mentoring strategies that work well for you, and long-term goals during your first week and I will use that information to guide my advising style. If you ever have any concerns regarding my advising philosophy, please let me know! As academics, we are all constantly trying to learn, and I certainly value any feedback that can help me to become a more effective advisor.

Lab Culture

The SEFS lab works in a collaborative and open science environment. We rely on trust and respect to build effective partnerships. We strive to improve and expand our skill sets through research, education, learning, and sharing knowledge.

- The lab is meant to be a safe and welcoming place. We strive to provide a supportive environment for all people, regardless of their background and identity.
- We ask one another for help when needed and we help each other when we can.
- We strive to be active listeners, approach discussions with an open mind, and listen with the intent to understand.
- We acknowledge our mistakes and try our best to learn from them.
- We continue to grow and change. We are always learning and looking for better ways of doing our work and accept constructive criticism with the goal of improving.

Time Requirements and Time Management

Time management is an essential part of graduate school and is one of the most important skills you will need to develop to be effective at balancing your research, classwork, and other tasks you engage in while at NC State. Every lab member is expected to finish their tasks on time. In general, there are no fixed hours for the office or remote locations. The hours when people are expected to be working vary by project, and can include mornings, evenings, and weekends when needed (particularly if field work is involved). Please be considerate of other people’s time and do not make them wait unnecessarily for you. If something should come up where you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me (and other people who are involved) to let them know your status. Of course, we will not always meet deadlines as life tends to get in the way. In such situations where you think you will not meet a deadline (either a hard deadline that is fixed or a more flexible deadline we set together to accomplish a research task) communicating this ahead of time will be important in order to figure out the correct solution.

Everyone in the lab is responsible for letting me know if you will be away for an extended period of time (i.e., 3 or more days as a result of, e.g., vacation, health, remote field work, conference).

It is important to know ahead of time if you are likely to be difficult to reach or slow to respond for an extended period of time. As mentioned above, varying the days and times you work during the week is totally fine (i.e., take off a weekday because you worked on a Saturday or Sunday). You do not have to let me know if you are planning to work slightly different hours than what you usually do. If your work schedule highly varies from typical work hours, I suggest you communicate this with me so I can plan accordingly.

I do not have any strict requirements as far as mandating you to work all hours in the office on campus. You are more than welcome to work some days (or parts of days) remotely if you would prefer doing so, and I of course understand that life scenarios often make it much easier to work from home. That of course is one of the beauties of quantitative work. However, I do typically expect you to be working in your office on campus at least 3 days per week, particularly during the school year. I also highly recommend meetings with other NC State faculty, staff, and/or students are done in-person if at all possible, unless there are specific reasons that it needs to be on Zoom (e.g., they requested it to be on Zoom). If you expect that you will work from home more than 3 days per week, please discuss this with me so we can establish a good routine.

Personal Life and Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is essential!! While I ask a lot out of you, I do not want you to interpret that as meaning that I want you to constantly work. Rather, if you are feeling burned out, overwhelmed at work, or behind on goals that we have set together, I would highly prefer having a discussion on how we can resolve the problem as opposed to you working extremely long days and getting increasingly stressed. I expect all my advisees to have a personal life outside of the lab and to ensure that they find a fruitful and healthy balance between personal and work life. Raleigh is too awesome of a place to not have a life outside of the office!

It is important to remember that each person's approach to achieving a work-life balance will be different and depends on the large variety of life activities that we all have. I strongly recommend establishing a schedule for when you work and trying to stick to that schedule as much as possible. The nature of research is such that there is always more that can be done. That concept, while exciting and one of the many, many things I love about research, can also lead to very stressful situations if you don't establish boundaries between work and personal life. Having set times of the day and week when you do work versus when you don't work is crucial. My schedule is somewhat atypical in the hours I work due to child care and the fact that I go to bed very early. I generally work during the week from 3:30am-5:45am and 8:15am-4:00pm. I am not working during all of these hours (I take a lot of walking breaks), but those are the general hours that I am available by email and engaged in work-related tasks. I generally do not do any work after 4:00pm, which allows me to relax with my family. Of course, this schedule may change as my personal life changes over time, but at the current moment in time this has become an effective way of achieving a work-life balance.

Conduct

Respect of Others

The SEFS Lab values and respects all forms of diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, immigrant generation status, nationality, religion, and worldview, among other dimensions. Raleigh and the broader Research Triangle area are very culturally diverse locations, which provides an outstanding opportunity to learn about cultures you may not be familiar with. I expect all lab members to respect other forms of diversity and to continuously reflect on how our backgrounds, perspectives, and previous experiences shape the viewpoints that we have today. As an advisor, I strive to understand and respect your positions and how they inform your work. All lab members are required to show respect to others in the SEFS Lab, FER, and NC State community.

Relationships with other advisees. As a graduate student, I encourage you to form positive relationships with other lab members. The SEFS Lab will be most successful when there is a friendly and collaborative environment among all students, postdocs, and myself. It is crucial that the relationships are supportive and not competitive. It is important to remember that different students are working on different projects, have different timelines, and/or may enter the program with different experiences, all of which may lead to different speeds of progressing through the graduate program. I encourage you to seek advice from other students and postdocs in the lab. The more opinions you hear in addition to mine, the more quickly you will be able to start formulating your own perspectives on important research topics. As you progress through your program, I will expect you to provide guidance to newer members of the lab as they begin their program. You will also have opportunities to mentor undergraduate students in the lab, both to assist you with your graduate program research, as well as assisting the undergraduate students on independent research projects they are pursuing.

Ethics. All members of the SEFS Lab should familiarize themselves with, and abide by, the following code of conducts:

- North Carolina State University's Student Code of Conduct.
- NC State's General Code of Conduct and Ethics.

If you believe someone has violated the Code of Conduct or has displayed inappropriate or discriminatory behavior to others in the lab, please report it to me and I will take the appropriate action to address the situation. If the incident involves me, or for whatever reason you are uncomfortable reporting the incident to me, please contact Dr. Erin Sills, Department Head, FER (my supervisor).

Resolving conflicts. Communication is key to minimizing conflicts. For example, this document is an effort to clearly communicate my expectations to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings between my advisees and me. One of my primary goals for each of my advisee relationships is to have open and strong communication between both parties of the collaboration. If you have concerns about your interaction with me or with anyone else in the

SEFS Lab, please don't hesitate to come talk with me. If you are uncomfortable speaking with me about your concern, please consult the Department Chair (Dr. Erin Sills) or Associate Department Chair (Dr. Chris Moorman) or the Department HR Liason (Colin Stepien). If you wish a conversation to remain anonymous, be sure to indicate that at the start of the conversation.

Meetings and Consultation

Lab Group Meetings. Lab meetings will generally take place each week during the fall and spring semesters. I will adjust the time of the meetings to align with all current lab members' schedules. Meetings will also take place during the summer, but the schedule will likely be more intermittent. Summer meetings may take place at more fun locations with cold beverages, good food, and outdoor seating. Lab meetings are in person and I expect all lab members to come to each meeting, or inform me if they are unable to make the meeting for a given week.

FER Department Seminar. Having a strong department community is very important for making the work environment more positive, and is something I feel quite strongly about. To help foster department community, I require all students and postdocs in the SEFS lab to attend the weekly FER Department Seminars. If you are getting a degree in Forestry and Environmental Resources, attendance of these seminars will be required as part of the required FOR 801 course. I almost always attend the seminars unless their scheduling conflicts with a class I teach. These seminars highlight the breadth of environmental research across NC State. Plus, there's usually free snacks and coffee :)

Individual Meetings. I expect my advisees to schedule individual 1 hour weekly meetings with me and to schedule additional ad-hoc meetings as necessary. There is no specific agenda required for these meetings, rather they serve as a mutual check-in about progress on projects and life in general. However, you should come to each meeting with a clear idea of the agenda or goals of the meeting and communicate that with me ahead of time as needed.

Time Requirements. I will always do my best to provide timely feedback on publications, presentations, and other projects you are doing as part of your graduate program. Below are a set of general guidelines to follow when seeking my feedback on something. These are the maximum time limits I will take to respond to you (unless I am out of the office, teaching a field course, or if there is some extraordinary life circumstance). I of course understand that there are exceptional circumstances when you may need feedback on something in a shorter amount of time. If you communicate with me regarding why you need a faster turnaround then the dates given below, then I will likely be understanding. However, if you continuously are seeking feedback on shorter timelines than outlined below, we will have a discussion to make clear our expectations are aligned.

- Review of a full manuscript draft: 2 weeks
- Review of one or two sections of a manuscript: 1 week

- Presentation: 1 week (also ensure that we discuss the presentation in person before you present)
- Letter of Recommendation: 3 weeks
- Coding/analysis help: 1 week

Communication. I use three primary forms of communication: email, text, phone calls. My personal phone number is (585) 683-4170. For larger work-related questions, I typically prefer that you send me an email. You can generally expect me to respond to an email from you within 24 hours (or on a Monday if you send it to me late on Friday). My approach to email is that I will strive to respond to you as quick as I can. If the email is just a quick question or request for a meeting, then we can take care of that quickly. If the email is asking for me to review something, then I will respond quickly to acknowledge I received your message and then respond later with the review within the time span described above. For a quick question or if communicating regarding field work, text messages or phone calls work great. I am fine with you texting/emailing me outside of work hours (since we all may work at different times).

I will strive to help you find the resources you need, but I also recognize that I may not always be the best resource. In such instances, you may want to find assistance outside the lab, whether it be a question related to your research or a more personal issue (e.g., difficulty with work-life balance, conflict with another lab member). A few resources that may be helpful in these situations include:

- NCSU Counseling Center (https://counseling.dasa.ncsu.edu/)
- Dr. Erin Sills, Department Head, FER
- Colin Stepien, FER HR Liason

Most days I work from campus in my office (Jordan 3115), usually somewhere around the hours of 8:15am-4:00pm, which is when I am most likely to respond to emails. Whenever my door is open, please feel free to come in to ask a research question, get some coffee, or have an ad-hoc meeting. If I'm in the middle of something then I'll let you know, but please don't hesitate to stop in and ask. If my door is closed, that almost always means I'm not there, am in a zoom meeting, or am focusing on something, so I won't be available to talk. On average, I work from home about 1 day every two weeks, in which case email/text will be the quickest way to reach me.

Independence

One of my overarching goals for you as a graduate student is for you to develop the skills and training you need to lead independent research projects. In general, the amount of responsibility you have to independently lead your research projects will increase in proportion to the time you have been in the program. In your first research project, we will work very closely together throughout all stages of the project. It is my hope that this process will help you to better understand the complete process of doing scientific research. As you progress through your program, you will be increasingly responsible for different components of your research project,

such that towards the end of your program you will feel more comfortable with the research process. Generally, I expect PhD students to have more independence on their dissertation chapters than M.S. students, although this is of course dependent on the specific project and individual. Regardless of your program or how long you've been in the program, it is your responsibility to know the requirements of your research project, coursework, graduate program, funding source, and important deadlines for your program and deliverables (e.g., reports, presentations, meetings, publications). While I will strive to assist you in ensuring you meet all graduate program deadlines, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure you meet the deadlines.

Publications and Authorship

Publishing peer-reviewed research as part of your thesis or dissertation is the main form of product I expect from you. Published manuscripts are often the most important product you can generate from your graduate program in terms of making you competitive on the future job market. I require PhD students to produce 3-4 peer-reviewed publications from a dissertation and M.S students to produce 1-2 peer-reviewed publications. When we are planning your thesis/dissertation program, we will outline your different chapters and how these will form into peer-reviewed manuscripts. For a PhD program, you should have at least 1 manuscript submitted for peer review by the time you take your comprehensive exams. At the time of a PhD defense, two of your chapters should be published (or close to it) with the other 1-2 manuscripts submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. When defending a M.S. thesis, the 1-2 manuscripts that comprise your program will ideally be in peer-review. There will be situations where it is not possible to meet these guidelines, and as long as there is clear communication between the two of us then we can determine the best plan of action. There will also be opportunities to get involved in other projects as a co-author on different manuscripts.

Authorship. As with most things in the lab, early communication is essential for determining authorship arrangements! If you ever have a question regarding authorship for yourself or someone who assisted you on a project, please discuss these concerns with me and we can determine a good plan of action. On your dissertation/thesis chapters, you will generally be the first author and I will be last author. I will generally expect you to serve as the corresponding author on most manuscripts you serve as first-author for, with the possible exception of your first manuscript that you submit. These authorship roles can be changed at a later date if we discuss them and mutually agree upon them. Usually, the first author has played the lead role in the project execution and will take the lead in writing the manuscript and overseeing the revision process. I expect the first author to retain primary responsibility for the publication process even if they graduate from their current position and move onto another job. The same general procedure applies to authorship for conference presentations as well.

In general, the SEFS Lab will follow APA Guidelines for publications: "Authorship credit should reflect the individual's contribution to the study. An author is considered anyone involved with initial research design, data collection and analysis, manuscript drafting, and final approval. However, the following do not necessarily qualify for authorship: providing funding or resources,

mentorship, or contributing research but not helping with the publication itself. The primary author assumes responsibility for the publication, making sure that the data are accurate, that all deserving authors have been credited, that all authors have given their approval to the final draft; and handles responses to inquiries after the manuscript is published."

Expectations as first author: The primary author assumes responsibility for the publication/report, making sure that the data are accurate, methods are described correctly, results are repeatable (e.g., scripts are functional, models converge), and cited literature is appropriate and understood. This responsibility is arguably more important than ever before given the increasing use of AI in assisting in some manner with academic research. Additionally, the lead author is responsible for verifying the manuscript meets journal requirements prior to submission (e.g., text length, figure requirements, supplemental files, etc.)

Old, unpublished projects: When projects require significant lab resources (e.g., time, money, labor), lab members are given 3 years after graduation or moving on to another position to publish the work. After that time, I reserve the right to re-assign the project as needed to expedite publication. We always want the transfer of data and projects to be a coordinated, agreed upon step (e.g, graduate student graduates and gets a full-time job, no longer has the time to be lead author, but can assist as co-author), but recognize this is not always the situation.

Professional Meetings. You will have opportunities to present your research in both formal and informal settings.

Below are some presentation expectations:

- As lead author, you are responsible for developing the presentation.
- Formal presentations will be shared with co-authors prior to the presentation.
- You must coordinate with me as some funding agencies also have strict requirements about reviewing public presentations (e.g., 2-week review period prior to presentation).

Developing a professional network is essential, regardless of your career objectives, and so I strive to provide you with different networking opportunities both around the Research Triangle as well as at professional meetings and conferences. Typically, I can support your attendance and presentation at one scientific conference per year to present your research. However, the availability of funds for travel depends on numerous factors (e.g., what grant your funded on, where the conference is). There are also often small travel grants available at NC State that can assist in funding a conference trip. We should discuss what conferences are of interest to determine the best plan of action given your research and career objectives.

Funding: We will discuss the funding that is paying you for your position during your first week to make sure we both understand the expectations that we have for one another. Typically, I will only bring students into my lab if I can guarantee two years of funding for a M.S. program and four years of funding for a PhD program. I am also happy to work with you on developing proposals for external fellowships.

Teaching: Teaching requirements will vary across the specific details of your position. If you have teaching requirements as part of your position, this should be clearly outlined in your offer letter, or some other official documentation from NC State. If it is not and you believe you have teaching responsibilities, please discuss this with me as soon as possible. Regardless of whether teaching or TA duties are part of your program, engaging in teaching, mentoring, or consulting at some point during your program is an excellent way to help determine what career path is right for you, and just to learn more about how to best communicate science/statistics with others.

Data Management: Data Management is crucial to a successful project. Per NCSU regulations, data collected as part of funded research projects and/or as part of official duties are owned by the University, State, or funding agency and must be maintained and available during and after the project. This includes the data and metadata to describe and interpret data file fields.

Data back-up: You are responsible for backing up your data and metadata files. Options include an external hard drive or cloud options (e.g., Github, google drive). Data must be stored in a minimum of two locations (e.g., your desktop/laptop hard drive and a separate google drive). I recommend backing up your work once a day or at minimum once a week.

Data archival: Upon completion of your project, you must archive all data, metadata, and scripts so that results from your work are reproducible. Archives can include the lab Github or a similar online repository (e.g., Zenodo).

Reproducible research: You must upload minimally sufficient data and scripts associated with reports and publications to the lab Github. Files must be well commented, include metadata files, and be able to reproduce the results in the report or publication. Prior to final upload, you must have another lab mate review and run the files to verify they are functional. Take a look at this manuscript for some good guidelines to follow regarding functional and reproducible research.

Data lifecycle:

1. All data (raw and modified) should be backed up (see above) along with local copies (stored on your hard drive).
2. All data cleaning, processing, quality control should be documented including necessary scripts and steps used.
3. All analyses should be clearly documented and all scripts and steps should be included and archived.
4. All final products (steps 1-3) should be uploaded and included on the lab Github page.

Guidelines for Accomplishing Graduate Program Requirements

Below are a few general guidelines that will be good to follow during your graduate program. The specific timepoints are not requirements, but this should give you a good idea of what you should be doing or preparing for during different points of your program:

- Form your committee as soon as possible! You should strive to confirm the members of your committee during your first semester. The earlier members of your committee are

identified and brought into the loop on your program, the fewer problems there tend to be towards the end of your program.
- Strive to have 1 committee meeting per semester (spring and fall).
- For a PhD program, preliminary examinations should be taken during the beginning or middle of your third year.
- For both preliminary examinations and defense, you need to provide information on the exact date at least two weeks beforehand to the graduate school. There are a lot of important steps to follow when taking your exams or defending, so I encourage you to talk with Steve Griffin (the FER graduate program coordinator) to ensure you are following all the right tasks. Don't save scheduling to the last minute!
- 9 hours of credits are required per semester for graduate students.

Summary of My Expectations for Graduate Students:

You will:

- strive to maintain a high level of professionalism during work and school activities, including acting ethically and following the NCSU Code of Student Conduct (https://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01/).
- ask me or the appropriate contact for clarifications on anything that is unclear.
- know the requirements of your degree program, including important milestones such as coursework, credit requirements, committee formation, and proposal/thesis submission.
- attend lab meetings. If you cannot attend, you must inform me.
- schedule a 1 hour weekly meeting with me.
- come prepared to meetings, which includes a clear idea of the agenda or goals for the meeting.
- attend the FER department seminar series.
- keep meeting notes and track of your research progress.
- keep me informed of your research progress and timelines.
- keep your collaborators informed about your research and progress.
- critically review my comments on your drafts (not simply "accept all") and ask questions if a suggestion is unclear or does not seem justified/appropriate.
- ensure that your research data are backed up and final products are reproducible.
- strive to improve and grow in your career interests.