

How to choose a lab/rotation

1. Pre-rotation

- Find labs that would interest you
 - What do you like about science?
 - Is there an area (disease, theme, technique) you are excited to work in? (This is a good starting point, but shouldn't be the biggest factor in your final decision.)
 - Is there a technique or field you want to gain experience in to help facilitate future endeavors?
- What type of lab do you like?
 - Do you prefer to work in a small or large lab environment?
- Are there good mentors in your general area of interest?
 - Ask around!
- Make a short list of faculty that you are interested in. Meet with Dr. Waldman and Dr. Eisenlohr to discuss your shortlist. Also meet with other MD/PhD students to hear a peer's perspective about the lab/department.)

2. Questions to ask during the pre-rotation meeting

- What types of projects are going-on in the lab?
- How often does the PI like to meet with students?
- Do they prefer to have formal meetings set up in their office?
- Is there an open-door policy?
- Has the PI mentored MD/PhD or PhD students before? Where are they now?
- If the rotation goes well, will there be funding for you to stay in the lab?
- Discuss expectations for your rotation

3. During the rotation

- Understand how the lab works – can you see yourself spending 4 years there?
- Learn a little science; getting exposure to different types of science, different types of models, different areas of your own interest, will all help you determine which lab you want to join and which area of science you want to pursue.
- Try to learn a new technique
- Read relevant articles (for practice and to become more familiar with the field)
 - consider completing a mini-literature review related to your rotation project and prepare them into slides; this will: 1) help introduce you to the field 2) be useful for when you have to present your project at the end of the rotation and 3) show your PI that you can think deeply about a project
- Introduce yourself to everyone in the lab and learn a little about their projects.
- Attend all lab meetings and journal clubs (pay attention to how the lab interacts with each other and how the PI interacts with other students)
- Ask the other lab members what the lab is *really* like
- Try to meet with the PI on a semi-regular basis
- Ask a lot of questions

4. **At the end of the rotation**

- If you will be presenting your work in a lab meeting at the end of the rotation, take this seriously. This will help you synthesize what you have accomplished and what you have learned.
- Meet with the PI to discuss your project and experience in the lab.
 - Personally reflect on what you have learned and what you enjoyed.
 - If you are interested in selecting this lab for your thesis work, ask about funding availability; also discuss any concerns you might have

5. **Choosing a lab for your thesis (in order of importance)**

- **Consider the mentor**
 - Will he/she take time to teach you, mentor you, and help you succeed through graduate school? Does he/she have the knowledge/expertise to help you do so? Will they provide you with the guidance/independence that you need?
- **Consider the lab environment**
 - Will you have the physical and intellectual resources at your disposal to be successful?
 - Will other lab members teach you what you need to know?
 - Is the lab well-funded and does it have the requisite infrastructure and equipment to carry-out your project?
- **Consider the project**
 - Is the scientific direction of the lab interesting to you?
 - Will you be motivated and excited to read papers about the topic?
 - Will what you learn help you with future scientific endeavors?

Advice: Choosing a good mentor and good environment is much more important than having an interesting project.

adapted from: http://lab.hirschey.org/resources/advice_blog/files/rotation.html