

Sea level group – lab values, culture, and expectations

This statement was prepared by the Sea level group and builds on lab statements by Bärbel Hönisch, Tamara Pico, Jonny Kingslake, and Ryan Abernathy. This is an evolving document!

Lab Values

The primary goal of this group is scientific discovery. We are united in our passion for understanding the natural environment around us and this group is here to guide, commend, and challenge our views and findings.

We believe that balancing work with sufficient time off to rest, have hobbies, and enjoy family, is fundamental to leading a happy life of which being a scientist is only one part. Mental and physical health receive the highest priority.

We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, disability, or sexual orientation – everyone is welcome here and we cherish diversity in all its facets.

Our group follows the [Lamont Code of Conduct](#), which provides important guidelines for professional conduct.

Group culture

In this lab group, we want to create a respectful, welcoming and inclusive group culture that brings out the best in all of us. To do that everyone is encouraged to

- be aware of our implicit and explicit biases in all interactions
- support others, particularly those at earlier career stage than ourselves
- conduct research in a transparent, reproducible and rigorous way (e.g. using github for code or zenodo for databases). We follow the [FAIR](#) and [CARE](#) principles.
- allow others the space to have input (applies to in-person meetings, virtual meetings, emails, slack threads, comments on documents, etc.)
- respect others' input and show others that you respect them and their input
- communicate with compassion and openness, voice opinions and concerns openly, and lift up other members of the group at all opportunities
- take part in larger scale (e.g. campus-, university-wide) activities to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in geosciences and beyond
- be generous with your ideas and time.

Responsibilities of all group members

- Group members are expected to contribute to community engagement and outreach, including events such as open house.
- Group members are encouraged to attend 1-2 department seminars a week to deepen their knowledge and broaden their horizon. They are also encouraged to meet with the seminar speakers.
- Group members are encouraged to participate in training, discussion groups, and community building events at Lamont.
- Group members are expected to attend our weekly group meeting and are encouraged to give notice if they will miss it.

- If group members are unclear about how long their position is for (e.g. postdoc positions or PhD positions past their 5th year) they are encouraged to reach out to the faculty member for clarification.
- In case of lab-sponsored or lab-centered social events, it is expected that the invitation is extended to all group members.
- Group members are not expected to reply to emails outside of regular office hours with the exception of urgent matters (e.g. pre-conference or proposal deadline crunchtime). If at all, these exceptions should not happen more than a couple of times a year.
- We use slack and emails for lab communications. Group members are expected to check both on a regular basis and respond in a timely manner.
- Group members are expected to back up their work on a regular basis, either on cloud storage or external hard drives (preferably both). The PI will cover costs associated with any back-up services that are chosen.
- Group members are strongly encouraged to point out scientists whose research they found particularly exciting and engaging. These individuals can be invited to give seminars at Lamont or nominated for awards and the PI can provide guidance on how to approach this.
- It is not unusual for postdocs to finish off PhD work during their postdoc. Postdocs should be allowed time to do that, but also need to honor the interests of the funding agency that pays their current salary and research support. If a postdoc moves to a new position before the work started at Lamont is published, the postdoc should plan on publishing that work within a year of leaving the Observatory.

Responsibilities of faculty members

While PIs have many different responsibilities that include research, teaching, and service in the department and community, the wellbeing and needs of group members should always be their top priority. The faculty member / PI is expected to

- offer to have one-on-one meetings once a week with students and every 1-2 weeks with postdocs to reflect on research progress and provide input on next steps
- provide funding for students and postdocs through proposals or departmental funds. While students might be asked for input on writing proposals, they are not expected to spend significant time on them. Postdocs are encouraged to submit proposals but the faculty member is responsible for guaranteeing salary support for the time that has been discussed during hiring
- provide resources (computer, lab equipment, ...) and shared office space
- provide funding for one conference a year for postdocs and PhD students after their first year. Students and postdocs can have green money or research funds in hand as well to allow supplementing costs, this should be discussed between the faculty member and student / postdoc. For additional conferences the faculty member and student/postdoc will decide together, and the faculty member will try their best to provide funding for the conferences/ workshops that are agreed to help the student/postdoc advance
- connect students/postdocs to fruitful collaborators

- provide clear expectations for grad students'/postdocs' role in research projects and in writing manuscripts
- provide research ideas, especially in the early years of the PhD, which have publication promise within ~2 years
- return manuscripts with comments / edits within two weeks. The PI might not always be able to meet this and in that case the PI is expected to communicate this delay to the student / postdoc.*
- respond to important emails in a timely manner (<1 week). If students / postdocs are awaiting email responses, they are encouraged to send a reminder email after a week.

Responsibilities specific to graduate students (PhD)

- Students should take initiative in applying for external funding in their first or second year (e.g. NSF GRFP). They are also encouraged to apply for student travel funds for conferences and summer schools.
- Students should aim to submit a first manuscript by the end of their third year and should aim to have at least three publications by the time they graduate (including in review). Every PhD is different and some work will take a lot longer than others. The faculty advisor should be mindful of every PhD student's specific circumstances.
- Students presenting at a conference are expected to share slides or the poster before the meeting for feedback (1 week before departure to the meeting). This should occur without being prompted by the advisor.
- Students are expected to spend the large majority of their time on performing their own research and taking classes (over extra-curricular or service activities).
- Per DEES guideline, students are expected to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher to remain in good standing. Beyond that, grades are not an important part of the students' assessment during graduate school and if the student chooses to apply for an academic job after graduate school. However, grades might be given more weight if a student chooses a non-academic job and in their applications to fellowships.
- It is the student's responsibility to understand all of the formal requirements of the graduate school and the department, and to stay ahead of all deadlines regarding registration, paperwork, qualifying exams, committee meetings, etc. The [DEES Guide to the PhD Program](#) is an essential reference in this regard.
- Students are allowed to perform summer internships outside of the research group and are encouraged to discuss this with their advisor prior to planning the internship. External internships can be a great opportunity to build towards future career ambitions. At the same time, the student and advisor should discuss together what timing and duration is most sensible, optimizing the success during the student's PhD and future career.
- Students are encouraged to look into and suggest options for summer training schools. Similar to internships, the timing and number should be considered to optimize the students' career progression.

Conflict resolution

We are aware of the power imbalance, which can make it difficult for grievances to surface. We want to actively counteract this by both promoting an open and friendly lab culture and by providing avenues for easy reporting that protect someone from retaliation.

Issues with another lab member should first be attempted to be resolved between the involved parties. If this is not a fruitful avenue it is encouraged to talk to the respective advisor to help to resolve it. If there are issues with an advisor, group members are encouraged to raise this with their advisor if they feel comfortable. If not, they are encouraged to reach out to another senior member of the department, who they feel can intervene. Kaleigh Matthews, the graduate student coordinator, might be a good point of contact.

Note that all faculty, officers of research, and students who are TAs, have mandatory reporting responsibilities under the university's Title IX policies. If mandatory reporting or another reason prevents a group member from speaking to the senior members of the group, it is strongly encouraged that they turn to one of the places at Lamont and Columbia where concerns can be raised (see Annex 2 in [Lamont Code of Conduct](#)).

Graduate students have 5 years of guaranteed funding that is not tied to a faculty member, which means that students can and should consider leaving the group if the working relationship is not productive. While funding is guaranteed, PhD work is only successful if a suitable new advisor can be found and a PIs willingness to accept transferring students to their group can still depend on the funds they have available. If a graduate student wishes to transfer to another group they are encouraged to work with the PI (if the relationship allows it) and / or Kaleigh Matthews to find a good new match.

Reviews and career progress

- Postdocs have annual reviews in which we discuss scientific progress and future career plans. We will go through the guiding questions in the Code of Conduct. Postdocs also have a mentoring committee and they can choose their members and convene with the committee at their desired frequency.
- Students meet with their committee at least once a semester, which provides feedback on their research progress.
- It is encouraged to ask for / provide more general feedback on a student's / postdoc's trajectory and career progression during one of the weekly meetings with the advisor.
- Faculty value input from students and postdocs on their advising style and general academic leadership. While no formal review procedure in which students / postdocs review their advisor exists at the moment, we welcome suggestions on how this can be implemented in the future.

Workplace and working hours

During times when the campus is open, we encourage everyone to work in their office at Lamont to see and engage with each other and other colleagues. However, personal and professional circumstances can make it counterproductive to be at Lamont 5 days a week and it's up to each individual to find the most productive balance between working at Lamont and

working remotely. Meetings are held in person unless specified otherwise. If a group member plans to work remotely for an extended period of time they should discuss this with their advisor.

Group members are not expected to work on weekends and staff holidays. There might be exceptions when deadlines are looming, but these should remain rare exceptions. A general working week consists of 40 hours of work, but this time will not be tracked and productivity is a better metric than hours at a desk. If group members are sick, they should stay at home and let others know by email if they need to cancel any meetings.

PIs are generally at Lamont M/W/F 9-5pm. Whenever their office door is open during that time, group members are welcome to come in to ask any questions they might have.

Authorship & Collaborators

It should be discussed carefully who is included as an author on papers and presentations. Group members should not submit work (proposals, abstracts, papers) before it has been properly edited and approved by the advisor. In general, co-authorship means that a person has substantially contributed to the intellectual and/or research work. A group member will be first-author if they contributed the majority of the intellectual effort and completed the project, including the writing. We encourage an open dialogue about who contributed to an idea being born, developed and brought to fruition. If in doubt, group members are encouraged to raise questions regarding authorship, co-authorship, and acknowledgement of their work with the PI.

It's the advisor's responsibility to facilitate productive and enjoyable research collaborations for all group members. If a student would like to collaborate with someone who is not currently a collaborator of the group, they are encouraged to have a conversation with their advisor first to discuss whether this is the best direction. The student's academic success is the priority in this conversation. Postdocs are expected to manage external collaborations on their own, but are encouraged to keep their faculty advisor updated about ongoing projects.

Taking a break! Vacation time and leaves

We first review the official guidelines on vacation time:

- The DEES graduate student guidebook summarizes that per GSAS rule, students are entitled to 10 days of vacation during the academic year. The guidebook points out that DEES/Lamont standards are significantly more liberal than the GSAS minimum and reflects a presumption that graduate students are able to manage their time, research, and progress towards the Ph.D. responsibly.
- Per the [postdoctoral union contract](#), full-time employees earn two days of vacation for each month of appointment up to a maximum of 23 days, plus three personal days per annum. Vacation time may not be accumulated beyond June 30th of the year following the one in which it was earned.
- Hourly workers are encouraged to review their vacation time with their advisor and HR personnel.

In this group, we encourage students and postdocs to take 4-5 weeks of paid vacation each year while staying within the official guidelines. This number is flexible and is meant as a guideline. Postdocs will have to report the number of unused vacation days at the end of their contract and will be paid for those. Graduate students are not expected to track or report vacation or sick days. Hourly workers should act according to their contract. If group members plan to take longer vacation breaks they are encouraged to let their advisor know ahead of time.

Students and postdocs are encouraged to consult the DEES guidebook and postdoctoral union contract for details about sick leave and parental leave and discuss these with their advisor if the situation arises.

Fieldwork

Performing fieldwork is a crucial and formative experience and even though not all group members' work might be focused around collecting new data, it is an integral part of Earth science research. If a group member is interested in participating more in fieldwork that is done within the group (or by collaborators), they are encouraged to talk to the PI about options.

While fieldwork is generally a great experience, long working/travel hours, cramped living and sleeping conditions, remoteness, and small teams who rely on each other to stay safe, leads to an environment where bad behaviour has a much larger negative impact, power dynamics are exacerbated, and accountability for bad behaviour can be reduced. To counteract this, the PI will make sure (to the extent possible) that at least three people are on any field trip and that ample communication occurred prior to the field trip to identify everyone's role and responsibilities. In the field, while plans can sometimes change unexpectedly, PIs or group leaders should make every effort to inform group members in advance of long hikes or any other expected strenuous physical activity. The [Lamont Code of Conduct](#) (Annex 1) lays out additional guidelines that should be considered.