

Office of Research Education Policy

Protocol to follow when a student leaves her/his/their mentor's research laboratory/program.

While the majority of ORE PhD students complete their doctoral work with their original choice of PhD mentor, this is not always the case. The choice to not continue doctoral research with the original mentor could be student-driven, mentor-driven and/or a mutually agreed upon decision. In all cases, the best outcomes will be achieved if open, honest, respectful interactions and communication occur between mentor and student. However, it is often necessary to enlist support of the program and/or ORE to facilitate optimal communication.

A primary issue to consider is the student's well-being. If medical or personal issues are creating barriers for the student's progress, the student should be made aware of appropriate support services as soon as possible. If it is not possible to address well-being concerns while working on PhD research, a student may consider a leave of absence – medical or personal. The procedures for LOAs are discussed elsewhere.

Below are steps to follow for changes in laboratory home depending upon whether the move is driven by the student, mentor or mutually-agreed upon. In all cases, please cc the ORE Associate Director (Angie Ribera) and ORE Business Services Program Director (Jodi Cropper) about the deliberations and decisions.

- I. Student-driven decision to leave original mentor's research program and find a new mentor and project.

A student may feel that their PhD training and career goals will be optimized with a different mentor. Underlying this decision, may be a variety of reasons including a significant change in research interests and career goals or sub-optimal communication and interactions with PI and/or other lab members. Open communication between the student and PI is the route that would lead to the optimal outcome (e.g., III below). However, often sub-optimal communication is one of the problems leading to the student's position. In that case, the student should first reach out to the Chair of her/his/their PhD committee and the ORE Asst Dean of Student Affairs (Andy Bradford). If the student wishes to continue finding a new laboratory home and mentor, the next step would be to work with the PhD program to find a new mentor and laboratory home. ORE recommends that the current mentor be informed at this stage, out of respect for the mentor.

- II. Mentor-driven decision to leave original mentor's research program and find a new mentor and project.

A mentor may feel that the student's PhD training and career goals will be optimized with a different mentor or that their expectations for the student's research commitment and progress are not being met. A variety of reasons may contribute to this conclusion including student absenteeism, sub-optimal communication and interactions with the student, or student's unprofessional behavior compromising the laboratory environment for others. Often, sub-optimal communication is one of the problems leading to the mentor's position. Additionally, if the student is being supported by funds provided by an NIH grant, the funding agency requires that there be effort devoted to the project. Thus, NIH compliance issues may also be of concern.



If the mentor and student cannot come to an agreement about next steps and the mentor wishes that the student find a new laboratory home, the mentor should first reach out to the Chair of the student's committee and the ORE Asst Dean of Student Affairs (Andy Bradford). The next step would be to work with the PhD program to find a new mentor and laboratory home.

As mentioned above, the student's well-being should be considered in these discussions and whether a medical or personal leave of absence is an appropriate course to follow.

In the event a student is unable to find another laboratory, in which to continue their PhD, they may be subject to dismissal from the program

III. Mutually-agreed upon decision.

If the student and mentor are in agreement that the student's PhD training and career goals would be best supported with a change in mentor and research project, the next step would be to work with the PhD program and ORE Asst Dean of Student Affairs (Andy Bradford) to start the process of finding a new research home. As mentioned above, the student's well-being should be considered in these discussions and whether a medical or personal leave of absence is an appropriate course to follow.

In the event a student is unable to find another laboratory, in which to continue their PhD, they may be subject to dismissal from the program

Not addressed – what if a new home/mentor lab is not possible for student?

Commented [BA(1)]: I added a sentence above. Sadly, I think it would result in dismissal, similar to what happens if a student cannot find a laboratory after rotations.