



Graduate Program in Cellular and Molecular Biology
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Dear faculty and incoming students of the Cellular & Molecular Biology Program,

We approach an unprecedented fall term in which most of our courses will be held virtually and there will be significant limitations for personal interactions in research labs and office spaces. The graduate program leadership is especially committed to ensuring that our incoming students have quality fall research rotations and that we formulate great and durable matches between mentors and mentees.

Below we offer strategies to maximize the rotation experience under the current limitations. The overarching goal is for mentors and mentees to effectively evaluate their compatibility. **These are only suggestions, and not directives for how PIs must configure or evaluate rotations.**

Suggestions for mentors of rotating students:

- **The OVCRGE has decided that faculty do NOT need to modify their Research Activity Request forms for graduate students who are doing lab rotations since rotation students will only be in their labs temporarily (4-5 weeks).**
- **Discuss physical distancing, face coverings, maximum occupancy, occupancy times, and other policies related to COVID restart policies for your lab and school.** Note that these may differ across labs, buildings and schools; do not assume your rotator knows the rules for your school/building/lab.
- **Articulate to students that the main goal of rotations is to ensure that you and student have sufficient resources to make an informed match.**
- **Schedule frequent meetings with rotators.** Because conversational / informal interactions will be limited, intentional planning is essential. Provide opportunities for mentees to lead some of the meetings. We recommend meeting at least twice weekly (they need not be long meetings).
- **Communicate with rotators more frequently than you have in previous years.** Use email, MS teams, and other communication forms for frequent check-ins to make sure rotators have opportunities to ask questions and express concerns.
- **Establish clear expectations and articulate them before the rotation begins.** Lab time may be limited, so alternative learning opportunities are great ways to evaluate mentees. These include co-review of manuscripts, thought experiments, preparation of figures, writing of mini-reviews and mini-reports of lab experiments.
- **Design a research project that will allow rotators to have a substantive research experience.**
- **Structure opportunities for rotating students to interact with other lab members.** It is important for your team members and rotating students to understand your community – you can schedule virtual journal clubs, virtual lab meetings, or informal get togethers to enable all members to interact.
- **Make yourself available for questions.**
- **Plan an evaluation session for the last week of the rotation.**

Suggestions for rotating students:

Your major professor / advisor is going to play a critical role for you, not only during your time in graduate school, but for the rest of your life. Finding a major professor with a compatible mentoring style is critical for your success. Traditional research rotations offer extensive opportunities to interact with mentors and lab members. Your lab time and contact with mentors and other lab members will be limited this fall. We provide suggestions to maximize your experience:

- 1) **Rotations should be planned and executed with the health and safety of the student in mind and accommodations made accordingly.**
- 2) **Understand that the main goal of rotations is to ensure that you and the PI have sufficient resources to make an informed match.**
- 3) **Begin rotations by meeting with mentors and discussing expectations.**
- 4) **Ensure that you are aware of relevant social distancing, maximum occupancy, occupancy times, and other policies related to COVID restart policies for your rotating lab.** Note that these are not the



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same for all labs, so please ask questions.

- 5) **Find opportunities to interact with your mentors – schedule formal meetings.**
- 6) **Establish weekly goals and report them to your mentor at the beginning of each week.**
- 7) **Report your progress on research goals at the end of each week** (written progress reports or in person or virtual meetings are effective ways to report progress).
- 8) **Don't be afraid to ask questions, but also put in effort to find answers independently.**
- 9) **Find opportunities to practice writing** (weekly lab reports, reviews of manuscripts, etc.) so that you can work with your PI to critically evaluate and improve writing. Read recent papers from your rotating mentor's research group and the related field. Formulate questions and potential research directions, write them down, share and discuss them with your mentor. You will spend a lot of time writing with your mentor, and your rotation is a great opportunity to evaluate your compatibility.
- 10) **Meet with your mentor at the end of the rotation to evaluate your performance and receive suggestions for improvement.**

Thank you for your commitment to UW-Madison Graduate Education!

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