Ganong-Noel Lab Principals, Job Description, Rhythms, and Professional Development

Lab Goals

Work in our lab is guided by four goals

1. **Asking policy-relevant research questions** We ask research questions with clear policy implications for helping people in financial distress.

2. **A shared understanding of questions**
   a. Economics is a lot more fun when you spend time talking through ideas at the whiteboard rather than working on them alone. We spend a lot of time talking with each other and we will endeavor to also spend a lot of time discussing economics with you.
   b. At the start of every task we include an objective which explains how the task fits into the larger research project. We believe that doing the best possible job on the task requires understanding how it fits into the larger research project.

3. **Getting the right answer**
   a. "Never be the senior person with a secret" This is a saying from the US Navy which we learned from a coworker who is in the naval reserves. Everyone makes mistakes in their code. When you find a mistake in yours or a colleague's (or ours), please let us know.
   b. "Where the bodies are buried" Even if there were no coding mistakes, a big challenge for empirical economics is that sometimes statistical results are fragile. If this is the case for a result in a project we are working on, we want to know! To that end, we encourage you to think of robustness checks that we have not thought of, implement them, and tell us what you find.
   c. "Obligation to dissent" Even if there were no coding mistakes and no statistically fragile results, every research project still has conceptual problems. If you disagree with an analytical choice we have made or a conclusion we have reached, we want to know!
4. Your professional development

We are committed to your professional development, regardless of whether you want to do a PhD in economics, work in the public sector or work in the private sector.

Job Description

- If there's something you don’t understand, please tell us. We’d much rather teach you about the concept than end up with you unsure if you did the right thing and us unsure if your code is right!
- Measure twice, cut once. We would rather have a small amount of output you are sure is correct rather than a lot of output that you are unsure about.
- We place a high value on clear writing. Provide context such that other readers (us, your future self, another lab member) who knows less about the topic can understand what you did.
- Sometimes we will send you time-sensitive requests and often we will send you requests that are not time-sensitive. We will do our best to clarify this in our tickets, but please always feel free to ask about the timeline for a project or a request.
- Not all of the work you do will make it into the papers that we write. Neither does all of the work that we do. This is not a reflection of the quality of your work. This is a normal part of research and also happens in government and the private sector.
- In your second year in the lab, expect to spend time mentoring first years and undergraduates in the lab.

Rhythms

- In general, we expect you to be in the office Monday through Friday, starting at 8 or 9AM, for 9 hours per day (including a lunch break). Usually we do a daily stand-up at 8:40AM where everyone discusses what they are working on and asks questions
  - There is some flexibility in work hours. Please let us know in advance if you need to adjust your schedule.
  - Occasionally, we will ask you to work longer than normal hours (evenings and weekends). However, longer hours are the exception rather than the norm in our lab and we will try to communicate clearly ahead of time when
extra effort will be useful. We won’t expect you to be on-site outside of normal business hours.

- No meeting can start until everybody present (RPs and PIs) has a pen and paper.
- You are welcome to attend a seminar once or twice a week or audit a class, and usually can take a class for credit as well.
- We follow the Booth leave policy, which gives four weeks of vacation/personal leave per year (in addition to the 13 university holidays). We encourage you to use this leave.
- We try to have a relatively small number of meetings. This is in part because you are on a maker’s schedule (we sometimes are too, depending on if we are in a teaching quarter or not).
- If your parents are in town, feel free to show them around the office and bring them to standup.

Professional Development

- Before you start, we will recommend a few books on writing good code and staying organized as well as a few academic papers related to the topic that you will be working on.
- We are committed to two-way feedback (i.e. we tell you how you can improve and you tell us how we can improve). We do two-way feedback once a month when you first start the job and at least once a quarter during your time with us.
- By 5pm the night before a two-way feedback session, we ask that you write a brief note describing what you think is going well, how you think you can improve, and any questions you have. After the session, you will write up some brief notes summarizing the conversation.
- We are committed to giving you regular feedback.
- We are committed to deliberately assigning tasks such that you learn a range of skills.
- We are interested in helping your professional growth whether that is a PhD in economics, another advanced degree, a job in the private sector, or public service. Although both of us have ended up as economics professors, neither of us took a particularly linear track to get there (Pascal worked in and adjacent to government for four years before starting his PhD, Peter took a year off to work in government during his PhD). We see our job as to help you pursue your career interests.