



## **Professional Interactions – Guidelines for Faculty, Research Staff, Postdoctoral Researchers, Students, and Administrative Staff of the Oden Institute for Computational Engineering and Sciences**

Preamble: The guidelines below are intended to provide awareness of the need to establish effective and productive professional relationships that start with trust, courtesy, two-way communications, and shared expectations. These guidelines are adapted from guidelines that were created by the Jackson School of Geosciences.

Effective research and education programs at the Oden Institute require a shared understanding of acceptable professional interactions among faculty, research staff, postdoctoral researchers, undergraduate and graduate students, and administrative staff. Effective instruction, learning, advising, research, and professional career growth require open communication, ethical professional conduct between all individuals, collegial interactions, proactive mentoring, and a responsive administration.

This version was posted and disseminated in August 2025. This document will be updated annually.

### **Faculty-Staff & Peer Interactions**

Interactions between and among faculty, research staff, and administrative staff should:

- promote an environment that is intellectually stimulating and free of harassment;
- be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful;
- recognize and respect the cultural backgrounds of all fellow faculty, research staff, and administrative staff;
- recognize that many administrative staff members have obligations to multiple faculty members;
- be sensitive to the power imbalance in the tenured full professor–junior professor, senior–junior research staff, and faculty/research staff– administrative staff relationships.

### **Faculty/Research Scientist Advisors & Co-advisors (in addition to above)**

Faculty/Research Scientist advisors and co-advisors (in addition to above) should:

- be sensitive to the power imbalance in the student–advisor and postdoc–advisor relationship;
- advise graduate students on the selection of an appropriate thesis topic and assist them in selecting a thesis committee;
- advise graduate students on timelines and expectations for submitting thesis proposal and committee selection;
- set clear expectations and goals for graduate students regarding their academic performance and research progress, meet regularly in order to provide feedback on

progress, and respect graduate students' needs to allocate their time among competing demands while maintaining timely progress toward their degree;

- ensure that each graduate student's course load is commensurate with expectations for research, especially in the first two years of the CSEM graduate program;
- develop explicit expectations for research work in pursuit of academic objectives such as completing a doctoral thesis, noting that these expectations are in addition to any teaching assistant (TA) or graduate research assistant (GRA) duties;
- develop explicit expectations for GRA duties each semester and agree on these with the student, making sure that time executing GRA responsibilities will not exceed that specified in the appointment (usually 20 hrs/week), and noting that GRA duties are in addition to academic research expectations;
- develop explicit expectations for TAs each semester, making sure that time executing TA responsibilities will not exceed that specified by the appointment (usually 20 hrs/week);
- provide clear instruction to teaching assistants at the start of the semester regarding particular tasks that will require focused effort at particular times during the semester, so that the student can manage their time and other commitments;
- avoid assigning duties or activities that are outside the academic/professional responsibilities of a student or postdoctoral researcher;
- set clear expectations and goals for postdoctoral researcher progress and meet regularly and often to provide feedback on progress;
- discuss policies and expectations for work hours, vacation time, and health contingencies;
- avoid placing pressure on students or postdoctoral researchers to produce results that support particular hypotheses;
- provide and discuss clear criteria for authorship at the beginning of all collaborative projects;
- discuss plagiarism with students and postdoctoral researchers —what plagiarism is and how to properly cite the work of others, including copyright and self-plagiarism;
- encourage participation in professional meetings and try to secure funding for such activities;
- provide career advice, offer help with interview and application preparation, and write letters of recommendation in a timely manner;
- be respectful of student and postdoctoral researcher expectations on reasonable working hours and work-life balance when scheduling group meetings and other regular research interactions; in particular, when scheduling meetings or other interactions with students and postdoctoral researchers, respect their availability and other commitments, especially off hours (e.g., evenings, weekends, or holidays);
- always act in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner toward other students, staff, and faculty;
- cooperate with any investigation stemming from a complaint, preserve confidentiality to the extent possible, avoid retaliation against whomever complained or was involved in the investigation, and only file complaints in good faith.

## Graduate Students

Graduate Students should:

- recognize that they bear the primary responsibility for the successful completion of their degree;
- exercise the highest ethical standards in all aspects of their research;
- know the policies governing graduate studies in the Institute and the graduate school and take responsibility for meeting Institute and graduate school deadlines;

- be proactive about communicating with their advisor and thesis committee, understanding that communication is a two-way endeavor;
- be considerate of other time constraints imposed on faculty and staff, including competing demands;
- take an active role in identifying and pursuing professional development opportunities;
- clearly communicate with their advisor(s) regarding their career objectives;
- be proactive about improving their research skills, including written and oral presentation skills;
- seek mentoring and support resources beyond their faculty or research scientist advisor(s), including other faculty members, peers, and organizations;
- always act in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner toward other students, staff, and faculty;
- raise complaints and concerns through appropriate channels and only in good faith.

### **Postdoctoral Researchers**

Postdoctoral researchers should:

- exercise the highest ethical standards in all aspects of their research;
- be proactive about communicating with their advisor(s), understanding that communication is a two-way endeavor;
- be considerate of other time constraints imposed on faculty and staff, including competing demands;
- take an active role in identifying and pursuing professional development opportunities;
- clearly communicate with their advisor(s) regarding their career preferences;
- be proactive about improving their research skills, including written and oral presentation skills;
- seek mentoring and support resources beyond their faculty or research scientist advisor(s), including other faculty members, peers, and organizations;
- always act in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner toward other staff, students, and faculty;
- raise complaints and concerns through appropriate channels and only in good faith.

### **Institute & CSEM Graduate Program**

The Oden Institute and CSEM Graduate Program should:

- provide students with up-to-date information that includes policies, practices, degree requirements, and resources;
- assist students with selection of their advisors as needed and provide students with contacts and resources for potential conflict resolution (e.g., ombudsperson, graduate coordinator, graduate advisor, GSC Chair, Deputy Director, or Director);
- monitor graduate student progress toward degree and professional development, including mentoring meetings, committee meetings, exam completions, and other benchmarks appropriate to their discipline;
- monitor student completion and time to degree;
- provide appropriate infrastructure to allow students to complete their education and research in a timely and productive manner;
- provide opportunities for professional development that will be relevant to students seeking careers outside academia and/or their research discipline;
- establish and communicate policies for emergencies and unplanned situations that may disrupt the work of students and/or faculty;

- respond promptly and appropriately to concerns raised by faculty and students.

## **Frequently Asked Questions For Graduate Students**

### **Can my advisor require me to take a course?**

Yes, your advisor may require you to take a course. It is their job to ensure that you learn adequate skills as well as identify areas where you may need more experience.

### **I won an award that will fund me for one semester of my choosing. Can my advisor tell me when to use it?**

No, you may choose when to use your award. Often your advisor will recommend that you use it a specific semester for funding purposes, however they may not remove promised funding in retaliation.

### **I wish to change my research topic and advisors, how should I do this?**

First you should talk to your advisor if you feel comfortable doing so. It could be that they could still be your advisor or serve on your committee if there is overlap with the topic. The next step would be to talk to the CSEM Graduate Advisor about finding a new advisor. If you have someone in mind, you are free to discuss a possible move with them as well. It is important to note that GRA funding is tied to an advisor, so there is no guarantee that a new advisor would be able to fund you. Also, you should talk with your current advisor about how to bring closure to the current research project.

### **I am having difficulties with another student, to whom should I talk?**

First you should talk to the other student if you are comfortable and it is appropriate. Many times people are not aware that their actions may be inconveniencing or bothering someone else, and a discussion can quickly resolve the issue. If you are not comfortable, it is not an appropriate situation, or talking doesn't help, the next step would be to view the dispute resolution guidelines and list of contacts below to see who might be the best contact for your specific issue.

### **My assigned work in my TA position is going over 20 hours per week, what should I do?**

The first step is to let the instructor know that the assigned work is exceeding the limits. Most of the time this is sufficient; however, if the assigned work continues to exceed 20 hours you should contact the Oden Institute Director (see below) to resolve the issue.

### **My assigned research work feels like an unreasonable load on a regular basis, what should I do?**

Keep in mind that your research responsibilities include academic research expectations in addition to any research duties assigned as part of a GRA. Work expectations to fulfill your GRA research responsibilities are limited to the specified number of hours per week (usually 20 hours per week) and may or may not have overlap with your academic research in pursuit of your thesis. There are times when overall research expectations may be unusually heavy, such as when you are working to meet a paper deadline. However, if you feel that expectations are unreasonable on an ongoing basis, an important first step is a discussion with your research supervisor about their expectations for weekly hours spent on academic research, over and above any GRA duties. Most of the time having this discussion is sufficient to reach an understanding; however, if the assigned work continues to be excessive you should contact the Oden Institute Director or GSC Chair (see below) to resolve the issue.

## Dispute Resolution Guidelines

As members of the Oden Institute, we wish to consciously establish effective and productive relationships that start with trust, courtesy, two-way communications, and shared expectations. To this end, complaints or concerns should be made in good faith with the intent to find equitable resolutions to any issues that may arise.

- If you feel comfortable, talk to the other person about the issue. You might use language such as, “On XXX date, when you engaged in XXX behavior, I felt uncomfortable, and I’d like to talk with you about it.” Most situations can be resolved this way, and if you resolve the issue earlier, it is often easier. If you do not feel comfortable addressing the situation in this way, skip this step.
- Document everything — emails, conversations, screenshots, and dates of events. In addition, make sure you document who, if anyone, witnessed the event, and consider asking them to record their recollections if possible. Do this as soon as possible to ensure accuracy. Keep to the facts.
- Documented disputes can be used in multiple ways. They can be communicated to all parties as a way to facilitate reconciliation. They can be provided to outside facilitators (University contacts listed below) if the issue remains unresolved. In most cases, once you reach out to one of these neutral University parties, there may be an investigation that includes interviewing relevant parties and the rendering of a finding. You will be expected to participate in the investigation.
- Specific University contacts exist for various offenses. In addition, one can contact the graduate coordinator, the graduate advisor, Human Resources representative in each unit, the Institute Deputy Director, or the Director. (See below for appropriate contacts.)
- If you as a complainant choose to identify yourself and the charges, then potential action can occur and all pertinent information associated with the charges can be made available to the appropriate University office and/or to the Oden Institute Director.
- If you choose to report in confidence and remain anonymous, this limits appropriate due process. If the report is to an Oden Institute contact listed below, they will document the incident, and a confidential record will be kept by the appropriate office for your affiliation (undergraduate or graduate student, faculty, research scientist or staff) to assess repeat offenses. Please note that some complaints (discrimination, including harassment, sexual harassment and interpersonal violence) cannot be kept anonymous and any Oden Institute contacts will need to report it to the appropriate University office.

## Who To Talk To

### Contacts within the Oden Institute and The University of Texas at Austin

For most concerns or complaints, the first step is usually internal to the Oden Institute, but many University-wide resources are available. Below are the general contacts for each type of individual, followed by specific ones for certain types of complaints. In all cases, complaints can be made internally to the appropriate Oden Institute contact or to a University contact. ***However, sexual harassment, any form of discrimination (including harassment) and interpersonal violence complaints must be reported by policy to the appropriate University contact.***

**Please note:** if you are worried about any kind of behavior towards you or anyone else, you may contact ***Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)*** or call 512-232-5050, 24 hours a day.

## Undergraduate Students

**Oden Institute level:** Associate Director for Research Administration and HR (Fatima Bridgewater), Institute Deputy Director (Robert Moser & Per-Gunnar Martinsson), Institute Director (Karen Willcox).

**University level:** [Dean of Students](#), [Ombuds](#), [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#), [UT Counseling and Mental Health Center](#).

*Note: All three university level offices offer confidential services.*

## Graduate Students

**Oden Institute level:** Graduate Coordinator (Stephanie Rodriguez), Graduate Advisor (George Biros), GSC Chair (Todd Arbogast), Institute Deputy Director (Robert Moser & Per-Gunnar Martinsson), Institute Director (Karen Willcox).

**University level:** [Dean of Students](#), [Ombuds](#), [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#), [UT Counseling and Mental Health Center](#).

*Note: All three university level offices offer confidential services.*

## Faculty

**Oden Institute level:** Associate Director for Research Administration and HR (Fatima Bridgewater), Deputy Director (Robert Moser & Per-Gunnar Martinsson), Institute Director (Karen Willcox).

**University level:** [Ombuds](#), [Employee Assistance Program](#). *Note: The Ombuds and Employee Assistance Program offer confidential services.*

## Research Staff and Postdoctoral Researchers

**Oden Institute level:** Associate Director for Research Administration and HR (Fatima Bridgewater), Institute Deputy Director (Robert Moser & Per-Gunnar Martinsson), Institute Director (Karen Willcox).

**University level:** [Ombuds](#), [Employee Assistance Program](#), [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#). *Note: The Ombuds and Employee Assistance Program offer confidential services.*

## Administrative Staff

**Oden Institute level:** Associate Director for Research Administration and HR (Fatima Bridgewater), Institute Deputy Director (Robert Moser & Per-Gunnar Martinsson), Institute Director (Karen Willcox).

**University level:** [Ombuds](#), [Employee Assistance Program](#). *Note: The Ombuds and Employee Assistance Program offer confidential services.*

## Required University Reporting

**Sexual Harassment:** [Title IX office](#).

***Discrimination: Department of Investigation and Adjudication, Office of Dean of Students.***

***Interpersonal Violence (including stalking): UT Police Department: 512-471- 4441 or 911 if emergency; Employee Assistance Program; Student Emergency Services; Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL) or call 512-232-5050, 24 hours a day.***

## **Process for Addressing Complaints/Concerns**

Within the Oden Institute, complaints and concerns reported to one of the contacts listed above, will be evaluated and reviewed with appropriate personnel for that person's affiliation (i.e., undergraduate or graduate student, faculty, research staff, administrative staff) and for the type of complaint in an effort to seek resolution. Generally, if the concerns or complaints can be handled informally, this approach will be tried first. In other cases, a more formal process will be followed, involving the appropriate University offices, depending on the type of complaint. This process may include a meeting with both complainant and respondent as well as any other witnesses, reviewing relevant documents, etc.

As needed available University resources may assist with complaint and concern resolution, including mediation. Additionally, concerns or complaints presented directly to a University level office will be managed through the processes in place for that office with full participation from Oden Institute resources.

## **Consequences of Negative Actions**

### **What are some possible consequences for inappropriate conduct in the Oden Institute**

It is the intent of the Oden Institute to address conduct contrary to the guidelines detailed above for the benefit of the whole Oden Institute community. Inappropriate conduct may be addressed with corrective action and disciplinary measures up to and including termination.

Specifically, possible scenarios for coaching and/or discipline of faculty and research scientists for repeated complaints and patterns of behavior or more serious offences include:

- Meetings to discuss issues and patterns of behavior with written and signed documentation of the meeting outcomes. Such meetings are meant to allow faculty and research scientists a chance to present their point of view and to discuss ways to mitigate the issues that have become a pattern. Subsequent complaints will lead to further action.
- Loss of ability to recruit new graduate students or supervise undergraduate students.
- Loss of ability to interact with or supervise graduate and undergraduate students.
- Depending on the infraction, negative performance evaluations likely translating into loss of any merit raises that might have otherwise occurred, and/or loss of endowments or discretionary funds (if any held).
- For faculty, loss of Oden Institute affiliation as a Core or Affiliated Faculty.
- For faculty, unpaid leave for a semester or a year.
- In severe cases, termination.

For staff, **University HR policies and procedures** will be followed.