ESSIC guidelines and expectations for Research Associate and Early Career Research Scientist appointees, and their Mentors

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For brevity, throughout this document we will refer to “RA/ECRS” for Research Associate (RA) and Early Career Research Scientist (ECRS) appointees.

The document is based on information gathered from three excellent sources:

a. UC Santa Barbara Postdoctoral Scholar Mentoring Guidelines:
c. University of Calgary: http://www.ucalgary.ca/postdoc/postdocpolicy

For additional information, see also:
Postdoctoral Appointments at the University of Maryland
http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/postdoctoral_fellows/postdoctoral_appointments.html
1. **What is expected of the RA/ECRS Appointees?**

The RA/ECRS appointee:

a. Is responsible for signing off on, and adhering to, the Letter of Offer;

b. Is responsible, with the Faculty Supervisor, for being informed of, and complying with, all University and applicable funding agency policies and procedures;

c. Is responsible, with the Faculty Supervisor, for developing at the start of the appointment period a clear understanding of rights and obligations under the policies and procedures on research, patents, conflict of interest, fraud and any other relevant issues;

d. Should communicate regularly with his/her supervisor;

e. Is expected to publish the results of his/her research in a timely manner;

f. Record and document research results appropriately, and identify the sources of funding in all publications, presentations (oral or poster) and any other statements;

g. Fulfill specific research and training objectives;

h. Comply with any professional codes of ethics governing the practice of the discipline;

i. Comply with all relevant federal, state and municipal regulations and guidelines;

If the appointee will be engaged in other specific activities, such as teaching, these expectations should be stated in the letter of appointment or in a subsequent written communication.

2. **Being a Good Mentor**

The supervising faculty member is expected to be a mentor to the RA/ECRS appointee, providing training and supervision. As part of the annual reappointment process the mentor is expected to write an evaluation or progress report of the RA/ECRS appointee’s activities in a manner that is clear and timely. These reports should be provided to the appointee and forwarded to the Director of the Unit. Mentors have the responsibility to provide an appropriate educational experience that helps to advance the career of the RA/ECRS appointee.

Scientific mentoring is a personal, one-on-one relationship between a more experienced scientist and a junior scientist through which the trainee receives guidance and encouragement that contributes to professional development.

**Why Should You Be a Good Mentor?**

Good mentoring should be viewed as an essential ingredient for ensuring that the RA/ECRS-mentor relationship is professionally productive. Mentors also often mention deriving personal satisfaction in helping nurture the next generation of scientists.
**Traits of a Good Mentor**

- **Accessibility**: An open door and an approachable attitude.
- **Empathy**: Personal insight into what the trainee is experiencing.
- **Open mindedness**: Respect for each trainee’s individuality and for working styles and career goals that may be different from those of the mentor.
- **Consistency**: Acting on your stated principles on a regular basis.
- **Patience**: Awareness that people make mistakes and that each person matures at his or her own rate.
- **Honesty**: Ability to communicate the hard truths about the trainee’s chances of success.
- **Savviness**: Attention to the pragmatic aspects of career development.
- **Trust**: As a mentor you are privy to considerable information about your trainee, including accomplishments, failures, financial situations and possibly even personal information. Information should be treated as confidential so your trainees feel they can trust you and share their ideas and problems with you.

**Strategies for Effective Mentoring**

- Make everything a learning opportunity
- Set specific goals and measures of accomplishment
- Encourage strategic thinking and creativity
- Uphold professional standards
- Impart skills
- Provide networking opportunities
- Give moral support
- Work toward improving and refining the person’s skills during the RA/ECRS training period.

3. **Orientation**

- Introduce the RA/ECRS to the research team, department administrators, and other colleagues.
- Ensure the RA/ECRS is aware of policy and guidelines that apply to him/her.
- Familiarize the RA/ECRS with the office/lab space, equipment, ordering supply process, lab procedures, and standing meetings of the lab.
- Familiarize the RA/ECRS with all the Unit’s administrative procedures, including those related to business travel arrangements.
- Discuss funding expectations. Is the RA/ECRS expected to apply for fellowships or will s/he be supported on training and/or research grants?
- Discuss research expectations. What knowledge is s/he expected to have and what will be taught? What are the research milestones?

**Evaluation**

- The mentor shall conduct periodic reviews with the RA/ECRS but no less than once per year in order to assess the RA/ECRS’ performance and provide constructive feedback.
- The annual review should assess the RA/ECRS’ progress to date, strengths, areas needing improvement, expectations and goals, and potential for a research career in the discipline.
Career Preparation

• Assess the RA/ECRS’s talents and skills and discuss career options.
• Encourage the RA/ECRS to engage in networking activities (introduce to colleagues at professional meetings, seminars, via email).
• Offer opportunities for the RA/ECRS to develop supervisory skills by allowing him/her to supervise students or other research staff.
• Encourage research independence.
• Encourage senior RA/ECRS to apply for grants that will provide bridge funding for independent research.
• Inform and encourage RA/ECRS to participate and attend workshops and seminars
• Encourage RA/ECRS to gain teaching experience by allowing them to give a lecture in the classroom, co-teach, present a seminar, or teach a summer session course.
• Assist with the job search (review CV, applications, interview format and questions, presentation, and write letters of recommendation).
• Encourage RA/ECRS to actively seek opportunities for professional experience and advancement (e.g., volunteer on committees, help organize meetings).