

## ORE advice and guidelines for Graduate Student research rotations

This document is a general overview of the process for students transitioning to their thesis lab. Program specific rotation requirements are listed in Program Handbooks. Students in ORE PhD programs typically undertake three laboratory rotations in the Fall and Spring semesters, each of approximately 10 weeks duration. These provide an opportunity for students to explore their options in order to ultimately select a lab and mentor for their thesis at the end of their first year. Each Program will provide a list of faculty who are accepting rotation students and, since many faculty are members of several graduate programs, ORE will coordinate a central resource listing all such faculty.

Students should meet with faculty to discuss possible rotations, based on their interests and availability of funded positions. The rotation allows faculty to evaluate students and vice versa. Important considerations for students are the mentoring style of the PI, laboratory environment and critically, the likelihood of being accepted into that lab for their PhD. This may be dependent on funding, space, available spots and how many students are competing for them but is ultimately the decision of the PI. Note that your grade for the rotation reflects your performance but does not guarantee acceptance into the laboratory. i.e. you may receive an 'A' but still not be offered a place in that lab.

It is important that students have a conversation with potential mentors and program advisors, upon completion of a rotation, as to whether they would be accepted into the lab and any contingencies, such as funding or consideration of other students in subsequent rotations. PIs should be honest and forthright with rotating students regarding their chances of being accepted into the lab and make their decisions to extend offers to join their lab as soon as possible. Likewise, students should indicate their enthusiasm for joining a lab or let faculty know if they are not interested in pursuing their PhD in their lab.

Student choices should be informed by the above factors, and they may need to change their rotation plans, accordingly. E.g a student planning to rotate in 3 labs for which there is competition for limited slots may, after talking with their first and second rotation mentors, decide to switch to a less competitive lab for a third rotation. While most students are successful in finding a home in one of their 3 rotation labs, it is possible that, despite careful planning and consideration of the above guidelines, they may not find a suitable PhD lab. In this event a program may petition ORE to allow and fund a 4<sup>th</sup> rotation of 6 weeks beginning July 1<sup>st</sup> of the students second year (see [ORE policy for 4<sup>th</sup> rotations](#)). Note that students must find a lab in order to continue in a PhD program. Thus, this 4<sup>th</sup> rotation has specific requirements to optimize the chances for success, which are detailed in Program Handbooks. Essentially student and potential mentor agree at the outset that a successful rotation, based upon defined criteria, will result in the student joining their laboratory for their PhD project.

Students should also note that a 4<sup>th</sup> rotation can obviously be stressful and anxiety provoking, delays their entry into a thesis lab and may impact their timely progression towards their PhD, possibly delaying their comprehensive exam and grant applications. Thus, it is important that students carefully weigh their laboratory rotation selections, discuss their outcomes with potential PIs, and consult with program advisors to make informed decisions, to optimize their chances of entering a thesis lab on schedule.

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