

Silverman lab expectations

Initial version August 25, 2022 — most recent update February 1, 2024

Expectations for the Silverman lab are as follows. This document will be updated annually or as needed.

I expect that I will always strive to help and enable my lab members to become the best possible scientists, researchers, mentors, labmates, and colleagues.

I expect all lab members to contribute to creating a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive environment for all other lab members, for the entire department, for the campus community, and for the broader scientific community.

I expect all lab members always to consider safety while planning and engaging in their lab activities. I expect all lab members to complete all required safety trainings and updates in a timely manner. As a part of safety, I expect all lab members to contribute to maintaining a neat, tidy, and uncontaminated environment, both in the lab as a whole (including common instruments) and at their individual lab work areas, as well as in non-lab common areas of the research group and at their desks.

As a part of safety, I expect all lab members to avoid having both ears covered simultaneously, e.g., with personal earbuds or the functional equivalent, whether or not music or other audio is actively playing, while at the lab bench or working with instruments. At all times including when at your desk, any audio through earbuds should be kept at a volume that is sufficiently low to be able to hear normal lab sounds as well as any calls for assistance from other lab members or people in nearby research labs and offices. I expect that there will be no routine playing of music in the lab through speakers that are not part of personal earbuds or the functional equivalent.

I define the academic year in accord with the campus calendar, in which each fall semester begins on August 16. Therefore, the academic year begins on August 16 and ends in the subsequent calendar year on August 15.

The department's formal policy on Personal Time Off (PTO) and Sick Leave is included in the department's Policy Manual, posted online at <http://chemistry.illinois.edu/policy-manual>. I expect all lab graduate students to be familiar with this department policy and to discuss any questions or concerns with me. The campus (university) holidays are addressed in this department policy. Wherever the department policy refers to advisor discretion, I intend to be highly accommodating of individual student needs, and specific situations should be discussed with me.

I do not numerically track individual graduate student PTO usage at the level of half-days or days, although such tracking would be allowed by the department's policy. Instead, I expect graduate students to take PTO as they individually require, up to and if needed personally in excess of the department's formal policy limit. I ask that excess PTO plans should be discussed with me.

I ask that when a graduate student is planning to be away from lab for several days or more, especially on days when the graduate student would otherwise ordinarily be present in lab, whenever possible please notify me in advance. It is most helpful to do so in the form of notifying me, "For my time off, I'm planning that my last full day in lab will be <date 1>, and my first full day back in lab will be <date 2>".

Among other considerations, such advance notice is helpful for (a) ensuring continuity in your research plans, and (b) informing our subsequent discussions about how other lab members, e.g., undergraduates, will be mentored during your absence.

I expect that graduate students will use their sick leave when they are sick, rather than working while sick. If you feel sick when you wake up or before you come to lab, then please stay home. If you become sick while in lab, then please go home. If you use your full, formally allotted (by the department policy) sick leave before the academic year has elapsed, then I will allow additional sick leave as needed, rather than require you to use PTO to handle your personal situation. If your use of additional sick leave becomes substantial, then we will discuss the situation to determine how you can still make good progress toward your degree.

I expect all graduate students to decide for themselves the extent to which they will work on weekend days, i.e., Saturdays and Sundays. I do not impose any lab expectation to work on weekends. Many graduate students decide that they can move their research forward more efficiently and decrease their total time to degree by occasionally or frequently working on one or both weekend days, which is an entirely personal decision for each graduate student to make.

I expect all graduate students to decide for themselves their range of working hours on each day. Some people are naturally active earlier or later in the day than are others, and no general rule can readily be stated. Both safety and mentorship (where the latter includes both mentoring others and being mentored by others) should be considered. If any questions arise for a graduate student regarding their most suitable range of working hours, then please discuss those questions with me.

I expect all graduate students to perform research and other lab duties in accord with their commitment to achieving the Ph.D. degree (or M.S. degree when relevant). All “hours per week” considerations are inherently average across the semester. Each graduate student is continuously registered for CHEM 599 Thesis Research, or its equivalent course in another unit such as BIOC 599. A graduate student has no departmentally required minimum number of working hours per week. In my view, a reasonable guideline is 30 hours per week for the CHEM 599 or equivalent research contribution. Separately, an 0.5 FTE research assistant (50% RA) appointment is formally an additional 20 hours per week of lab research, where for most graduate students, the RA appointment forms the basis for pay (salary) and also comes with a tuition waiver such that the student is not directly responsible for paying their own tuition and most fees. Some graduate students have a fellowship that fully or partially defrays their RA costs. By both department policy and my own policy, a graduate student with a fellowship has the same working hours considerations as a graduate student on an RA appointment.

Therefore, although I do not specify a precise number of expected hours per week of research time, for planning purposes a reasonable initial estimate for a graduate student is the sum of 30 hours (CHEM 599) + 20 hours (0.5 FTE RA) = 50 hours per week. Please note that the fact that an RA appointment is formally for 11 months rather than 12 months does not change this calculation, because the campus holidays and PTO days summarized in the department’s policy already account for the duration of the RA appointment, and CHEM 599 is year-round. Also, the department’s policy explicitly considers a graduate student to have PTO in accord with the equivalent of a 100%, not 50%, RA appointment.

I expect that graduate students with a TA appointment may reduce their total research hours in accord with the time actually spent on TA duties.

I expect that undergraduate research students in the lab will contribute as follows. Formally, each 1 credit hour of undergraduate research (e.g., CHEM x97/499, or its equivalent in another unit such as BIOC and MCB 290/492) corresponds to 5 hours per week of lab research, averaged across the semester. It is inherently understood that some weeks of the semester will have a larger than average number of non-research obligations (exams, papers due, etc.), such that an undergraduate student will have little time available in that particular week to spend doing lab research.

The primary purposes of undergraduate research are to gain familiarity with a high-level research environment, learn scientific and other skills relevant to that environment, and experience the enjoyment and personal and professional growth that come with contributing to scientific advancement. Many undergraduate research students discover that they truly want to spend additional time doing lab research, beyond the minimum contribution as computed from their registered credit hours. This additional time is allowed, as long as safety considerations are respected, and as long as doing well in regular college coursework is not neglected as a consequence. Undergraduate research students may work in lab on weekends, if doing so fits their personal schedule and inclination, and if proper mentorship (including safety consideration) is available. Undergraduate research students should always plan to take suitable time off, both at the end of any semester and before the start of any semester.

My expectations with regard to working hours, PTO, and sick leave for lab postdoctoral researchers will be discussed individually with each postdoc, in accord with their individual situation and career plans.

I expect all lab members to communicate frequently with me about their research progress. A reasonable guideline is that if more than one week has elapsed without updating me about your research, then you should update me, either in person or by email. I will follow up promptly if further discussions are needed. As your research advisor, I can't properly do my advising job if I don't know what is happening in your research. Naturally I understand that you each have many things going on outside the lab, such that your research progress will vary from week to week, sometimes strongly so. You should still update me in accord with the mentioned time considerations, even when progress has been slower than usual.

Formal group meeting presentations for each individual lab member happen only three to four times per year and are therefore inappropriate as the mechanism for communicating details of research progress specifically to me. Instead, group meetings are meant to inform the other lab members about your research progress, as well as to foster discussions about possible different or new research directions for yourself and others based on current findings. In general, I expect that lab members will not routinely use their group meetings as the primary means of showing me new data or updating me on their overall research progress.

I expect all lab members to contribute to the smooth operations of the lab, by contributing to the maintenance of the good condition of all lab instruments and the lab itself, by ensuring that I know to reorder any common supplies and reagents in a timely fashion, and by conscientiously performing their assigned group jobs and other tasks such as assigned lab radiation surveys. All group jobs are assigned by agreement with the lab members, and I am always willing to discuss changes in the group jobs listing.

I expect all lab members to keep proper scientific records, including lab notebooks and computer files, in accord with my instructions and standing lab policies for procedures and instruments.

I expect all lab members to check their @illinois.edu email account at least once daily. Official campus communications, as well as important messages from SCS, the department, me, or other lab members are often sent via email.

All Silverman lab standard operating procedures (SOPs) are stored in the lab Safety Manual, accessible both online in the Group Members folder and physically in the red binder in the lab computer room (140 RAL).