

Department of Horticulture - Graduate Student Life

Note this document is meant to supplement, not replace, the Graduate Handbook

Overview & Graduate Student Responsibilities

Purpose of This Guide

- Briefly define expectations and responsibilities for graduate students and faculty.
- Foster a culture of respectful mentorship, academic growth, and mental well-being.

Key Realities of Graduate Education

- Research-based programs are iterative and ambiguous; experiments fail routinely and projects evolve—adaptability is a strength!
- Success = persistence + skill development, not perfection.

Student Responsibilities

- Communicate professionally and openly.
- Be proactive with goals, deadlines, and self-advocacy.
- Participate in seminars, networking, and development.
- Be resourceful and use resources early when issues arise.
- One important resource for students is the departmental [Graduate Student Handbook](#)
- For more information on student responsibilities, refer to the WSU Graduate School Policies and Procedures Manual, Chapter 12, "[Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)"
- Information about advisor/mentor expectations is found the WSU Graduate School Policies and Procedures Manual, Chapter 1, "[Expectations of Faculty Advisors and Mentors](#)"

Mentorship—Expectations & Relationships

What Good Mentorship Looks Like?

- Regular 1:1 meetings (biweekly).
- Timely feedback (within 2 weeks unless otherwise specified).
- Advocacy for student development.
- Respect for work-life balance.
- See Table 1 (next page).

Building a Mentorship Network

- No single mentor meets all needs—cultivate mentors across intellectual, emotional, and professional domains. Your committee is a great place to seek additional mentorship beyond your faculty advisor.

Research Assistant (RA) and Teaching Assistant (TA) Roles, Funding, and Professional Growth

RA vs. TA Work

- For both, clarify expectations early each semester via Credit Agreements.
- RAs may work on lab projects that differ from your thesis.
- TAs should receive supervision and materials; communicate clearly and reach out if expectations are not met.

Financial Realities

- Funding may not cover all expenses—budget carefully.
- Understand the scope and duration of RA/TA support and seek fellowships early.

Professional Development

- Discuss career plans regularly with mentors.
- Attend workshops, conferences, and seek guidance from Career Services.
- Graduate student organizations can be a source of travel funds and support professional development.

Table 1. The following table summarizes key expectations for both faculty mentors and graduate students to help ensure productive, supportive, and professional mentoring relationships.

Topic	Faculty Mentor Responsibilities	Graduate Student Expectations
Meeting Frequency	Meet one-on-one at least once every two weeks. Increase frequency during critical periods.	Be proactive and schedule meetings with your mentor. Come prepared to meetings with updates, questions, or agenda items.
Response Time	Respond to emails and messages within 2–3 business days. Use automatic replies and other forms of communication if delays are expected.	Use professional communication. Follow up respectfully if no reply within 5-7 business days.
Feedback on Written Work	Provide constructive feedback on proposals, drafts, and reports within an agreed upon timeframe (usually within 2 weeks).	Submit materials with enough lead time and clarify deadlines.
Support for Professional Development	Discuss goals, provide networking opportunities, and support fellowship/job applications.	Be proactive in discussing career goals and opportunities.
Research and Project Guidance	Help plan timelines, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure scientific rigor.	Follow through on agreed timelines. Seek help when stuck.
Respect and Inclusion	Maintain a safe, inclusive, and respectful lab/working environment.	Treat all lab members and mentors with professionalism and respect.
Advocacy and Opportunity	Nominate students for awards, presentations, authorship, etc.	Communicate goals and express interest in opportunities. seek out opportunities rather than wait for them to be presented to you.
Availability During Field/Lab Work	Be accessible (directly or by delegation) during intense periods.	Communicate schedules, needs, and issues in a timely way.

Degree Timeline and Milestones

Activity/Milestone	Timeline
Begin steps to establish residency	Within 30 days of arrival
Complete research credit hours – refer to Graduate Student Handbook for the specifics of your degree program	While enrolled
Complete teaching/outreach experience	As scheduled
Meet with new advisor, understand work expectations for courses, research, and teaching (if applicable); identify a minimum of 2 additional committee members (i.e., in addition to your advisor)	First semester <i>preferred</i>
Meet with graduate committee	Each semester <i>preferred</i>
File Graduate Program of Study with Graduate School	By end of second semester
Complete HORT 508	Second semester <i>preferred</i>
Complete and have Research Proposal approved by Faculty Advisory Committee	First year <i>preferred</i>
Review and complete training needs for research (e.g., IACUC, IRB, IBC, and/or RSC)	First year
Complete HORT 509 - Seminar	Every semester when enrolled full-time (except when enrolled in HORT 510 - Seminar)
Complete HORT 700/800 Research Credits (minimum of 1 credit/semester)	Every semester
Complete Preliminary Exams (PhD students only—minimum of 2 credits of 800 required)	Second year <i>preferred</i>
Annual review of progress with advisor	Every year (usually due by end of March)
Complete HORT 510 – Seminar	Final Semester
Complete thesis or dissertation defense (minimum of 2 credits of 700/800 required)	Final semester
Exit survey and interview with Dept. Chair	Upon graduation

Navigating Challenges & Mental Health

Addressing Inadequate Mentorship

- Start with open communication if safe.
- Escalate to program directors or department chairs if unresolved.
- Document concerns and review options like conflict resolution through the Graduate School (see “Graduate and Professional Student Informal Complaint and Formal Grievance” section in

the Policies and Procedures manual), meeting with the [Ombuds Office](#), or filing a formal complaint (see below).

-File a formal complaint if the issue involves harassment, discrimination, or ethical misconduct to [WSU Compliance and Civil Rights](#)

Mental and Emotional Health

Sometimes, mentorship challenges—such as unclear expectations, lack of support, or disrespectful communication—can directly contribute to mental health struggles. These situations are not your fault, and you deserve both professional support and a healthy academic environment.

- **You do not have to be in crisis to ask for help.** Stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue are valid reasons to seek support.
- You can speak confidentially with campus mental health professionals through **WSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**. Students at Research and Extension Center can access this care through [Teladoc](#) (24 hour) via the grad insurance or ISHP health plans.
- If mentorship is a source of distress, reach out to the **Department Chair, Graduate Executive Chair**, or a **trusted faculty ally**. They can help you explore constructive solutions or a change in mentorship.
- Consider reaching out to peer networks or student support groups—sharing with others who understand can be powerful.

Taking care of your mental health is part of being a successful scholar. Seeking support is a sign of strength and self-awareness—not weakness.

Community, Housing, and Transportation

Graduate students in the Horticulture program may be based at the main campus in Pullman or at one of WSU's Research and Extension Centers (RECs) located throughout the state. Each location offers unique opportunities and challenges. Understanding the local environment, resources, and lifestyle will help you better prepare for success.

Living and Working in Pullman

- Community and Lifestyle: <https://pullmanchamber.com/>
- Housing and Cost of Living: <https://housing.wsu.edu/home/>
- Transportation and Connectivity: <https://www.pullman-wa.gov/services/transit/index.php>
- Social and Recreational Opportunities: https://www.pullman-wa.gov/services/parks_recreation/index.php

Living and Working at the Northwest Research REC (NWREC)

- **Community and Lifestyle:** NWREC is in Mount Vernon, approximately halfway between Vancouver, Canada and Seattle Washington. Census reports from 2023 estimate approximately 35,300 people reside in Mount Veron. The area is known for its mild, marine climate, rich alluvial soils, diverse small and mid-sized farming enterprises, and unique rural-urban interface. The city and surrounding area attracts tourists and hosts regular farmers markets, music festivals, and is well known for the Tulip Festival held in April.
- **Housing and Cost of Living:** Cities in northwest Washington have a high cost of living relative to Pullman. The Olsen House is an on-campus dormitory in a historic farmhouse. A limited number of rooms with a shared bathroom are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Senior students that have stayed longer in the Olsen House will be asked

to move if demand exceeds availability, so that rooms are given to new, incoming students. Many students not residing in the Olsen House share a 2-3 bedroom apartment with others to keep living costs down.

- **Transportation and Connectivity:** Most students acquire a drivers license and car to meet their transportation needs. However, limited bus services are available through Skagit Transit. Bellair Airporter Shuttle provides shuttle transportation to the Sea-Tac Airport and other locations within the state. Mount Vernon also has an Amtrack train and bus station. Ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft are limited and expensive in the area.
- **Social and Recreational Opportunities:** There Graduate Student group in Mount Veron arranges social outings and periodic field trips. In the summer there are numerous social and recreational activities such as hiking, boating, music festivals, and more. Several city and state parks are also within reasonable driving distance.
- **Additional Resources:** <https://www.mountvernonchamber.com/tourism/>

Living and Working at the Irrigated Agriculture REC (IAREC)

- **Community and Lifestyle:** Prosser is a small, agricultural community with an in-city population of approximately 6,000 people. It is approximately 35 minutes away from the Tri-Cities (400,000 people), and the WSU Tri-Cities campus. While small, the town has a vibrant feel, with new schools, weekly farmer's markets, and a strong tourism industry based on the local wineries.
- **Housing and Cost of Living:** Housing in Prosser and the cost of living is generally higher than Pullman, given the small community. While the IAREC campus has a dormitory for temporary (6 months or less) stays, it is expected that most students will procure housing in the town of Prosser, although some choose to commute from the Tri-Cities or neighboring towns. Given there are a number of working professionals in the area associated with wineries, the hospital, and other major employers, rent tends to be high, and it is anticipated that many students often share 2-3 bedroom apartments with others to keep living costs down.
- **Transportation and Connectivity:** May students often obtain their driver's license and own a car for routine transportation. However, there is a regional transit system that can be used to connect IAREC to Prosser and other towns. This is the Benton-Franklin Transit, and they also have Dial-A-Ride services.
- **Social and Recreational Opportunities:** There are a number of private gyms, city parks (including outdoor swimming pool), and other outdoor activities in the Prosser area. Given the number of wineries, the summers are filled with events, concerts, and other social gatherings. There are several music and theatre venues in the city that bring in both local and international talent. In the winter, the city hosts a number of downtown events.
- **Additional Resources:** <https://www.prosserchamber.org/>

Living and Working at the Tree Fruit REC (TFREC)

- **Community and Lifestyle:** The TFREC is located in Wenatchee, WA, in the center of Washington's tree fruit industry, which is the largest producer of apples, pears, and sweet cherries in the US. In addition to being a prime location for tree fruit research, extension and industry opportunities, Wenatchee is a wonderful place to live. The population in 2024 was reported to be 35,401. Sitting in the shadow of the Cascade Mountain Range and on the confluence of the Wenatchee and Columbia Rivers, our town enjoys stunning mountain views, countless forms of outdoor recreation, and 300 sunny days per year. If you like parades and good food, you can also enjoy our Apple

Blossom festival held in late spring. TFREC is also home to the community education garden ran by the WSU Master Gardeners. This is an outdoor learning environment for demonstrating and teaching sustainable gardening practices.

- **Housing and Cost of Living:** TFREC has on-campus housing that holds up to 10 students and/or employees with roommate situations. The rent is very affordable and the units are fully furnished. Students will have first priority for this housing up to two (2) years unless a special request is made and space allows. While cost of living is high in Wenatchee, there are many apartment complexes and new builds going in year-round.
- **Transportation and Connectivity:** If obtaining your own vehicle is not practical or financially possible, Wenatchee Link Transit offers FREE electric bus transportation with a stop situated in front of the Center. You can also find taxi and Uber services as well as the Wenatchee Valley Shuttle which travels between the Sea-Tac airport and Wenatchee. It is important to be mindful of the weather when traveling if you must cross a Cascade Mountain pass. Pass reports can be found on the Washington DOT website. Alternative, we also have Pangborn Airport that flies directly to Sea-Tac and is located in East Wenatchee, just 22 miles from the Center.
- **Recreation:** TFREC Graduate Student Organization is a very closely bonded group who support each other. They plan activities and outings throughout the year to include journal club, field trips, fishing, bowling parties, and pumpkin carving/cider pressing around Halloween. Students are given many opportunities to showcase their research through open houses, science in our valley presentations and visits to the local schools to connect with other students.
- **Additional Information:** [TFREC Graduate Student Handbook](#)

Living and Working at the Tri-Cities Campus

- **Community and Lifestyle:** The Tri-Cities consists of Richland (and West Richland), Pasco and Kennewick. Tri-Cities is located at the confluence of the Columbia, Yakima and Snake rivers in south-central Washington. The WSU Tri-Cities campus is located on the north side of the City of Richland, adjacent to the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL). With ~275,000 residents in Benton and Franklin counties, Tri-Cities is a major population center in Washington state. The regional economy is based on technology and energy, along with a strong agricultural sector. There is a strong tourism industry based on the wine industry, as well as the recreational opportunities afforded by the three rivers that meet in the Tri-Cities.
- **Housing and Cost of Living:** Housing is generally higher in Tri-Cities than Pullman, despite the size of the communities. PNNL and the Hanford site offer competitive wages, keeping the cost of living and housing high for the region. There are a number of apartment complexes close enough to walk or bike to campus, although many students choose to live further away in other parts of the Tri-Cities where lower cost housing opportunities exist. Students often share apartments or houses to keep living costs affordable.
- **Transportation and Connectivity:** Most students will own cars for routine transportation, even if they live close to campus. The campus is on the north side of town and is not within easy walking or biking distance of grocery stores and other stores. Benton-Franklin Transit offers a bus service to most of the Tri-Cities region and also offers Dial-A-Ride service. The region is served by Interstate highways 82 and 182, and Interstate Highways 84 and 90 are a short drive from the area. Tri-Cities Airport (PSC) offers daily flights to Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, Denver, and other cities as well.

- **Social and Recreational Opportunities:** Tri-Cities offers abundant opportunities for outdoor activities. The Tri-Cities campus is located next to the Columbia River, and there is a paved bike/walking path that runs through the campus and down the river to the far end of town and beyond. There are numerous private gyms, city parks, and other activities nearby. Every summer the Tri-Cities hosts hydroplane races on the Columbia River. There are also dozens of wineries within an hour's drive of the Tri-Cities.
- **Additional Resources:** <https://tridec.org/welcome-to-the-tri-cities/>

Living and Working at the Puyallup REC

- **Community and Lifestyle:** PREC is located in Puyallup, Washington, approximately 35 miles south of Seattle and part of the greater Tacoma metropolitan area. With a population of about 43,000, Puyallup is known for its strong sense of community, historic downtown, and agricultural heritage. The city hosts the Washington State Fair, one of the largest fairs in the country, each September. It also features year-round farmers markets, art walks, and community festivals. The area offers a unique blend of suburban amenities and agricultural roots, with proximity to both urban centers and outdoor recreation.
- **Housing and Cost of Living:** Like much of western Washington, Puyallup has a relatively high cost of living compared to Pullman and other rural areas. Students often reduce housing costs by sharing rental housing in the surrounding community. On-campus housing at PREC is limited but includes the Ross Graduate Student House, offering private rooms and shared common spaces, and three family units: a cottage and north campus unit on the main PREC campus and a farmhouse at Farm 5 located 5 miles east of the main campus. Housing is available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Transportation and Connectivity:** Puyallup is part of the Sound Transit system, with access to the Sounder commuter rail, connecting to Seattle and Tacoma, and local bus service through Pierce Transit. While public transit and biking are feasible for many, having a personal vehicle is often helpful. Rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft are readily available, and major roads like I-5 and Highway 167 make travel convenient.
- **Social and Recreational Opportunities:** The PREC Graduate Students Association (GSA) often organizes events such as hikes and social gatherings on and off campus. The area offers access to hiking, biking, and water sports, with Mount Rainier, the Puget Sound, and Washington's parks and forests within driving distance. The nearby cities of Tacoma and Seattle also offer concerts, museums, sporting events, and more. On the PREC campus, students have access to a free gym that is open to all faculty, staff, and students.
- **Additional Resources:**
[Puyallup Chamber of Commerce – Visit Puyallup](#)
[City of Puyallup](#)
[Washington State Fair](#)

Final Note: You Belong

- Impostor syndrome is common—your presence in graduate school is earned.
- Success = showing up, growing, and building community support.