

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ROTATIONS AND PERMANENT LAB ASSIGNMENTS

Q: Do I need to do a rotation if I have already decided which lab I am interested in and the PI wants to take me?

A: Yes, you do. Rotations are an integral part of your 1st year, exposing you to different fields of research and ways to do science, before you embark on your thesis project.

Q: What are the expectations of the PIs during a rotation?

A: While generating lots of data for a publication is not generally expected, the PI would likely expect you to show interest and excitement for the research in the lab. The PI would also gauge your work ethic and the overall fit for the lab. You should discuss additional expectations with the PI, before and during the rotation.

Q: How do I pick a lab for a rotation?

A: You have to look at multiple parameters.

- Do you find the research interesting and exciting?
- Does the lab publish regularly?
- Are past students from that lab prominent authors in the lab's publications?
- Is the lab funded?
- How long does it take, on average, to graduate from that lab?
- What careers did past graduates of that lab follow?
- Consider the size of the lab, and what best fits your expectations and style.

Discuss with the PI your interest in a rotation and possible thesis and rotation projects. Also, talk to current members of that lab. If, after all this, you are interested, and the PI is willing to take you for a rotation, then add the lab to your list of choices.

Q: The names of how many labs should I provide before each rotation?

A: At least three names in a ranked list (names and priority score; top choice = 3, second choice = 2, third choice = 1). Sometimes, during the semester PIs may decide not to take any rotation students, due to limited time or changes in funding, effectively limiting your options. Therefore, you may want to add more names, to help ensure that you are successfully matched with a lab. List them in order of preference as described above (e.g., if you have 6 names; top choice = 6, second choice = 5, third choice = 4, and so on).

Q: Can I rotate in a lab outside the Graduate Program of BCBP?

A: No. Only faculty members with a primary or joint appointment with BCBP can accept rotation students. You will receive a list of faculty who will take rotation students during the orientation week. Later in the semester additional PIs may decide to take rotation students, depending on their funding, and you will be notified accordingly.

Q: To whom do I send the list of names for rotation choices?

A: Before each rotation (the Graduate Office will send you the date through email), you will receive an online form, which you should complete and return to the Graduate Office (bcbpgradoffice@ag.tamu.edu).

Q: Can I rotate in a lab that has no funding?

A: It is not recommended and essentially “No” because this PI will not be on the list you receive for rotation choices. A rotation is a “test drive” for a lab to complete your PhD thesis. Under current departmental policies, a lab must have active funding to accept a new graduate student. Therefore, rotating in a lab without funding will limit your chances of finding a permanent home for your thesis.

Q: If I (the student) have secured independent support through a fellowship, can I pick as a permanent thesis home a lab without funding?

A: This is a possibility, assuming that the duration of the support is long enough to ensure that you will complete your PhD within a reasonable timeframe without relying excessively on serving as a TA. Prolonged TA duties will limit your research performance and significantly increase the duration of your PhD. The Graduate program aims to have a time-to-degree as low as possible (<5 years). You should also ensure the lab has the necessary resources (e.g., functioning equipment and consumables) for your research. Usually, explicit permission from the Department Head would be needed if you wish to join a lab without funding.

Q: How are the rotation assignments made?

A: Before each rotation, the Program Assistant will tabulate the choices of all students and also make a separate table with the priority list of the PIs (if any PIs have expressed preferences for particular students). Then, the Program Assistant will communicate the two tables to the Associate Head for Graduate Programs and to all the members of the Advising Committee. The two tables will be entered as input to a computer program that implements a matching algorithm. For PIs who have expressed no rotation priority preferences (usually the vast majority), the software will randomize the PI priority input. For rotations, the software will make “student-optimal” matches (i.e., collectively optimizing the student priorities as much as possible).

Q: How many students can a lab take for a rotation?

A: No more than two. In very rare cases, exceptions may be made, for up to three slots in a rotation.

Q: What happens when more than 6 students want to rotate to the same lab during the Fall rotations?

A: While in very rare cases some labs may accept an extra rotation student, it is possible that not all rotation requests can be accommodated. Therefore, it is strongly advised that you expand your lab choices, to ensure that you will be successfully matched to a lab for each of your rotations.

Q: *What is the best strategy to ensure I get to rotate in a specific lab?*

A: Put that lab at the top of your priority list every rotation.

Q: *How are the permanent lab assignments made?*

A: In the same way as the rotation assignments, but also with priority lists from the PIs involved. For the permanent lab assignments, the software will make “PI-optimal” matches (i.e., collectively optimizing the PI priorities as much as possible). This is another reason to perform as well as you can during rotations.

Q: *How many students can a lab take for a permanent assignment?*

A: Faculty with a primary BCBP appointment can take up to 2 students each academic year. Faculty with a joint appointment can only take one student per year. Exceptions to the above are rare and require permission from the Department Head and the Associate Head for Graduate Programs.

Q: *What happens if after 3 rotations I do not match with a lab for my permanent assignment?*

A: After consultation with the Associate Head for Graduate Programs and the Advising Committee, efforts will be made to arrange for a 4th rotation. To avoid this problematic situation, you need to think thoroughly about all your rotation choices in advance, explore as many labs as you can, and perform well during your rotation in each lab.

Q: *Can I have co-advisors from outside the BCBP graduate program?*

A: No. The expectation is that most of the work for your thesis will be done in your BCBP (primary or joint) advisor’s lab. Only faculty members with a primary or joint appointment with BCBP can serve as advisors.