



ESGP Mentorship Questionnaire

Approved by the 2025-26 Environmental Sciences Graduate Studies Committee

Purpose of this document:

Mentor-mentee relationships are designed to provide students with the training, guidance, and experiences needed to succeed in their chosen fields. Each relationship is inherently unique, shaped by the student's individual strengths and goals as well as the advisor's expertise, expectations, and mentoring style. As a result, it can be difficult for prospective students to assess whether a particular laboratory or advisor will be a good fit.

To support this process, we have compiled a broad set of potential interview questions for faculty and prospective students to draw from. We hope these questions serve as a helpful guide for evaluating whether a prospective mentor-mentee relationship aligns with the needs, values, and expectations of both parties.

QUESTIONS FACULTY MIGHT ASK PROSPECTIVE GRADUATE STUDENTS

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your motivations for pursuing a graduate degree?
- Why are you interested in working with me as your advisor – what aspects of my research interests you? What are your professional goals/ambitions?
- Can you tell me about your prior research experience? Do you have any work experience or independent projects that are not reflected in your transcript?
- Do you have experience working on a semester-long [or longer] research project? How did you manage this project? What challenges did you face and how did you approach them?
- Have you ever developed research product(s) such as a report, white paper, or published manuscript? If so, what did you see as successes in this product? What did you feel needed improvement?
- How do you think your past experience aligns with the lab's current projects?
- What questions do you have about the transition from undergraduate to graduate study?

- What did you learn about yourself and how you approach research tasks by working with past advisors or supervisors?
- Why are you interested in this specific research topic?
- Do you have a specific research project in mind that you'd like to work on?
- Are you interested in a project that is directly applicable to a specific industry, or are you more interested in fundamental research?
- What kind of technical skills do you have, and which new skills are you hoping to develop?
- Are you interested in working independently or collaborating closely with others in the lab?
- Are you interested in being a part of other research projects outside of your primary project?
- What would you like to learn from the other students on our team?
- What leadership/research/teaching/outreach skills would you bring to our lab?
- What skills do you need the most help developing as a researcher?
- How would you rate your ability to design an experiment? Analyze data? Present research findings?
- What is your experience with specific research methodologies or programming languages?
- What are you hoping to gain from this program that you feel is missing from your current skillset?
- How did past advisors/mentors contribute toward your professional development?
- How comfortable are you applying for grants, fellowships and awards?
- How do you like to receive feedback—direct and immediate, or reflective and periodic?
- What kind of advisor-advisee dynamic are you most comfortable with (structured vs. informal)?

- How do you prefer to work with your advisor: hands-on or hands-off?
- Have you ever worked for a challenging advisor or supervisor? Can you tell me about what made this relationship difficult and how you managed it?
- How do you deal with adversity? Can you provide an example?
- Have you worked on challenging or complex projects/job tasks? How do you manage pressure and tight deadlines?
- What are your greatest strengths and how do you plan to use them in your studies?
- What are your weaknesses, and how do you plan to address them?
- What specific courses have you taken, and what are the critical knowledge gaps you'd like to fill in this program?
- How do you manage deadlines?
- How do you plan to handle the pressure of graduate school?
- Are you more motivated by praise and encouragement or by constructive criticism?
- What are your expectations for meetings with your advisor? How often would you like to meet?
- Are you looking for a project that is already defined or do you want more freedom to choose your own?
- What are your expectations for paper authorship?
- What is your preferred timeline for completing your graduate work and publications?
- What is your preferred work schedule?
- Have you ever mentored another student researcher? What was this experience like? Are you interested in mentoring undergraduates as part of your graduate experience?
- How do you typically recharge—are there specific holidays, travel periods, or cultural observances important to you?

- Would you feel comfortable initiating discussions about time-off when needed?
- Are you familiar with university policies regarding vacation and personal leave for graduate students?
- Do you like to interact with lab members/colleagues outside of the lab/work, and if so, what are some activities that you enjoy? Do you prefer structured activities or more informal and open-ended activities? Would you like these to include the advisor/supervisor, or be just with peers?
- Are there other activities that you really enjoy doing (or have enjoyed) such as team sports or playing music?
- What kind of academic and career guidance do you believe you will need?
- In what job sector would you like to work after completing your degree (academia, industry, government, non-profit)?

QUESTIONS PROSPECTIVE GRADUATE STUDENTS MIGHT ASK POTENTIAL ADVISORS

- What are the research projects that are ongoing in your lab?
- How much flexibility do students have to choose research topics, develop research questions, design and implement studies?
- How do you see me as a new (MS or PhD) student fitting into that work or your broader lab research goals?
- How do you mentor students to achieve their post-OSU job goals (whether academia, industry, public sector, etc.)?
- How would you describe your mentoring philosophy (hands-on, independent, flexible)?
- How frequently do you meet with students one-on-one, and what does a typical meeting look like?
- How do you support students who encounter personal or academic challenges?
- For this degree and project, what expectations do you have for my research outputs?
- How are students typically funded while pursuing their degrees?

- What are your expectations for students regarding coursework, teaching, service and outreach/extension?
- What have your previous students done after graduating? What kind of jobs/careers have they pursued?
- How have you helped previous students expand their professional network and prepare for careers after graduation?
- What is the best way to contact you? Are emails, texts and phone calls okay, and/or there specific days/times when you are not responsive?
- What qualities do you consider essential for a graduate student to succeed in your lab?
- What is your availability? Do you prefer to work on campus or from home? Do you have an “open-door” policy?
- What are your expectations regarding working hours? How many hours per week do students typically work? Are these flexible or do they fall into specific days and times?
- What is your policy on working remotely?
- Do you have lab meetings? How are they structured?
- What are your expectations for students regarding applying for grants, fellowships, travel and professional awards?
- Do students in the lab attend conferences? How does the lab prepare?
- What is expected to publish a paper as a first author? How many papers have previous students published?
- Do your students co-author collaborative publications?
- How is responsibility typically delegated within your lab—by experience level, interest, or timeline?
- What’s the lab culture like when it comes to collaboration, competition, and inclusion? What do you do to create a positive lab culture?
- How does the lab organize field travel? Will we be provided with transportation? Where do we stay? What costs should we expect to incur?

- Are you open to students developing their own research topics, or do you have specific projects in mind?
- What are the typical methods and approaches used in your lab?
- What opportunities are there for collaboration with other faculty in the program?
- Do you have any specific advice on research topics that would be timely or important in this field?
- How hands-on or hands-off are you as an advisor?
- How successful have other students of yours have been in completion and in their careers?
- How long does it take for a grad student to complete a PhD? Masters?
- Does the lab or university offer resources for professional development, travel, or conferences?
- What is the overall environment of the lab like? Is it collaborative or more independent?
- How do graduate students in your lab socialize or study together?
- What's your approach to graduate students taking vacation or personal time?
- Are there busy times when time-off is discouraged?
- Is there a formal time-off policy, or do students usually work it out informally with you?
- What is the culture of the ESGP program and OSU like?
- How do you typically recharge? How do you personally balance work and life outside of work?
- How frequently do you travel for work and personally? How do you communicate your travel plans to advisees and how accessible are you while you are away?

