

Updated: August 21, 2019

Welcome to the NPNL! We hope your experience as part of the Neural Plasticity and Neurorehabilitation Lab at USC is a great one, and that you learn a lot, make great friends, and contribute excellently to science.

To that end, we've developed a set of lab policies that will help make sure everything runs smoothly and everyone gets the most out of their time in the lab. If you have any questions, please contact me at sliew@usc.edu.

Best wishes,
Sook-Lei Liew
Director, NPNL

A. LAB CULTURE

1. Follow through on your commitments.

- a. Be at the lab for the hours you've committed and at the times you've committed. That should be at least 10 hours per week, for at least the academic year.
- b. You should put your scheduled hours on the lab google calendar ("NPNL Lab Members"). This helps us coordinate keys and make sure everyone can get in when they need to!
- c. You also need to keep track of your hours and productively **daily** on the lab google doc: XXX
- d. To request time off in advance, please fill out this Time Off Request Form: XXX
- e. If you will be absent last minute, let both myself and the lab manager know via email - preferably at least 24 hours in advance (if you think you will be out sick for instance, let us know the night before if possible). If you are responsible for a project or deadline, let us know when you will make up the missed work.
- f. Three missed days without explanation, or an excessive number of missed days overall, are grounds for dismissal from the lab. We don't do this to be harsh, but to keep everyone accountable and responsible - helpful skills for the 'real world'!
- g. We expect all of our lab members to be proactive. It is not the best use of our time to follow up with you on your commitments, your time log, or your productivity, so we eagerly expect each of you will take responsibility for yourselves.

2. Use your time wisely.

- a. We want you to have fun at lab and getting to know your labmates, but not at the cost of your own--and the lab's--productivity. We have lab outings and encourage lab lunches and other times to hang out and chat, but please be mindful of if you're trying to talk to someone when they really need to be working.

- b. Set daily and weekly goals for your work, and update your accomplishments on the lab google doc so we can celebrate your hard work with you.
- 3. Your effort is noticed and will be rewarded.**
- a. If you are in the lab, it's because we believe you possess the skills and abilities to succeed here. So please - go to town and show us what you can do!
 - b. Individuals who are reliable, resilient, consistent, hard working, problem solvers, and great team players have and will stand out here. Individuals who volunteer to help out and take on responsibility and follow through on those tasks, and who take the initiative to learn new things, will be rewarded. Not all tasks are fun or exciting, but those who work hard and make the most of each opportunity will be noticed.
 - c. **Aside from the inherent satisfaction of knowing you did your best work, additional potential rewards include a strong letter of recommendation from the lab director when you leave the lab, extra opportunities to work on special projects and learn new skills, opportunities to present your work at research conferences, paid opportunities when new grants come in, and opportunities for authorship on abstracts and papers. The opportunity to take on new responsibilities in the lab depends on how well you do with the responsibilities you currently have.**
 - d. On the flip side, inconsistency, flaking out on tasks, spending most of your time on your phone rather than on work, a lack of problem solving, and difficulty working with others will also be noticed. Letters of recommendation are to be earned, not assumed, and excessive or repeated problems are grounds for dismissal. (Note - we haven't had to do this yet because everyone's been so awesome, but we will enforce this if needed.)
- 4. Treat each other with respect, and be generous with one another.**
- a. At the NPPL, we strongly value a positive, encouraging, and collaborative work environment. We are a team, and we will function best when each team member does their part. You were brought into this team because we believe you have something great to contribute, and we hope that you will treat each lab member with respect and be generous with your time with each other. You may be asked to teach someone a skill they don't have, and they may be able to do the same for you in return. Let's foster an environment that we're excited to go to each day, and where we are generous with our time and talents to help one another!
 - b. If you have any interpersonal conflicts, please let the lab manager or myself know as soon as possible so we can try to peacefully resolve them.
- 5. Be honest.**
- a. If something goes wrong, please tell me ASAP. An honest mistake is typically a mistake that I can help to fix. If you try to cover it up, no matter how small, it will definitely become a much bigger problem.
 - b. Don't make excuses. If something didn't work, I expect you to have tried to problem solve it before you come to me, and to tell me the full problem. If you didn't do something right - own your mistake and try to learn from it for the next time.

6. Practice tough love.

- a. The best criticism is the criticism you get at home, from people that you trust, rather than from outside. Criticism should always be constructive and provide a solution or something that can be acted upon - not just pointing out an error. We will practice constructive criticism at lab meetings, and I will practice constructive criticism with you in our one-on-one meetings. My goal is to help you be the best you can be. If you feel I've been unfair with you but are afraid to tell me, you can tell the lab manager and they will let me know. Or you can fill out this anonymous form: Lab Feedback (XXX) - I will check it periodically. I never want to be unfair, but I also don't want to see your opportunities in this lab wasted because I didn't tell you difficult, but important, information.

7. Be professional.

- a. There are lots of great opportunities to work on your professional development in the lab as well. We will periodically assess professional behavior using guided tools such as this one: <https://www.marquette.edu/physical-therapy/documents/professional-behaviors-student-self-assessment.pdf> and we will also perform 360 evaluations of one another (and of me) so we can help each other be our best.

8. A culture of integrity and excellence.

- a. We are committed to a lab culture where everyone comes in, is excited to be there, and does their very best. It's understandable that some days are better than others. However, this mentality may not be the best fit for everyone, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps there's too much else going on in your life to really enjoy your time at the lab, or you realize you don't enjoy the research process. If this is the case, please let us know as soon as possible, as we invest a lot into each one of our lab members. In addition, individuals that consistently are not showing their best efforts may be asked to leave the lab, as they may bring the rest of the lab down and take time and energy from places it could be better spent. The 'three strikes and you're out!' rule applies to any area of lab culture, policies, and expectations, and as lab director, I reserve the right to dismiss any lab member who is not fulfilling their responsibilities or disrupting the lab culture. This is not to be mean or scare people, but to create a fair environment for everyone who is committed to their work, where people can work to the best of their abilities, help each other, and be proud of their accomplishments. We hope that everyone who comes into the lab enjoys their time and finds it to be an enriching and worthwhile experience!

B. HOUSEKEEPING

1. **Weekly lab meetings are mandatory.** There will be a Doodle poll sent at the beginning of each academic semester to figure out the best time for everyone. Meetings are mandatory unless you have been excused by the lab director.
 - o Everyone should be prepared to update their status and what they have accomplished that week, as well as what they plan to work on for the upcoming week.

- Lab meetings are a great opportunity to practice public speaking, how to engage in scientific discourse, learn from other people in the lab, and to share your research findings - please take advantage of them!
 - If you would like to give a talk at lab meeting, discuss a journal paper, etc., please let the lab manager know so you can be included in the schedule.
- 2. Weekly/bi-weekly one-on-one meetings are also mandatory.**
- Typically these are after the weekly meetings - we will touch base and you can tell me what's going on with your work. If you need to meet sooner, just let me know. Even if there's not much to say, I want to see you and make sure everything's going smoothly - oftentimes things will come up that you didn't think were important enough to email, but will let me know if I can be helping you in any way. If you will have to miss a meeting, please be proactive about setting up an alternative time with me.
- 3. Keep a good file structure from the outset, a designated lab notebook for each project, and document your code.**
- For file structures - we use BIDS format for storing neuroimaging data (<https://bids.neuroimaging.io/>) and try to maintain this format for all other data storage as well. Develop your file structure before starting your project and update it as needed throughout – it's much easier to do it at the start than halfway through when things are a mess! See existing lab examples if needed.
 - Please keep an electronic lab notebook. Trust us - when you leave, you will be glad you did this! Document what you did each day, and specific notes for your work so we can retrace steps in case it's needed. If there were any anomalies in an experiment, please track this.
 - Keep documentation of your code and use executable code where possible (R markdown, jupyter notebook, matlab markup) and carefully record what processes you're using - sometimes a paper is written 2 years after you collected the data, and it will be hard for you to remember all the things you did! Reproducible science relies on good documentation.
 - All code should go onto our lab github with clear documentation.
- 4. Dress cleanly and act professionally, especially when participants are scheduled.**
- This includes no short shorts, backless tops, exposed bellies, low cut tops, exposed underwear of any kind (bra straps, boxers, etc.). Instill an air of confidence and professionalism for our participants when they come in for experiments.
 - We also often get spontaneous lab visits, tours or demos - it is important that you maintain a professional environment!
- 5. Be clean.**
- Please be mindful of your work space and make sure to keep it clean and tidy!
 - We have kitchen - please use it wisely and clean up after yourself each day. (Especially in the kitchen with the coffee machine, the dishes, and microwaves/refrigerators.)
- 6. Authorship.**

- Authorship on an abstract or paper is a discussion, and is not to be assumed. We will discuss authorship on each project before starting, and if we forget to, please speak up! We will write down the assumed order of authorship before going into a project. Authorship may change as the project evolves, for instance, if one student leaves before a project is complete and another student takes over. However, expect that authorship will be a constant and up front conversation, and don't be afraid to be direct. It's much better to discuss this in advance than to work under assumptions that don't end up being true.
- Authorship is typically granted to individuals who put forth a significant intellectual and/or work contribution to a project, for instance, running the majority of the subjects or developing and programming the experimental paradigm. Running a few subjects, helping with just part of the analysis, or proofreading the paper will be acknowledged in acknowledgements, rather than authorship. If you are unclear about this, please let me know. It's always an open discussion.
- Here are some published guidelines on authorship:
 - i. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC499623/pdf/jclinpath00196-0118.pdf>
 - ii. <https://hms.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/assets/Sites/Ombuds/files/AUTHORSHIP%20GUIDELINES.pdf>
 - iii. <http://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper.pdf>

7. Meetings and Conferences

- Other USC meetings of interest for our lab include:
 - i. Engineering, Neuroscience and Health (Mon 4-5 pm)
 - ii. Motor Learning Journal Club (Thursdays 10:30-11:30 am)
 - iii. Neurorehabilitation Seminar (Fridays 12-1 pm)
- Our lab participates in a number of conferences. We don't go to all of them all the time, but if you are interested in submitting your work for a conference, please let me know at least 2 months in advance of the abstract deadline so we can discuss what you would potentially submit. Attending a conference is a privilege, not a right, and depends on the stage of your work as well as our current lab funding. Conferences we have attended include:
 - i. International Stroke Conference
 - ii. American Occupational Therapy Association
 - iii. Neural Control of Movement
 - iv. OT Summit of Scholars
 - v. Organization for Human Brain Mapping
 - vi. American Society for Neurorehabilitation
 - vii. American Congress for Rehabilitation Medicine
 - viii. Society for Neuroscience
 - ix. Real-Time Functional Imaging and Neurofeedback
 - x. Brainhacks
 - xi. Etc.

8. Peer-reviewing abstracts, posters, papers.

- To maximize my time, and to help you learn how to mentor and guide others, we have an active peer review system in place for any abstracts, posters, or papers that we work on. Please make sure to fill out the proofreading checklist for your own work, and then have a peer in the lab review your work and fill out the checklist as well. Use this as a good opportunity to give and get feedback from others about your work, and learn areas you can grow in your writing and posters.

9. Remember that you are now a representative of the NPNL.

- If you aren't sure about something (e.g., what we do, for instance), please refer the person to me. Better to be cautious with what we say than to promise something we can't do!

10. Lab snacks and equipment

- We will refill the snacks every few months. Let the lab manager know if you are craving something in particular to help you get through lesion tracing! But please also do not abuse this system, otherwise we will discontinue it.
- Similarly, lab equipment is for your time and productivity at the lab - we do not provide batteries for your home remote control!

11. Communication

- I am not always in the lab. Sometimes I am at my office at the Information Sciences Institute in Marina del Rey or at a clinical partner site or in a meeting. Please send me an email to XXX if you need something and haven't seen me, and feel free to send reminders. In case of emergency, call me at XXX.

12. Maximize my time with you

- I really care about each of you and want each of you to have an awesome experience! I would love to spend lots of time with each of you. Unfortunately, as our lab grows, so do the things taking up my time. When I'm not at the lab, I'm often trying to build ties between our lab and other labs, clinical partners, or industry partners, write papers and grants to gain us visibility and funding to do our research, manage research projects and collaborations, giving talks, teaching, and a lot of other random things in between.
- Help me to make the most of my time with you by preparing what you want to discuss when we meet. If it's something that I may need to consider (like a paper or abstract), send it to me with a few days advance notice so I can make sure I have time to get to it.
- If I'm around - please don't hesitate to come by and talk. Take advantage of my time when I'm around, don't be afraid to ask questions or just let me know how things are going for you. If you want access to a particular opportunity or have an idea - come find me and let me know.
- Email is often the fastest way to get something done. Don't hesitate to try emailing me first if you need something asap and don't see me.
- For troubleshooting problems: Please make sure you've tried your best to troubleshoot problems in advance (and/or, after you try, if you can't get it, ask the lab manager, and then, ask me). Google is your best friend, and chances are, if you come to me with a problem, I will google it and we will just end up doing some steps together.
 - i. Your own ability to problem solve is a very valuable research skill and one that I anticipate you will develop more as you grow in the lab. It will be viewed very favorably! Feel free to brag to me about your latest solved problem - I'd love to know!

- ii. That said, some problems really are challenging or require advanced know-how, so don't waste hours belaboring an issue. If you try and can't get it, usually if you send me an email, I will be able to tell you if you should be able to solve it on your own or not.
 - iii. **In the end, the skill you will really develop is learning how to assess a problem and how much time it should take to solve and the most efficient way to get there!**
- Remind me of what you're working on or what you need when we meet. Don't be afraid of being too pushy - I am managing over 20 different projects at any given time, so I may forget what you're doing or what your immediate needs are.
 - I will try to review your progress and growth at least every semester. Don't be afraid to remind me that you'd like to do a semester review so I can see all the great things you've done. I am glad you've joined the lab, and I'm excited to see all the great things you will do here! :)

13. What you can expect from me

- With all these expectations that I have of you, you also can have some expectations of me. You can expect that I will really care about you and go to bat for you and that I will do my best to make this lab experience an awesome one for you. You can expect that I will provide consistent, hands-on mentorship for you, and that I will be fully invested in helping you achieve whatever you define as success. I have an open-door policy and promise to listen to you. I will ask you where you want to go next and help encourage and actively support you towards whatever you determine you want your next step to be, whether it be in academia, industry, public service, or any next step really. If you have mental or physical health needs, I will do my best to support you, provide you with resources that can help you, and provide accommodations to help you succeed. I will try to learn your quirks, and also share with you mine so that we can work together as best as possible (e.g., quirk #1: I get hangry sometimes, so if I seem grumpy, you might suggest I eat something. I will get the hint. ☺) You can also expect that I will dedicate time in my schedule to go over your work with you, and that this time will expand as needed (e.g., if you have a grant submission of paper doing in) and that I will lay out my schedule each week so you will know where you will fit into my schedule. My job is to do good science and train good scientists, and I have to balance the needs of the lab overall with the needs of each individual, but overall, you can expect that I will give you my best efforts to help you succeed, and if you see ways that you think I could do this better, I am happy to have that conversation. I look forward to working with you!