



UNIVERSITY OF  
MARYLAND

DEPARTMENT OF CELL BIOLOGY AND MOLECULAR GENETICS

Biosciences Research Building  
College Park, Maryland 20742-4407  
301.405.1084 TEL 301.314.1248 FAX

To: Charles Caramello, Dean of the Graduate School

From: Working Group on Statement of Mutual Expectation

Stephanie Cork, Graduate Student, School of Public Health/GAAC

Charles F. Delwiche, *chair*, Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics

Rick Kohn, Avian/Animal Sciences

Art Popper, Biology

Mark Shayman, ECE/Graduate School

Yang Tao, Bioengineering

Date: 4/25/16

Re: **FINAL REPORT**

The committee was charged on December 8, 2015 with considering a suggestion, stemming originally from the Graduate Student Government, for the establishment of “Mutual Expectation Agreements” for all graduate assistantships. The charge instructed the committee to focus on research assistants. In this context, the committee discussed the possible benefits and drawbacks of such agreements, explored what constraints may be imposed by law and by agreements with funding agencies, and examined practices at other comparable institutions. The committee also attempted to infer how the use of MEAs might differ among disciplines on campus, and to consider the different effects they might have on domestic *vs.* international students. The committee received a “GSG white paper” dated June 2015 that advocated for MEAs from the student perspective.

The Office of the General Counsel advised that the use of the term “agreement” would in and of itself imply a contract, and recommended the term “Statement of Mutual Expectations” (SME), which is adopted here.

In general the committee was highly supportive of the concept of the SME. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a substantial number of disputes between graduate assistants and their supervisors occur among otherwise well-intentioned individuals and stem from poor communication, misunderstanding, or disparate expectations. In such circumstances, having an expectation-setting meeting early in the assistantship accompanied by a

written summary of that meeting could substantially facilitate communication.

However, the SME could lead to further confusion if it were to conflict with University policies, applicable law, or agreements with funding agencies. In consultation with Diane Krejsa in the Office of the General Council, the committee worked to develop a document that makes it clear that the SME must function within the context of University of Maryland policies and procedures. It would be to the disadvantage of the student, the supervisor, and the University of Maryland as a whole if the SME could be confused with a contract.

A second potential objection would be the burden of additional paperwork, record keeping, and administration. The Committee recognized that this was a legitimate concern, but felt that the fundamental activity involved – an initial meeting between the graduate assistant and their supervisor – was an essential part of almost any assistantship, and the burden of documenting this meeting in writing would be minimal, particularly with the benefit of an SME template and guidance (attached).

The committee also took care to develop a document that minimized differences among disciplines, while still providing useful information and guidance (e.g. IUCUC, which is directly relevant only to projects that work with animals, but is vitally important to any such project).

The committee recommends that the SME template and explanatory cover page be made available immediately via the graduate school web page, and that the following statement be added to Assistantship Policies Section III “Duties and Time Commitments” as a new paragraph in the preamble:

The Graduate Assistant and Supervisor should meet no later than the first week of the term of the assistantship to prepare and discuss a Statement of Mutual Expectations (SME).

A link to the document should also be provided here.

The committee felt that the SME could be put into immediate use, and could quickly be adapted to other assistantships (i.e., Teaching Assistantships, and Administrative Assistantships).