

Advising Protocols, Expectations, and Other Notes

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This document is intended to serve as a guide for 2nd-through-6th-year Ph.D students working with me, and generally applies to all class of situations related to research roles (as RA, collaborator, potential/prospective advisee, and/or dissertation advisee with me as committee chair or member). It also serves as a contract between you and me that clarifies the expectations if I'll be included on your dissertation committee.

My goal is to help you write a rigorous, original, valid, and important dissertation that will enable you to pursue whatever career goal you might have. For me to do that, I intend to be clear about the expectations that I have on your coursework, when you complete your program requirements, and my involvement in your research process.

Things I expect of you

- I expect you to be organized and ambitious, and to treat graduate school like a top-caliber private sector job that expects high performance, dedication, and seriousness. Or, like you are the founder of your own startup company. We are lucky to be given the opportunity to study and work on whatever we want, and I expect you to make the most of it by reaching for the seemingly impossible with reckless abandon. Another way to put this was given to me by a faculty while I was in grad school: “The fallback options are pretty good, so might as well ‘go for broke’ and try for the highest risk, highest reward thing you can.”
- When I give you feedback — including blunt or critical feedback — it is about your work, never about you as a person. I ask you to receive it that way. If you want my advice on things outside of research and professional development, I am happy to give it, but you will need to ask.
- You should plan to build an intellectual foundation and academic profile as a development economist, at least in part. This means finding time to learn core development economics through self-study, directed readings, or consortia courses — not just the methods you use in your dissertation, but the broader literature and the questions that animate the field.
- I expect you to apply for grants, do fieldwork, find and/or collect novel data, learn qualitative methodologies and other research methods not necessarily in the Economics doctoral curriculum, and in general be able to teach yourself whatever you need to do the research you want to do.
- I expect you to think out of the box in all dimensions possible, and to not feel bound by standard rules, expectations, guidelines, or advice given to Economics doctoral students at Emory.

- I expect you to be in touch with me at the first moment you feel that you do not have something to actively work on, or need feedback (after a substantial amount of work has been done) in order to proceed.
- I expect you to be in touch with me at the first moment you think that I could get you over a major roadblock to progress.
- I expect my advisees to keep me apprised of their progress toward and achievement of milestones at least twice per month, although this can vary as needed depending on the stage one is at.
- I expect you to take one or two extracurricular technical writing courses. You should also limit use of generative AI in all writing you do, except for checking for grammar and common mistakes of non-native speakers.

Research participants and ethics

Johannes Haushofer’s advising document (linked in the Resources section below) has an excellent discussion of respecting research participants and the ethical obligations that come with working in development economics. I endorse his perspective fully. A few points I reiterate and further develop:

Much of the research we do involves collecting data from real people — in surveys, interviews, experiments, or administrative records. These people are giving us something valuable, and they deserve to be treated with respect and professionalism at every point of contact. That means being courteous and patient during data collection, being honest about what the research is for, and never cutting corners on consent or privacy because it would be more convenient. If a participant raises a concern or reports a problem, I need to hear about it immediately.

I expect everything we do to meet a high ethical standard — not the minimum that an IRB protocol requires, but the standard you would be comfortable explaining to the people in your study. This applies to recruitment, consent, data handling, how we describe our work to funders and communities, and how we report results. If something does not feel right, raise it. Do not proceed on the assumption that the protocol technically allows it or that no one will check.

Honesty and mistakes

I expect you to be honest with me about what you do and do not understand, and about mistakes when they happen. Everyone makes mistakes — coding errors, missed deadlines, misunderstood instructions. What matters is how you handle them: find them early, own them immediately, and fix them. I will never react badly to an honest mistake reported promptly. I will react badly to a mistake that was hidden or discovered late because no one was checking.

Do not pretend to understand something when you do not. Ask questions freely, even if they seem basic. After we have worked together for a while, I will have a good sense of what you know and what you do not. What you can control is whether I see you as someone who is genuinely learning or someone who is performing competence.

Logistics

- A core component of working with me is proper calendar entry use. If something is not on my calendar via a shared calendar invite, or I have not accepted a meeting request, you can expect that I will not be attending that meeting. This means that if we verbally or electronically

agree to a meeting time/date, it is your responsibility to follow up with an accurate and detailed calendar invite if one was not made on the spot.

- E-mail is one of the worst ways to communicate to be effective. If I haven't responded to an email in 24 or 48 hours, it means your e-mail was probably overlooked by accident. I use an array of tools, protocols, and other devices to manage projects. We will decide together what works for our particular collaboration; the important part is to actively use and stick to whatever system we agree on.
- Regarding communication, you are expected to be available for short-term coordination via text (WhatsApp) when you have a consequential role in collaborative projects (including your own). My own availability can be unpredictable (kids + family + own schedule) so I frequently text outside of business hours; you are welcome to choose to respond only during business hours and I will not think anything of it. This means you are expected to be available by text during business hours, within reason. Advice against my own interest: manage up. I am also increasingly trying to substitute texting with Slack DMs when communication is project specific. This should allow a little more control over when we engage in work-related coordination.
- I will make notes on any memos or papers you send me, often electronically, so if this is something you want, please email as a PDF with sufficient margins for me to write electronic comments (e.g. wide margins, double spacing, no small fonts).
- I will need to know your typical schedules during the semester. This usually takes the form of me asking for a printout of your typical M-F schedule. This is so I can schedule you in meetings or calls when you are potentially available without having to text or email, and so I can avoid doing so when you are known to be busy.

Things you can expect of me

- I am available to you at any time to discuss ideas, review paper drafts, or strategize about general research, grad school, or job market strategy. Ideally, we have a predictable structure (weekly meetings should be the starting point) to work within.
- When I say I will do something by a certain date, I will usually do it, and if I don't, you should remind me; I am not bothered by this and far prefer being reminded to causing you to miss or be late for something important.
- I am always happy to look over data and code, and you should involve me in some review sessions over time to look at things together. We can plan half-day sessions for this; I will not mind. Use as you need.

Meetings

- I prefer you to send concise written updates (a couple of paragraphs or pages by email) a day or two before meeting. I will read it and we can discuss.
- Your pre-meeting update should follow this structure:
 - Brief summary of what we discussed last time.
 - Status of every recommendation or to-do from the last meeting: done, in progress, stuck (and where), or set aside (and why). Setting aside a recommendation is fine — I am wrong often enough. But I need to know you thought about it rather than lost track of it.
 - The items you want to cover, with a rough time allocation for each. My meetings are often scheduled consecutively, so managing our time is your responsibility. If I am going

- on too long about something, interrupt me and move us to the next item.
 - For each item, tell me what you need: a decision, a reaction to something specific, or broader feedback on direction.
- If you are working with data or theory, I recommend bringing figures/tables to our meetings to discuss — it’s much easier to give concrete feedback.
- Like other faculty (especially ones with small kids) I need advance time to review something: A day or two to review a 1-2 page summary; A week or two for a built-out idea, paper or paper section draft, or memo.
- I suggest that all our meetings be Zoom recorded, even if we are holding them in person. This is so that we can have a record of our meetings, and also to have the AI-assist technology to extract highlights and to-dos quickly and easily.
- Most “to-do’s” from in-person or virtual advising meetings, or text messages, should be converted to a Github issue (or issues) immediately after our meeting. Likewise, I expect you to transcribe meeting notes into entries in a running “advising meeting notes” issue, which link to specific to-do’s that make their own issues. A thing that does not work for me is giving the same suggestion twice because it was overlooked or forgotten the first time.
- After an advising or project meeting, I expect you to begin work on the followup (transcribing meeting notes, updating Github issues, making progress on the substantive tasks) right away, usually on the same day. This will keep the momentum going for your project and will indicate to me your proactive approach to next steps.

Dissertation ideas and progress

- A perennial topic in advising conversations should be about where you are in the program (timing-wise) and when your next program-specific milestone is coming up. I like to set broad timeline plans and then revisit them occasionally to see where we are falling as things develop with your research. You should keep this sketch of “what happens when” and be ready to talk about it anytime we meet.

Building skills that coursework does not teach

Coursework will train you well in econometrics and economic theory. What it will not do is teach you how to identify a good research question, how to tell whether your own idea is worth pursuing, or how to write and present a paper effectively. These skills matter just as much as the technical ones, and you need to build them deliberately, starting early.

For writing and presenting: the single most productive habit you can develop is to pay close attention to how other people do it — not just what they say, but why they structured the argument that way, put that claim in the introduction rather than the conclusion, or chose to present the data before the model. Read published papers with an eye toward craft, not just content. After seminars, think about what choices the speaker made and which ones worked. If you can find two or three other students willing to debrief seminars together on a regular basis, do it.

You should be presenting your own work regularly — at minimum every semester, starting in your second year. Record yourself and watch it back. No one enjoys this. It works.

Collaborations, conferences and other presentations

- I should be actively kept in the loop on all collaborative projects you are either considering or engaged in with other students or faculty throughout the duration of their lifecycle.

- Do not submit your research to be presented at any *external* conferences, seminars, or workshops without my express advance permission.

Resources

There are several excellent compilations of advice for economics graduate students. You should read these early in your program and revisit them periodically:

- AEA CSWEP mentoring readings: <https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/cswep/mentoring/readings>
- Econ Grad Advice: <https://sites.google.com/view/econgradadvice/>
- Ryan Edwards's resources: <http://www.ryanbedwards.com/resources>
- Masayuki Kudamatsu's tips: <https://sites.google.com/site/mkudamatsu/tips4economists>
- John Cawley, "A Guide and Advice for Economists on the U.S. Junior Academic Job Market": <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=869>
- Johannes Haushofer, "Hints for a Happy Working Relationship": http://johanneshaushofer.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Johannes_s_Hints_for_a_Happy_Working_Relationship.pdf

You will find that some of this advice contradicts other parts of it, and some will not be relevant to your situation. Read it critically, take what helps, and ask me if you are unsure.

CV

- You should show me your CV and obtain approval before submitting it anywhere (jobs, internships, conferences, etc.). This is to ensure you are putting the best foot forward externally and in accordance with established and hidden norms.

Grants, and other accolades, accomplishments, or recognitions

- This is an area where students can go astray by accident, and where missteps can have professional repercussions for you, me, and the program. For grants and other awards or accomplishments being listed on your CV, I expect to have full right to ask about these and request from you any supporting documentation regarding such at any time.

Human subjects, research ethics, and IRB

- This is an area where students can go astray by accident, and where missteps can have professional repercussions for you, me, and the program. Any student who works with me must complete the basic Human Subjects Research Training (from CITI) in the summer before 2nd year. Once you establish an understanding of human subjects research and research ethics, my requirement is that any project that even potentially contains personally identifiable information (PII) needs to go through IRB – no exceptions whatsoever.

Job market

- We should have frank conversations throughout your time in grad school about your ideas and goals for the job market. My goal is to support you ending up where you would be happy while setting fair expectations for everyone.
- I am equally happy to support students going into academia, the private sector, government, or anything else. There is no single right job for everyone, and I will not push you in any direction. But you need to choose a direction, because I will write one letter that is properly

tailored for the type of position you are pursuing. A letter that tries to cover everything covers nothing well.

- If you want me to write a reference letter, tell me by the end of August. We should meet in September to discuss what kinds of jobs you are applying to and any preferences on location, institution type, or sector.
- Before you submit applications, you are required to go through your full list of target positions with me. I will give you guidelines — and in some cases hard rules — about where you should and should not apply. If I tell you not to apply somewhere, that is not a suggestion. There are professional considerations that may not be visible to you, and misplaced applications can reflect poorly on you, on me, and on the program.
- At least three weeks before your first deadline, I need to have in hand: your CV, job market paper draft, any other research papers you are circulating, and your research statement. These do not need to be final versions, but they must be consistent with what you will submit — nothing I write in my letter should contradict your own materials.
- I will give your job market paper two reads: one thorough pass covering design, results, writing, and tables, and one quick pass focused on the abstract and introduction with lighter notes on the rest. You should plan when to use each of these and let me know in advance.
- We should hold a long meeting to go through your job talk slides before your first flyout. Schedule this for December — flyouts can start in early January.
- Starting in November, send me a weekly update on interview invitations. Starting in January, send weekly updates on flyout invitations and offers. We should meet to discuss offers as soon as you receive them.

Professional challenges

Graduate school is long, and most students encounter periods where something outside of research — health, family, finances, personal circumstances — impedes their ability to work. If this happens to you, tell me. I am unlikely to be the right person to help you with the underlying challenge, but I am the right person to help you manage its professional consequences: adjusting timelines, communicating with the department, restructuring expectations. That is part of my job as your advisor.

You are under no obligation to share details. You can tell me that you need flexibility without explaining why, and I will take you at your word. I will treat anything you do share as confidential unless you explicitly say otherwise.

Some notes on schedule and timelines

1st year: focus is on coursework and passing exams. I usually do not even interact with students during this time.

Summer between 1st and 2nd year: Once exams are passed, you should plan to be in residence and present in the office for the remainder of your summer in order to work with me to set up your plans for 2nd and 3rd year, and also get started working on research.

2nd year: You are still taking some classes, so focus is on part-time research assistance and building research skills while learning scholarship in some core topical areas. Over Fall and Winter, you should be bringing me ideas for potential 3rd year papers for me to shoot down. By the Spring, you will continue the same while also formulating a plan for a productive summer.

Summer between 2nd and 3rd year: You should be either in the field or in the office. 80% of business hours from May through August should be spent on research (i.e., a max of 2 weeks of “vacation”).

3rd year: Your focus right from the start will be the 3rd-year paper proposal. This should be something that has been developed substantially over the the prior summer and is ready to present by September 1, leaving September, October, and early November for refinement. Once proposal is passed, objective is to then write that paper which is due at the end of the AY. Once proposal is passed, you should also begin the process of developing additional ideas for a subsequent paper, most of which you can reasonably expect me to shoot down.

Summer between 3rd and 4th year: You should be either in the field or in the office. 80% of business hours from May through August should be spent on research (i.e., a max of 2 weeks of “vacation”).

4th year: Your entire year should be focused on research; this includes developing ideas, carrying out analysis, writing. Your 3rd-year paper (and possibly a subsequent paper) should be being submitted to a journal by now. Your underlying effort is to develop a solid job market paper idea.

Summer between 4th year: You should be in the office working on your job market paper. There is no vacation except smoke and coffee breaks. Your job market paper needs to be handed to me in full draft no later than August 15th.

5th year: Job applications are due in November. I suggest to take September, October, and November getting ready for the job market (and **not** working on your paper, since it should be largely stable).

Things that will definitely happen

- I will forget things that I said or advised to do.
- I will give guidance or to-dos and later question why anyone would want to do that thing.
- I will tell you not to do something that you think you should, and then later realize or rediscover that it is a good thing to do and wonder why you didn't do it.
- I will be wrong, short-sighted, or dismissive of good ideas.

Acknowledgments

This document has been shaped by inputs from several colleagues' similar documents, including but not limited to some of the resources listed above. I take no intellectual credit for the content within — these ideas reflect accumulated wisdom from many advisors and mentors across the profession.