Community Guidelines & Code of Conduct

Rutgers Ecology & Evolution Community
Last Updated: February 17, 2022

Ratified by the Ecology & Evolution Graduate Program Faculty on 14 June, 2022.

Purpose and Scope

The goal of this document is to establish norms and expectations around working behavior in the Rutgers Ecology & Evolution graduate program. As a group, which we refer to as 'the E&E community', we pride ourselves on maintaining a **working environment free from any form of harassment or discrimination for all members of our community**, regardless of academic rank. We encourage our community members to view the principles outlined in this document as a baseline expectation of conduct and professional behavior.

Identifying and addressing problematic behavior in the workplace can be a challenge, especially when issues involve a power dynamic or there are discrepancies among individuals' beliefs of what constitutes problematic behavior. It is our hope that this document will serve to demystify what sorts of behaviors are helpful and what sorts of behaviors are harmful to ensuring an inclusive working environment. By putting these expectations in writing, we seek to empower community members to effectively identify problems and give voice to issues that may arise.

As many of us are eager to point out, a major strength of our community is our collegiality. In the interest of maintaining this inclusive community, we want to be transparent about the kinds of behaviors that do and do not help create that inclusivity and a sense of belonging for everyone. We want to clarify our shared understanding and general expectations of behavior by putting it into words and to have an efficient way of onboarding new community members. Many and perhaps everyone will see this document as common sense, and that's good. The guidance in this document is not intended to prevent anyone from ever being uncomfortable or to avoid all disagreements; in fact, we hope it will create a safe space where uncomfortable and challenging conversations can be had in a mutually respectful way. This document is also not meant to be weaponized against anyone. Creating a safe community also requires that we all assume positive intent from our colleagues.

It is important to note that this code of conduct is intended to be a living document. Like good science, community building is an iterative, self-correcting process; as our community grows and evolves, so too will our values and norms. As such, we expect these guidelines to be continuously revised and improved over time, perhaps annually. This version of the code of conduct was drafted by a committee consisting of faculty, staff, graduate students, and postdocs during the summer of 2021, with the input and feedback of the broader community and heavy adaptation from the UNC Biology Department's community values manual. That document has excellent examples of behaviors to be avoided (examples of disrespect, exclusion, inadequate personal support, irresponsible behavior, poor communication) and is recommended reading for all involved in the E&E graduate program.

We have populated this document with links to both internal and external resources, and for each subsection, provide several examples for the sake of clarity. If the points outlined in this document prompt you (the reader) to pursue further discussion or action related to a specific incident, we recommend you begin by consulting the E&E Incident Reporting & Resources Flow Chart to determine the appropriate channels and points of contact. Additional resource links and a few definitions are included at the end of the document. We include a few reminders of university policy where relevant, but this set of reminders is far from comprehensive, and members of our community should adhere to both university policy and local, state, and federal law at all times. As community members read through, we ask that they reflect on how their own values align with the values outlined in this document.

Respect & Support

The E&E Graduate Program is dedicated to teaching, research, and outreach. Every member of our graduate program is expected to faithfully carry out his/her/their professional duties in furtherance of our mission and the mission of the university. It is expected that members of our community will treat one another respectfully; this requires being mindful of how our words and actions affect those around us. Examples of respectful behavior include:

- Active listening. In both scientific and personal communication, seek to understand before being understood. Do consider others' ideas thoughtfully. This applies to email also: read emails completely, respond in a timely and professional manner.
- Patience. We all make mistakes. Address errors by others honestly, but with empathy, remembering that others may have difficulties of which you are unaware. At all times, keep criticism constructive! Accept constructive criticism as an opportunity to reflect and improve.
- Respect for differences. Our program encompasses a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences. This is a great strength and requires thoughtfulness and sensitivity from all of us to best benefit from that diversity. If we hurt others, even unintentionally, we apologize quickly and sincerely.

We believe the work conducted in our community is not a zero-sum game. That is, one person's success should not be viewed as somebody else's failure. As such, each member of our community has a responsibility to support each other by celebrating each other's success and supporting a balance among academic goals, research demands, and mental and physical health. This is, however, just one aspect of support. Our community will benefit further from graduate program action to ensure a robust support system to address academic & non-academic issues. For instance, issues relating to bias, discrimination, and harrassment should be met by validating, investigating, and reporting such instances, as well as providing victims and offenders with available resources and following-up to ensure that the appropriate action and resolution was achieved. Ultimately, we have a responsibility at the program level to ensure our mentors are able to provide mentees with the resources and inter-personal support required

to succeed at graduate school and that mentees take advantage of these resources and support.

Examples of disrespectful behavior and discouragement:

- A professor consistently disrupts or disparages trainees during research discussions.
- A graduate student refuses to stop telling inappropriate jokes in the lab, despite fellow lab members confronting them about the behavior.
- A graduate student dissuades their peers from applying to the same competitive fellowship as them, in hopes that it will boost their individual chance of being selected.
- Upon finding out a graduate student in their lab is taking an approved vacation, a postdoc makes disparaging comments about the student lacking commitment to the program and their research.
- A graduate student does not reply to email from a professor or a fellow colleague, instead the professor or colleague has to chase them down for a reply.
- A professor is consistently late to one-on-one-meetings with their graduate or undergraduate students.
- A senior faculty member consistently interrupts junior faculty members in committee and program meetings.
- While staying in mixed-gender lodging during field work, a graduate student repeatedly walks around in a shared living space undressed, making other graduate students uncomfortable.

Attention to Power Dynamics

An important component of respect and support is recognizing power dynamics within the E&E community. **Anyone** who is in a supervisory or training role has disproportionate influence in interactions with those they are supervising and training -- influence which turns behavior that would typically be respectful and appropriate between peers in the workplace into inappropriate behavior. It is the responsibility of all of us in supervisory and training roles to understand and adjust our behaviors accordingly.

A classic academic power dynamic that can be abused is that of mentor and mentee. A flippant, harsh criticism from a mentor carries more weight than a similar comment from a peer -- and professors must be sensitive to the outsized impact that their comments have on their trainees, and strive to provide constructive criticism. Similarly, people in positions of power over others should not ask for favors or expect gifts from those in their supervision. While the professor might assume that a graduate student knows it’s okay to decline their request to water their houseplants or pet sit while the professor is at a conference, the fact that doing a task unrelated to science/Rutgers for a professor may dispose a professor to write a more favorable recommendation for a student -- or write a worse recommendation for one that declines -- means that it isn’t a fair request to make. Similarly, the higher paid and more senior professor can freely cater lab meetings without the expectation that lower paid trainees will equally contribute food. This applies to committee meetings and thesis defenses, where any food and

beverages provided should not be paid for by the student presenting. Professors and other supervisors should proactively think about the effects of power imbalances and adjust their behavior so they do not make unethical demands or requests of trainees.

Power dynamics can influence relationships among community members at all professional levels (e.g., a graduate student can have power over an undergraduate's grade as a teaching assistant or as a research mentor, a senior undergrad in a lab training a new undergrad should be aware that they are in a supervisory role, a senior faculty member making promotion decisions for a junior faculty member). Labmates should be sensitive to power differences due to rank (e.g., postdocs are not strict peers with grad students). Despite the conviviality of many lab groups, power dynamics mean not all trainees are in the same position. While issues of power dynamics typically concern the behavior of higher ranked individuals towards lower ranked individuals (e.g. mentors' treatment of mentees), power dynamics may exist among members of the same professional rank (e.g. issues of seniority and expertise). Additionally, power dynamics may be further complicated by sexism and racism. For example, power dynamics may exacerbate the impact of discriminatory behavior by those with power, and likewise, discriminatory behavior by lower-ranked individuals can undermine the authority of higher-ranked individuals. Awareness of power dynamics and thoughtfully avoiding exploiting power imbalances are necessary parts of all training and supervisory roles in the E&E community.

Examples of abusing a power dynamic:

- A graduate student is interested in asking out an undergraduate they have been supervising for a few months on a date. This is not allowed under Rutgers University policy for good reason. The undergraduate's grade, whether their name is associated with the final research product and, indirectly, the professor's recommendation for the undergraduate are likely dependent on the graduate student's opinion of them.
- A postdoc invites the lab's work study student out for lunch to talk about their applications for professional school, assuming the undergraduate will pay for the two meals because the postdoc is 'doing them a favor' by mentoring them.
- A professor asks a trainee or employee to work on a last-minute project over a weekend despite knowing about the project for many weeks. The trainee/employee may feel coerced into doing the work. While last-minute deadlines or project needs sometimes arise in our field, supervisors should respect their trainees' life outside of work hours (while recognizing that different labs and workers have different times for those work hours). Last minute requests should be the exception, not the norm.
- A junior faculty member feels unable to speak up in departmental meetings against a more senior faculty member's opinion because they know the senior faculty member will vote on their promotion and/or reappointment.
- A faculty member's knowledge and authority are dismissed by undergraduate or graduate students due to the faculty member's gender, age, and/or race/ethnicity. For example, a male graduate student may be more inclined to seek advice/feedback on a

research project from a male professor, even if that professor has less expertise in the topic than his female colleagues.
- During a field season, inclement weather limits the number of days suitable for data collection. As a result, a supervisor encourages a seasonal field technician to make a potentially hazardous trek to collect data from a remote location alone at night. Despite the potential safety risks, the technician feels uncomfortable saying no due to the power dynamic between them and their supervisor.
- A supervisor asks a hired student to apply herbicide as part of research work, but the student does not have the necessary training and certification, thereby breaking university and state policies. As an employee, the student should not have to choose between doing something illicit or upsetting the supervisor.

Excellence & Integrity

Excellent science is a goal that all members of the E&E community share. Therefore, we have a responsibility to identify, examine, and curtail unethical scientific practices so that we can produce the best scientists possible who publish work that can be trusted by the broader scientific community. Some examples of **ethical practice** in research and publishing include (adapted from ESA code of ethics):

- Focusing professional advice and guidance on subjects in which you are informed and qualified through professional training or experience.
- Sharing accurate/empirical and not exaggerated findings and information with others, through both formal and informal channels.
- Giving full and proper credit to the works and ideas of others, i.e., do not plagiarize or downplay the work of another researcher.
- Do not fabricate, falsify, suppress, or intentionally misrepresent research findings.
- Do not attempt to hinder the progress or harm the reputation of other researchers/peers; we can all be successful and work in an environment where we do not bring others down.

We believe that science is a self-correcting process and we encourage a culture in our community where it is okay to take risks in research and to be open and honest about mistakes without fear of punishment or retribution. This can only be possible if we all adhere to best practices of **scientific integrity**. Examples of this include (some adapted from this report):

- Honesty in proposing, performing, and reporting research contributions and outcomes.
- Fair and unbiased peer review.
- Collegiality in scientific interactions, including communications and sharing of resources.
- Transparency when it comes to conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest.
- Humane care of animals in conduct of research; avoiding or minimizing adverse effects on ecosystems and human communities in which you work or conduct research.
- Reporting harmful practices through the proper channels if witnessed.

We believe that there is value in diverse communities and in diversity of thought. Therefore, we acknowledge that ideas of success and excellence may vary among individuals. Thus, we encourage open discussion of what personal goals and success looks like. This may take place between peers or within the context of mentor-trainee relationships. Additionally, different forms of knowledge or expertise in our field are not limited to western standards of the “academic” ecologist/evolutionary biologist and we should be open to learning about expertise different from our own and aiming to understand and respect, rather than judge those practices.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As part of its academic mission, the E&E program has stated a commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our academic field, at Rutgers, and more broadly. The E&E program website and periodic mailing list messages emphasize that each of us has opportunities to contribute both to DEI within our community and to new university-wide initiatives.

Achieving progress requires going beyond minimal standards, i.e. the university's policies against discrimination based on any type of personal identity. Addressing systemic issues and compounded bias requires action at the individual, classroom, and research group levels. Individuals should think critically, remain open-minded, and study DEI issues, including ones related to the history of ecology and evolutionary biology as academic disciplines. Some of these issues can be subtle. For example, nominally fair procedures can often fail to produce equitable outcomes. Many gentle introductions are available online; the E&E journal club has recommended readings and is scheduled to regularly discuss these issues each fall.

We strongly encourage individual research groups to document steps that they are taking to foster an inclusive working environment: lab expectations or code of conduct documents are often valuable. Field work often involves specific safety and harassment concerns, especially for members of under-represented groups, which can often be mitigated with planning and awareness (Demery and Pipkin 2021, listed in ‘Resources’ below). The E&E DEI committee is available for seeking advice, reporting concerns, or offering suggestions on new events or initiatives.

Examples of exclusionary and/or inequitable behavior:

- Organizing events that may be difficult or impossible for community members to attend, for example due to disabilities or family commitments, especially when attendance is mandatory or highly encouraged. Scheduling events during normal business hours and/or making clear when family members are welcome can help mitigate the latter issue.
- Insisting on shaking hands or hugging as a greeting, despite objections based on personal discomfort or religious reasons, which may vary across gender lines.
- Organizing social events with co-workers (e.g. lab members) that may impose a financial burden on participants. In labs where members come from differing socio-economic

backgrounds, activities such as regular lab lunches, purchasing group t-shirts, or going on expensive group retreats can alienate those who don't have the financial means to participate.

External Resources and Definitions

As noted above, this document is tailored to the E&E community, i.e., anyone associated with the Ecology and Evolution Graduate Program. Many disagreements, including violations of this code of conduct, can be addressed directly by the affected parties. Other issues are more persistent or difficult, and are worth discussing with the department chair, the graduate program director, or the chair of the Student Life and Grievances Committee.

- E&E Incidence Reporting & Resources Flow Chart
    - List of policies and resources: https://ecoevo.rutgers.edu/reporting-bias-incidents.html
- University Code of Student Conduct
- Office of Community Standards, Rutgers Camden
- Academic Integrity Policy for students
- School of Graduate Studies policies page, including a brief Code of Responsible Conduct and Professionalism
- University-wide DEI initiative: https://diversity.rutgers.edu
    - The New Brunswick campus Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement (DICE; https://nbdiversity.rutgers.edu) provides many resources, including glossary links and the following definitions:

      Diversity refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, age, religion, language, disability status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and more.

      Equity refers to actively working to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented full participation across differences in culture and circumstance, specifically redressing the exclusion of historically underrepresented groups in higher education. Attention to equity involves ensuring access, opportunity, and advancement for all students, faculty, and staff in every stage of education and career development.

      Inclusion refers to the act of creating environments in which individuals and groups feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued by eliminating practices and behaviors that marginalize. An inclusive climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions so that all people can fully participate in the university's opportunities.

- Rutgers E&E DEI efforts: https://ecoevo.rutgers.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion.html

- UNC Biology Community Values
- Useful guide on developing a code of conduct for academic departments: https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/resources/codes_conduct.html
- https://opensource.guide/code-of-conduct -- guidance on adopting and using a code of conduct in open-source software projects, which is increasingly common and recommended.
- Demery and Pipkin 2021, Nature Ecology and Evolution, 'Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions'. Includes lists of recommendations. (readcube link)
- The science of effective mentorship in STEMM (2019 book). National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/25568. PDF freely downloadable with registration.
- NIH report on research integrity: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK208714/
- ESA Code of Ethics: https://www.esa.org/about/code-of-ethics/