August 24 SGM: Choosing a Lab Rotation

“Second Week Business”

* How did the first week of Core Course go?
* Is everyone set for their first rotation?
* If you are interested in becoming a First Year Representative for the GSO, nominate yourself by emailing [k.calabro@ufl.edu](mailto:k.calabro@ufl.edu) by 5PM Thursday (Today!). Please feel free to email Kaitlyn with any questions you may have about the role.
* COM Graduate Education Welcome Reception is TODAY (Aug 24th) at 5pm in the Harrell Medical Education Bldg. Atrium

*Before your rotations…*

* For a list of PIs currently accepting students, go to: <http://idp.acceleration.net/HostedSites/IDP/Pages/SearchIDP.asp>
  + This site allows you to search by name, concentration, department, and keyword.
  + Although this database should be updated, don’t hesitate to contact a PI that is not accepting students to double check. Situations can change!
* Try to contact possible rotation PIs as early as possible. It sometimes takes a while for PIs to return your emails and you don’t want to have to rush to find a rotation at the last minute. Some PIs are just not good at replying to emails altogether, so if there is someone you are very interested in talking with be prepared to track them down in person.
* After initially contacting a PI through email, try to set up a time to meet with them one-on-one. This will give you a chance to learn more about the PI and the research they do.
  + See “Question to ask Potential Mentors”
* If after meeting with a PI, you decide that lab is not for you, don’t feel obligated to do a rotation with them.
* Try to have a list of at least 5 PIs that you are interested in working with. Some PIs may be unavailable, and you may decide that some of the labs aren’t for you.
* Don’t hesitate to contact current graduate students in a lab you are interested in. They may be able to give you insight into the lab’s atmosphere, what it is like working for the PI, the type of research that is done, and funding situations.
* Some of you may already be decided on what lab you want to join. You should still put some thought into your rotations since you are required to do at least three. You may want to mix up these rotations. Rotate in entirely different concentrations and departments, or with collaborators in the lab you want to join. Even if you have your heart set on a particular area of research, try something different. You never know!
* You don’t have to choose all of your rotations now. You may want to wait a few weeks into your first rotation to start looking for a second rotation. See if you are interested in and enjoy the work in the topic of your first rotation. You can then decide if you want to rotate in a similar lab or a completely different one.
* Once you have decided on a rotation fill out the form located at: <http://biomed.med.ufl.edu/students/first-year-students/rotation-selection-form/>
  + Submit the form online.
  + Print out a copy and have the PI sign it.
  + Return the signed form to the Graduate Student office.

*During your rotations…*

* It can be difficult to balance doing well in core course and doing well in your rotation. There is no one way to do this. You have to find a balance that works well for you.
* Read papers! Ask the PI and the lab member you are working with for papers that are relevant to your rotation project early on. This will help you to better understand the project and help out when writing your rotation report.
* Talk to as many of the lab members as possible (lab manager, graduate students, post-docs, etc.) Do they enjoy the research they are doing? Are they happy? What is it like working with the PI? Do they publish often?
* If the lab works with animals or dangerous materials, is this okay with you? If you are not comfortable working with animals, radiation, etc. you should probably consider a different lab.
* You may decide early on in your rotation that the lab is not the best fit for you – do not let this get in the way of you doing well in it! You are still being evaluated and your performance and attitude in a lab could be a determining factor for another PI letting you join theirs. Also, the PIs that you rotate with can still end up on your committee or providing letters of recommendation for grants and fellowship applications, so it is in your best interest to not burn any bridges along the way!
* Be open to learning as much as possible! Soak in as much information as you can. Even if you think your rotation project is not relevant to what you ultimately see yourself working on, you still may learn a thing or two that will help you later on in your lab life.

*After your rotations…*

* Make sure you talk to the PI towards the end or after your rotation has ended to get feedback from them. Ask them if they are willing/have funding for you to join their lab.
* Even if you had a great rotation, you may want to wait until rotations are coming to an end to commit to a lab. You may find another lab that you like even more!
* Once you have decided on the lab you want to join, talk to the PI as soon as possible. Make sure that the PI is interested in taking you and that they have funding.
* If at the end of your third rotation you still haven’t found a lab you love, don’t panic! You are allowed to do a forth rotation. If you are having trouble finding a lab, reach out and talk to Brett, Amy, Dr. Rowe, or an advanced GPBMS student.
* The goal of doing rotations is to find a lab that you are comfortable in and that performs research that interests you. Remember that this will be your home for the next ~4-5 years. You want to make sure you will still be happy and interested in your project several years down the road.
  + For things to consider before committing to a lab see “Questions to Ask Yourself Before Joining a Lab”

Questions to Ask Potential Mentors

* Can you tell me more about the different projects that your lab is working on?
* What is the funding like in your lab?
* Have you mentored graduate students in the past? Where are they now?
* How often does your lab publish papers? If they have had previous graduate students, how many papers did they publish before graduating (first author/secondary author)?
* Are there scientific conferences that your lab normally attends?
* Does your lab work with animals?
* Does your lab work with radiation/other dangerous material?
* Do you already have a potential project/projects in mind that I would work on? If so, can you describe them in more detail?
* Does you have regular lab meetings? Are they weekly? Bi-weekly? Monthly? Are they structured as formal presentations or more laid-back?
* What hours do your lab members normally work (early morning, later into the afternoon, etc.)?
* Do lab members typically work on the weekends? Is this required?

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Joining a Lab

* There are no right or wrong labs to join. The process of joining a lab is a personal decision. You must decide what is best for you. What are the things you are looking for most in a lab? What are things you are willing to settle on? The best advice is to know what you personally like and choose the lab that you feel happiest and most comfortable in. Here are some other things to consider:
* Does the research in this lab interest me?
* If you have already been told about your potential project, does this project excite you? Is this something you think you will still be interested in in 2-3 years?
* Do you get along with the PI? Is the PI more hands-on or do they want you to learn on your own? Do you feel comfortable with their mentoring style?
* Is the PI more formal or laid-back when dealing with lab members? What do you prefer?
* Do you think you will get the amount of attention you need from your PI? (Some people may want to be able to meet with their PI several times a week. Others may be fine with only seeing their PI a few times a month. What do you want in your PI?)
* Does you PI have an open-door policy with meetings or will you need to make an appointment?
* Do you get along with other lab members (graduate students, techs, lab managers, post-docs)?
* Are there experienced lab members (graduate students, postdocs) you can talk to for advice? Is this something you want or are you okay with figuring out things on your own?
* Does the lab take undergraduate volunteers? Are you interested in mentoring undergrads?
* Does this lab publish often? Will you have the chance to be a secondary author on any papers?
* Does the lab go to many conferences? Do the lab members give talks or poster presentations at conferences?
* Does the lab collaborate with other labs? Does the PI have contacts that you can network with?
* Does the lab have more formal work hours? Do these hours work for you? (Are you a morning person or would you prefer to get into lab later and work later?)
* How many hours a day are lab members expected to work? Do you want to be involved in other activities on campus (GSO, GAU, etc.)? Will you have time for this?
* Are lab members expected to work on the weekends? If so, are you okay with this?