



Mentor-mentee contract

Student/employee: Rylee Tomey

Mentor: Jonathon Valente

Semester: Summer 2025

Anticipated completion date: 30 September 2029

Current career goals:

1. Apply for and receive a research grant or fellowship
2. Publish something related to PhD dissertation (short comm, methods)
3. Be the first author on a manuscript that is published in a high-impact journal

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.

[Jonathon's voice in blue below.](#)

Summary of Spring 2025 contract meeting

Meeting: 13 May 2025

Rylee's expectations of Jonathon

You expressed no reservations in terms of how things have been going with me as a mentor/advisor. You specifically stated that you appreciate the personalized approach that I try to give to students and that you think it's working well for you. You also stated that you appreciate the regular check-ins, and that meeting every other week has been working better for you because you also have expectations to meet with your other advisor, Dr. Belsare. One of your major concerns for this first semester was that you'd run into challenges with balancing feedback from two advisors and you stated that you didn't want to have to mitigate any conflicts between your advisors. You specifically included this as an expectation, but we discussed how important it is for you to be the one taking the reigns of this project and being in the driver's seat. That may mean that sometimes you need to make the final decision when Dr. Belsare and I disagree, and that is ok, and something you need to learn to be comfortable with. You also mentioned that having group meetings with me and Dr. Belsare is helpful to ensure we are all on the same page, and that you would like to continue that in the future. You have not participated in many of our social lab events, and I told you that was absolutely fine; that's by no means a requirement, but I also asked if there was anything holding you back that I could address. You said there was not anything specific you needed from me.

Jonathon's expectations of Rylee

You have done a good job of helping me to maintain a positive and supportive environment for your colleagues in the lab. You've worked hard on learning about deer population modeling with Dr. Belsare this semester and on trying to wrap up your MS thesis projects. Your communication has been strong, and you are timely with responding to my requests. I also see how seriously you take this exercise of goal-setting and self-evaluation, and I think that shows a growth mindset that will help you continue to improve. Although we assigned you to be the lab "reproducibility manager" this semester, I did not have time to work with you on developing that niche, so I have nothing negative to report there. This summer I'd like to work harder on figuring out how to integrate that role into the lab workflow.

One you volunteered is that you've been dealing with some personal issues that have kept you from being as engaged and productive as you'd like to be. I appreciate the open communication because that helps me manage my expectations of you. With that said, we discussed a few things you can improve on. First, it would be valuable for you to spend more time in the office because it will facilitate interaction with your colleagues and hopefully have positive effects on your mental health. Secondly, I want you to focus more on your dissertation this summer and less on your thesis. I have no problem with you spending ~20% of your time (~ 1 day per week) on your thesis publications, but it's time to really buckle down on your PhD project. I would like to see you take control of this project, particularly now that Conner has left. I want you to move away from asking Dr. Belsare and me what to do next, and more towards steering your dissertation in the direction you want it to go, then soliciting feedback from us. In the coming weeks, I want

you to develop a dissertation plan with consideration to whether we should bring on another student to replace Conner. While it is not applicable this summer, I also want you to prioritize attending seminars in CFWE or other departments at Auburn to help you gain exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking.

Semester goals

One goal we set for you was to find time to take a break and refresh from your marathon thesis-writing session. You noted that you are feeling less burnt out, so I would like to say we met that goal. You also submitted your first thesis chapter for publication and made revisions on it. You've made good progress on understanding the state-of-the-art with deer population modeling through Dr. Belsare's class. You did not get much work done in terms of writing and outlining your thesis, at least not on paper, so we will move those goals to the summer and I'd like to see you really focus on putting pen to paper so we can get a framework for your dissertation (and the role of another MS student if we choose to hire one).

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

- ❖ Current concerns to address
- ❖ Anything else you want to discuss and agree to
 - Unless otherwise needed, I would like to schedule bi-weekly meetings to offset weeks with Ani's lab meetings – [This works for me](#)
 - Plan a monthly meeting with Jonathon/Ani to streamline communication – [This also works for me, but I'd like you to be in charge of organizing those meetings](#)
 - Group calendar/vacation time – visit/work from home 1-2 weeks during summer? – [I have no problems with you taking a little time off to be with family this summer, as long as you're keeping your semester goals in mind. We currently do not have a lab calendar, but I'll make one and keep you posted.](#)

My expectations for all students/employees

**does not apply to undergraduates*

[I've highlighted the specific sections below that I'd like to see you work on this summer.](#)

- ❖ 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
 - We will try to be more proactive about figuring out what this looks like this summer.
- ❖ Additional expectations:
 - Continue working towards publishing your MS work, but refrain from spending more than ~20% of your time on this.
 - 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
 - You will take control of the deer project. Now that you are the only graduate student on this grant, we need you to be the leader.
 - Work on moving away from a "what should I do next" mindset and more towards a "here's what I think we should do next..." mindset
 - Develop a presentation for SEAFWA
 - Work with Justin, Darcey, and Austin to integrate additional camera trapping into our fall sampling season.

Meeting times and places

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

Weekly in my office on Tuesdays from 10 am – 11:00 am, or as needed.

Mentee's specific semester goals

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

- ❖ See the first MS thesis chapter through to publication
- ❖ Review and summarize the state of the literature on deer population modeling
- ❖ Develop a thorough outline for your dissertation
- ❖ Develop a draft plan of study for Ani and I to review with you
 - In particular, decide on what classes you'll take this fall and enroll.
- ❖ Develop a presentation for SEAFWA
- ❖ 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

- ❖ Decide on whether you want to incorporate additional camera trap surveys into our lab workflow, and if so, how to implement that.
- ❖ Help the PIs decide on whether we should bring on a new MS student, and if so, what s/he would work on.

The information below here was input by Rylee and does not represent specific expectations from Jonathon, although much of it is integrated into the goals and expectations we've agreed on above. Rylee, please feel free to update or edit as you find useful.

- Research/writing

<u>Draft outline for dissertation</u>		<u>Due Date – Initial (ongoing develop)</u>
	<u>Define chapters/ main objectives</u>	<u>End of May</u>
<u>For 1-2 chapters ↓</u>	<u>Organizing existing research and programmatic efforts</u>	<u>Mid-June</u>
	<u>Learn/understand nitty gritty of quantitative methods</u>	
	<u>Identify potential materials and methods for each research question based on gaps</u>	<u>End-June</u>

<u>SEAFWA abstract</u>		<u>Due Date – July 12</u>
	<u>Develop a feasible presentation goal for submission</u>	<u>Start of June</u>
	<u>Presentation topic / analyses completed</u>	<u>End of June</u>
	<u>Abstract draft to Jonathon/Ani</u>	<u>End of June</u>

- Classes

<u>Bayesian Statistics?</u>		<u>Due Date – August 9</u>
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- Administrative responsibilities

<u>Study Plan</u>		<u>Due Date - August 9</u>
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- Service

<u>Participate in Chewacla or other invasive/trash pick up</u>
<u>Help lab with fieldwork/equipment</u>

- Enrichment

Wood carving

- Lab responsibilities

<u>Reproducibility Check</u>		<u>Due Date</u>
	<u>Meeting with Jonathon + lab mates</u>	

	<u>Complete checks</u>	
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<u>Initiate a database for shared scripts</u>		<u>Due Date</u>
	<u>Organize noted/collected examples + data</u>	<u>End of June</u>
	<u>organize folder structure + navigation</u>	<u>Mid July</u>
	<u>Input code</u>	<u>End of July</u>

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- Other

Take charge of work

Student signature: Rylee Tomey

Date: 05/18/2025

Mentor signature: _____

Date: _____