Mentor-mentee contract

Student/employee: Rylee Tomey **Mentor**: Jonathon Valente

Semester: Spring 2025 **Anticipated completion date**: 30 September 2029

Current career goals:

Positions:

- Work within a federal agency in a data management/analyst, branding/engagement/social, or supervisor/director position
- Academia as a professor that leads an active research laboratory
- Geospatial/remote sensing analyst for private sector (e.g. Google earth) or federal government (e.g. USGS, NASA)
- Research/Develop products in the pharmaceutical and biotech sector

Focus:

- Wildlife – preferably medium to large mammals
- Applied research
- Innovative tools, techniques, technologies
- Population modeling – conservation concern to estimating harvest limits
- Zoonotic diseases – from emerging to neglected
- Data management and visualization - public platforms more than confidential

Achievements:

- Be the first author on a manuscript that is published in a high impact journal
- Apply for and receive a research grant or fellowship to support current or future projects
- Contribute as an author to a book chapter that gets published and purchased
- Manage my first independent research study from identifying a research need to publishing the findings in a peer-reviewed journal
- Create and distribute a tool to make technical tasks more accessible or streamlined
- Manage a social media account focused on connecting the next generation to nature with instructional videos of ‘backyard’ crafts, foraging, basic survival, common IDs, etc.

Overview

The purpose of this contract is to document mutually agreed upon goals and parameters that will serve as the foundation of your participation in my lab and of our mentor-mentee relationship. Please thoroughly review this contract, add any specific details regarding your expectations for me. We will then discuss this document together, align our expectations, and provide our signatures. We will review the contract twice per semester (once in the middle and once at the end) to ensure you are making progress towards your goals and that we are each meeting our expectations of one another. The contract will be renewed every semester you are active in my lab group.

All students/employees can expect from me

**does not apply to undergraduates*

- I will maintain a positive, supportive, professional environment where all voices are heard and respected regardless of race, skin color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- My ideal workday looks like this:
  - I am at the office by approximately 8:30 am
  - The first two hours of my day are dedicated to writing
  - From 10:30 am – 5 pm I am teaching, having meetings, working on administrative tasks, or whatever else needs to be done. This is the ideal time to schedule interactions with me.
- I will not bother you after 5 pm or on a Saturday/Sunday unless it is an emergency. You are not obligated to respond to any emails or messages I send you after hours unless I specifically state something must be dealt with immediately.
- I will prioritize your physical and mental health. I believe in creating whole, happy, healthy people, so while it is not required, never be afraid to speak with me regarding challenges you have with managing stress, your work-life balance, etc.
- A personalized approach to advising you. No two students are the same, so no two students will receive identical advisement (and you should not expect it).
- I will do my best to ensure that anything requiring your feedback will be provided to you at least 2 weeks before I need it back.
- Financial support within the parameters set forth when you joined the lab. Where possible, I will also strive to support attendance at workshops and conferences.
- Regular lab meetings to keep you apprised of any issues you need to be aware of and to facilitate growth for individuals and the team
- Any issue or conversation you ask me to keep confidential will remain confidential but note that I am required to report any issues that may affect the health or safety of you or anyone else.
- I will discuss authorship with you for any projects to which you contribute. If there are any disagreements over who should be an author, we will follow the rules established here.
- *I will meet with you weekly if you need or want to do so. I am also willing to discuss meeting with you more frequently if you think that is necessary. I will also do my best to manage drop-ins to my office, but I reserve the right to turn you away if you don't have a meeting scheduled.

- ❖ I am committed to your growth as a scientist, in your career, and as a person. I will provide you the best possible advice when you seek it, and help you find additional resources when I feel I am not equipped to handle your requests.

Mentee's additional expectations of Jonathon

- ❖ <u>Current concerns to address</u>

- Make sure that we agree on * bullets and that I note specifics
- I need to pay special attention to or is something I may initially need guidance

- ❖ <u>Anything else you want to discuss and agree to</u>

- I would appreciate if expectations specific to the co-advisor arrangement could be provided so that I don't have to guess or accidentally cause confusion or conflict. For example:
    - Clarify whether I should send drafts to both of you simultaneously or stagger feedback
    - Specify whether feedback should be consolidated before I address it or handled individually for each advisor.
    - Outline how authorship order and contributions will be determined for papers and presentations involving both of you
    - whether I need to copy both of you on every update or if direct communication is preferred for certain tasks
    - Clarify if one advisor will oversee or contribute to specific side projects
- An expectation that I would like to add is that I do not want to make a final decision for disagreements between co-advisors. I would prefer that we just continue discussion until we can all come to an agreement.
- I would like to have a communication plan in place so that we can minimize repetitive conversations (e.g. providing updates down the road) and so that I'm not solely responsible for sharing ideas or decisions made by one advisor to the other advisor

My expectations for all students/employees

**does not apply to undergraduates*

- ❖ You will maintain a positive, supportive, professional environment where all voices are heard and respected regardless of race, skin color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- ❖ *If you are on an assistantship, that means I am technically able to assign you specific duties for up to ~13 hours per week. Most of the time your only duties will be to focus on your thesis/dissertation, but when asked, I expect you to contribute to other efforts (e.g., assist with a funding agency report, vehicle maintenance, or storage room organization).

- *Vacation time is tricky for graduate students, but in general, consider yourself an employee of the university. I do not expect you to work when the university is closed (e.g., on holidays or during the 2-week period the university shuts down in December/January), but otherwise, you are expected to be at work like normal employees
    - Note that the university is **not** closed during spring break and thus I expect you to be working (spring break is for undergrads)
    - Beyond that, you have 4 weeks (20 working days) of vacation time per year. Please keep our group calendar updated with your vacation time.
- I do not want to be contacted about work issues after 5 pm during the week or on Saturday/Sunday unless it is an emergency. This is the life part of my own work-life balance, and it is important to me. Of course, you may send me messages via email or on Teams, but do not expect a reply until work hours.
- You will do your best to ensure that anything requiring feedback will be provided to me at least 2 weeks before you need it back.
    - To that end, you must provide any product (abstracts, publications, theses, dissertations, book chapters, etc.) on which I am a co-author to me in ample time to have it approved through Digital Measures (USGS system) before submission. For presentation abstracts, this takes about a week, and for publications it can take up to 3 weeks.
- You will take charge of your own work. I expect you to be proactive in terms of developing plans, approaches, or solutions and follow up with me for guidance. If you require help from me, I expect you to seek it out.
- If there is a conference or workshop you would like to attend, you will seek funding to help defray the cost if available, as this both saves the project money and looks good on your CV.
- *"Side projects" that do not directly relate to your thesis or dissertation are encouraged but should take a backseat to any thesis/dissertation-related work.
- *I would prefer it if you worked in the office during normal work hours (i.e., 9 am – 5 pm), but I will not enforce this if you are being productive. If you are **not** making sufficient progress, however, I reserve the right to make you work in the office. I also reserve the right to request your presence in the office when necessary (e.g., to help with a group task).
- You will pay attention to your Teams and email messages and respond to those from me and your lab or project colleagues at your earliest convenience (i.e., within 12-24 hours).
    - As noted above, you are not required to respond to messages after hours, on weekends, or while on vacation.
- You will be an active participant in the lab. This means you will attend lab meetings, if possible, come prepared to those meetings (e.g., having done pre-assigned readings), and contribute to discussions, regardless of whether you are spearheading the lab meeting. You will also treat your lab mates with respect and respond to reasonable requests from them in a timely fashion.
- *Graduate students will attend weekly seminars in CFWE, Biology, or another department of your choosing, if possible. Seminars are critical for being exposed to new ideas, tools, and potential collaborators.
- Your data will be formatted according to Tidy data principles and be stored on GitHub in a repository that is accessible to me. In addition, code you want my help with, and any code used to analyze data for a publication will be stored on GitHub and be accessible to me.

- You will follow through on research publications. Most of our work is funded by public money, and we have a responsibility to make our data and findings public.
- You are responsible for staying on track with respect to graduation, meaning you should ensure your coursework satisfies requirements for your degree program and that you are submitting all your documents (e.g., proposal, plan of study) on time.
- You will take care of any project, lab, Coop, or university equipment and treat it carefully. Always return it as soon as possible in the same condition you found it and report any issues that need to be fixed right away. Don't panic over broken equipment because mistakes happen, but it is not acceptable to return something broken or damaged without taking the necessary steps to fix it.
- You will be proactive about physical, personal, and emotional safety for everyone you work with and will report any accidents or safety issues to me immediately.
- *I expect you to do a public presentation of your research proposal, unless otherwise discussed with me and/or your other committee members.
- You will discuss authorship with me for any projects to which I have contributed. If there are any disagreements over who should be an author, we will follow the rules established here.
- *Each semester, you will set goals (using this document) and report back to me on your progress midway through the term and then again at the end of the term. We will construct a new version of this document each semester.

Jonathon's specific expectations of mentee

- Lab group responsibility: Reproducibility manager
  - Develop a database of reproducible figures that others can reference (n = 10 this semester)
  - Initiate a database of code snippets that may be useful across members of the lab
  - Verify any scripts created for reports or publication are reproducible

- Additional expectations:
  - Take a break and enjoy completion of a very big hurdle in your MS degree. Let's try to get you back in the office the first week of February (we can discuss this)
  - Publish the work from your MS. I don't mind you using ~30% of your time to do that this semester. Those publications are going to be critical for your success.
  - I want you to pay close attention to developing a constructive, supportive, and respectful work relationship with the rest of the members of my lab - your project is a bit isolated, but your work will have lots of overlaps with what's being done in the rest of my lab, so there is a great opportunity from you to teach and learn from the others
  - Assist on the sea turtle project as needed
  - I do not expect you to be at CFWE seminars this semester because it overlaps with Ani's class, but I do expect you to attend seminars in other departments when they are pertinent to your work.

Meeting times and places

Where, when, and how frequently will we meet this semester?

Weekly in my office on Tuesdays from 10 am – 11:30 am, or as needed.
Lab meetings on Tuesdays from 11:30 am – 1:00 pm

Mentee's specific semester goals

I've provided some structure for developing these goals, but feel free to make this your own

- My initial list of goals for you to accomplish:
  - Take a break and refresh
  - ~~Complete and submit your MS thesis chapters for publication~~
  - Review and summarize the state of the literature on deer population modeling
  - Review and summarize the ADCNR deer population data available and the current methods for analyzing those data
  - Develop a presentation for ALTWS (depending on whether Dr. Ditchkoff supports this)
  - ~~Develop your theoretical and methodological understanding of individual-based-models (IBMs) and work with Dr. Belsare to learn how to use and apply his deer IBM~~
  - ~~Develop a draft outline for your dissertation~~
    - I think that within ~1 year is a good timeline for having your first committee meeting, complete with your plan of study and proposal. This semester, I'd just like to see a first draft outline of what you're thinking about. I'm not going to hold you to it, but I'd like to start making sure you, me, and Ani are on the same page with where it's going

- ~~Personal goals (if you'd like to share)~~

Catch up on responsibilities
• Sell old car + cancel insurance
• Relaunch Goose TikTok account or close GoldenGoose LLC

Travel using free flight benefits
• Go on first flight with Michael as pilot
• Visit a new country

Start taking weekends off for outdoor activities
• Hike and camp at an AL state park not previously visited
• Resume afternoon walks with goose at Keisel, dinius, town creek, or chewacla
• Participate in at least one orienteering race

❖ Research/writing

MS thesis and manuscript submissions
• Finalize edits for thesis versus manuscripts with Steve, review with committee, submit thesis to AU
• Incorporate JWD reviewer and editor changes to 'history' manuscript, re-submit (due 03/14)
• Meet with committee to get definitive additions needed for 'bait fate' manuscript
• Write and run code for additional analyses + incorporate into draft, tables, and figures for 'bait fate'
• Share updated manuscript with committee + back and forth on suggestions/edits, submit to JWM

Shift gears to PhD literature and thinking
• Briefly review basics of white-tailed deer biology, ecology and population processes
• Status and prior contributions made to deer population modeling programs and literature
• Methods and concepts needed for practical and technical understanding of IBMs
• Identification of entities and estimates needed for WTD IBMs in Alabama

Dissertation Development
• Identify chapters and narrow down objectives for each chapter with committee
• Review and summarize the ADCNR deer population data available and the current methods for analyzing those data
• Review literature notes for state of IBMs and WTD management → research justification
• Brainstorm materials and methods with Ani and Jonathon
• Create skeleton outline for dissertation draft then add details, examples, and relevant literature for each section

❖ Classes

Ani – Deer population modeling
• Refresh on the basic concepts, processes, and analyses related to wildlife populations
• Utilize time to ask Ani questions about theoretical and methodological understanding of individual-based-models (IBMs) from reviewing literature
• Take time to learn NetLogo and coding language using subset of ADCNR data and simple If/Then scenarios

❖ Administrative responsibilities

MS → PhD Data Management
• Condense current MS materials to one central location + check that materials are up to date
• Framework and folders for PhD material organization – OneDrive, outlook, box drive, literature app
• Finish organizing new laptop + work with Seamus to add missing apps

Work through list of tasks that got postponed during last months of MS
• DOI motor vehicle certification + hazard assessment (due early February)
• Notes from recorded deer management webinar and paper Jonathon shared
• Move CV to word and update

❖ Service

Lean on Jonathon and lab mates for becoming more active
•

❖ Enrichment

Hopefully address at the half semester – I have too many irons in the fire right now
•

❖ Lab responsibilities

Develop structured but simple repository and workflow
• Set up organized GitHub repository with guidelines for lab mates so that reproducibility checks flow as the repository grows
• Pull code snippets from workshops, classes, notes, and research that are generally useful + figures
• Walk through basic repository with lab then discuss suggestions, requests for specific figures or code snippets, and brainstorm other improvements to maximize usefulness to lab
• Invite lab to contribute code snippets or figures + add code found while reviewing literature

❖ Other

Contribute to sea turtle project
• Attend meetings and participate in discussions, assist whenever needed
• Keep organized notes on ideas for figures and tables from meetings and review of data received

• Screenshot/reference figure/tables for inspiration from the reproducibility manager findings and literature review

Resume wildlife biologist health knowledge survey when time
• Review data cleaning code and data structure and conduct comparative analysis
• Interpretation and simple figures and tables to share with group
• Schedule a meeting with group to share results + assign responsibilities for manuscript

Student signature: Rylee Tomey Date: 1/17/2025

Mentor signature: Jonathon J Valente Date: 17 December 2025