Welcome to the Gait Rehabilitation and Motor Learning Lab!

I want your experience as part of the GRML at USC to be positive, productive, and rewarding. We hope that you learn a lot, build a network of friends and colleagues, and make an interesting contribution to science.

To that end, I have developed a set of lab policies that will help ensure that the lab environment fosters the achievement of these goals, things run smoothly, and everyone gets the most out of their time in the GRML. If you have any questions, please contact me at kleech@pt.usc.edu.

I am glad you've joined the lab and I'm excited to see all the great things you will do here!

Best,

Kristan Leech
Director, GRML

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. This will vary from person to person, but should be at least 10 hours per week, for at least the academic year.
   b. Put your scheduled hours on the lab google calendar (“GRML Personnel”) and keep it updated. This helps us coordinate with one another for meetings/experiments.
   c. For time off - email your request to me for approval.
   d. If you will be absent last minute, let me 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 me know when you will make up the missed work.
   e. Three missed days without explanation, or an excessive number of missed days overall, are grounds for dismissal from the lab. This is not done to be harsh, but to keep everyone accountable and responsible (helpful skills for the ‘real world’).
   f. I expect all lab members to be proactive. It is not the best use of anyone’s time to follow up with you on your commitments, your time log, or your productivity, so I 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 lab mates, but not at the cost of your own (and the lab’s) productivity.
   b. Set daily and weekly goals for your work, keep track of your progress/accomplishments and share them with me in our meetings so I can celebrate your hard work with you.
   c. Beyond day/weekly goals – keep track of relevant grant/conference deadlines and program benchmarks and make long-term plans.
3) Your effort is noticed and will be rewarded.
   a. If you are in the lab, it’s because I believe you possess the skills and abilities to succeed here. So, embrace your talents and show the team 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.
   c. 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.
   d. 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.
   e. 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 GRML, we strongly value a positive, encouraging, supportive, and collaborative work environment. We are a team and function best when each team member does their part. You were brought into this team because we believe you have something great to contribute. We hope that you will treat each lab member with respect and be generous with your time. You may 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 all excited to work in everyday!
   b. If you have any interpersonal conflicts, please let me 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 and the earlier I know about it, the better. If attempts are made to cover it up, no matter how small, it will definitely become a much bigger problem and affect more people.
   b. If something didn’t work or there is an issue, I expect you to have attempted to problem solve it before you come to me. That way, when we discuss it – you can explain the full problem and how you have tried to address it already – which will save time. If you didn’t do something right, please own your mistake and learn from it moving forward. It may prevent someone else from doing something similar in the future.
6) Provide an intellectually challenging and supportive environment.

a. Getting feedback and engaging in exciting/challenging discussions about your work is one of the best parts of science! It challenges you to think critically, consider different perspectives, be open to new ideas, and communicate clearly. There will be many opportunities to get feedback on your work (lab meetings, division seminars, and in one-on-one meetings). My goal is to challenge you intellectually and support your professional development into the best scientist you can be.

b. If you feel I’ve been too harsh – do not be afraid to tell me. It is important for me to know, so that I can adjust my feedback style. I never want to be harsh/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) A culture of 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.

a. 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.

b. 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.

c. 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!
d. If you would like to give a talk at lab meeting, discuss a journal paper, etc., reach out to the person organizing it and get your name added to the schedule.

2) Weekly one-on-one meetings are mandatory.
   a. Typically, these are after the weekly lab meetings - we will touch base and you can tell me what’s going on with your work. 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 need to meet sooner or you will have to miss a meeting, please be proactive about setting up an alternative time to meet.

3) Use a designated lab notebook for each project and document your code.
   a. You may use an electronic lab notebook as well, but we need to have access to it. Trust me - when you leave, you will be glad you did this!
   b. Document what you did each day, and specific notes for your work so we can retrace steps in case it's needed.
   c. Keep documentation of your code and processes as well - 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.
   d. All code should go onto the lab github with clear documentation.

4) Dress and act professionally.
   a. This includes no gym clothes, short shorts, backless tops, exposed bellies, ripped pants, graphic tees, etc. Instill an air of confidence and professionalism for our participants when they come in for experiments.
   b. Good personal hygiene is expected.
   c. Avoid the overuse of fragrance or scented products that could be bothersome to colleagues/participants.

5) Authorship.
   a. 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 example, if one student leaves before a project is complete and another student takes over. However, expect that authorship will be an ongoing, direct conversation. It’s much better to discuss this in advance than to work under assumptions that don’t end up being true.
   b. 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.
   c. Specific journals usually have authorship guidelines, but here are some examples:
6) Meetings and Conferences.

   a. Other local, regular meetings of interest for our lab include:
      1. Engineering, Neuroscience and Health (timing changes each semester)
      2. Motor Learning Journal Club (timing changes each semester)
      3. Neurorehabilitation Seminar (Fridays 12-1 pm)

   b. 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:
      1. Society for Neuroscience
      2. American Society of Neurorehabilitation
      3. American Physical Therapy Association
      4. Neural Control of Movement
      5. American Society of Biomechanics

7) Maximize your time with me.

   a. I really care about each of you and want you to have an awesome experience in the GRML. I will do my best to spend as much time as possible with each of you. However, as the lab grows, so will my other obligations. If I’m not at the lab, I’m likely working on collaborations with other labs and clinical partners, editing your papers, and writing grants to get funding for our research, giving talks to gain visibility, teaching, etc.

   b. To make the most of our meeting time - prepare 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 a few days in advance – so that I have time to get to it.

   c. Remind me of what you’re working on or what you need when we meet. I am managing multiple projects/people at any given time, so I may forget what you’re doing or what your immediate needs are.

   d. We’ll try to set goals and review your progress at the beginning and end of each semester using the Lab Goal Setting form (here is a post describing why this is helpful https://gis.usc.edu/blog/why-setting-goals-matters-in-graduate-school/). Please make sure to fill it out and go over it with me at the beginning of each 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.

   e. When I am in my office, please don’t hesitate to come by and talk. 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 let me know.

   f. Slack is often the fastest way to get something done. Email is second. Don’t hesitate to try slacking/emailing me first if you need something asap and don’t see me.
g. 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 a lab member who might have another perspective). Google is your best friend, and chances are, if you come to me with a problem, I will google it with you, and we will just end up doing some steps together. So, try to google first, so we can get to the harder problems together!

h. Your ability to think critically and problem solve is a very valuable, necessary research skill. I anticipate you will develop this skill 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!

i. That said, some problems really are challenging or require advanced knowhow, so don’t waste hours belaboring an issue. If you try and can’t get it, usually if you send me a message on slack or an email, I will be able to tell you if you should be able to solve it on your own or not.