Kirby lab undergraduate researcher guidelines

As part of our mission to train future scientists, we welcome undergraduates in the lab who wish to gain research experience in neuroscience. The following is a description of what will be expected of undergraduate research assistants and what they may expect from the lab.

What undergraduates may expect:

Research is a grand adventure and one of the most intellectually rewarding activities available to a student. As an undergraduate researcher in the Kirby lab, undergraduates can expect:

Exposure to research: Undergraduates will be exposed to empirical research in neuroscience using a mixture of small rodent models, tissue culture and cell/molecular biology. They will also be exposed to primary literature in neuroscience related to the project they are working on.

Supervision and training: Undergraduates will be trained by their lab supervisor and their progression to independence will be monitored and regulated by that supervisor. A lab supervisor is agreed upon by Dr. Kirby and the supervisor. Undergraduate researchers are entitled to reasonable training for their experience level such that failures are instructive and do not pose safety risks.

Opportunity for growth: Undergraduates can expect to continually update their skillset in experimental procedures and scientific process throughout their time in the lab. Students are encouraged to attend lab meeting and, if their supervisor determines they are ready, present their experimental work from the lab or a journal club. Thesis students are required to attend lab meeting and present (see below).

A welcoming workplace: We welcome researchers from all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, ages, religious or philosophical leanings, sex, gender identities and orientations. Everyone in the Kirby lab is entitled to a welcoming workplace.

What is expected of undergraduates:

Obeying safety rules: Our highest priority is conducting research safely. The lab has standard operating procedures (SOPs) that describe the handling of hazardous substances, which undergraduates are expected to read and follow. All lab members also complete a number of trainings provided by the college or ULAR (University Laboratory Animal Resources). In addition, undergraduates must be trained in-person by qualified lab personnel on every procedure. Violating important safety rules is grounds for immediate dismissal from the lab, depending on the severity of the violation.

Participating in conducting research: Undergraduates are expected to be active participants in the execution of research. This means asking questions when something is unclear and showing dedication to high quality work, not just completed work.

Scheduling: Undergraduates will have a set schedule of no less than 9 h/week. The time when they are expected to be in lab will be negotiated with their lab supervisor. If lab time must be missed, students are expected to notify their supervisor with as much advance notice as is possible. Lab should be thought of as a job more than a class in the sense that if you don’t show up, others are inconvenienced.

Emergency circumstances requiring absence: Emergencies happen and we can’t always explain the details. If you must be absent for an emergency but do not wish to explain the details around why, contact your lab supervisor by email or phone to let them know you are OK. A suggested message is:
“Dear supervisor, I am (or was) unable to come to lab today (or tomorrow, or yesterday) due to an emergency. I am safe and will contact you again when I can.”

**Leave of absence:** If you find that you need substantial time (weeks or months) away from lab for either personal or academic reasons, you may request a leave of absence from your supervisor. We prefer that you take a leave of absence rather than repeatedly miss lab time with little or no notice. If you need a leave of absence, discuss it with your supervisor and give her or him a reasonable estimate of when you can return to lab fully. With proper communication and if you have been an engaged researcher thus far, it is highly likely that your leave will be granted and you will be welcomed back when you are ready.

**A welcoming workplace:** Just as all members of the Kirby lab can expect a welcoming workplace, each member is expected to provide welcome to other lab members regardless of background, race, ethnicity, age, religious or philosophical leanings, sex, gender identity, or orientation.

**Communication:**

We use several platforms for communication in the lab. These will function best if we all understand the expectations for how they should work.

**Routine communication during working hours:** Aside from our in-person interactions, the lab communicates regularly via email. If you send an email that requests a response from me (Dr. Kirby), I will generally respond within 1 working day to at least acknowledge the receipt of your email. If I have not responded within 1 working day, I encourage you to email me again to confirm I got your email. You are not bothering me. I welcome reminders. This also means that we as a lab generally expect responses from you within 1 working day. You need to check your email regularly (daily on working days) and respond generally within 1 working day to any email that requires your response. The response can be that you will respond in full later if the request is a complex one. But at least verification that you have received the email is expected within 1 working day.

**Communication on non-working days:** Many of us work a flexible schedule, including me. That means you may receive emails on non-working days because that day is a convenient time for someone else to be working. You are NOT expected to check or respond to email on non-working days (holidays, weekends). If I send you an email on a Saturday, I do not expect you to read it until Monday. Similarly, if you send me an email on a non-working day, do not expect a response from me until the next working day.

**Emergency communication:** For matters that require immediate attention on working or non-working days, we use text messages to communicate. Examples of these kinds of events would be: freezer failures where we need help moving supplies, finding a piece of your work left out in a place where it might not be stable, calls for help such a filling in for someone who became unexpectedly sick or COVID+.

**Thesis expectations**

Doing a senior or honors thesis is an excellent experience for students who find a love of research and want the challenge of a more independent project. All students are encouraged to consider the possibility of doing a senior/honors thesis. The thesis is a substantial, independent project performed over the course of a year, designed to answer a question relevant to current Kirby lab research.

Both the student and the lab will retain a copy of this agreement.
directions. To assure that students are ready to undertake this challenge, there are several requirements specific to this lab:

1) At least 1 year of lab experience in the Kirby lab, including a full time summer.
2) Enthusiastic consent of the lab supervisor to mentor the thesis project.
3) A formal proposal of the project to Dr. Kirby and her approval of the question and methods.
4) A consistent demonstration of understanding of lab safety, indicating readiness for a more independent role in research (determined by lab supervisor and Dr. Kirby).

During the thesis year, undergraduates are expected to regularly attend lab meetings and present just as other lab members do. They are also expected to present their work at one (or more) undergraduate research symposium.

I, ________________________________, have read and understood the policies for undergraduates in the Kirby lab and agree to abide by them as an undergraduate researcher in the lab.

Signature:
Date:

Name of lab supervisor:
Signature of lab supervisor:
Date:

Principle investigator: Elizabeth D. Kirby
Signature of PI:
Date:

Both the student and the lab will retain a copy of this agreement.