

How to Arrange A Productive Laboratory Rotation

First, do a lot of background work. Between August 15 if you start GPILS at the regular time (or June, if you start early) and November 15, identify six faculty members in your program that you might like to work with.

1. Look at the SOM website of that faculty member, and also look at their laboratory website.
2. Then look them up on PubMed and read the abstracts of a few publications, especially the most recent.
3. You may also want to look them up at NIHReporter and read the abstracts of current grants they hold.

In mid-October, email the top 4-5 professors you liked best out of this research and ask to meet with them within the next 2 weeks regarding a possible rotation.

Then meet with them, making sure that they know that you are also currently considering several other laboratories and are not yet committed. During your meeting, ask to briefly visit the laboratory and meet with current students and postdocs. Ask them about the lab and how often they meet with the PI, whether they think well of the lab as a training experience etc. If you would like to write an NRSA, ask if there are opportunities to self-fund if you choose that lab.

When you leave, tell the professor you will let them know your decision within a week/2 weeks. (Of course, they also have to decide to accept YOU. Be aware that the more popular labs will fill up early.)

Within that time period, you must actually make your decision. This should be based on many factors: 1. your personal excitement for the field and project; 2. the likelihood that you will be supported by an NIH grant during your time in the lab; 3. your interaction with the professor; whether the style of the professor (hands-on or hands-off?) is something you feel you would work well with; 4. whether you feel you would learn something new and interesting during the rotation; and 5. the lab ambience (though be aware that this is a constantly changing element and it is not smart to base your entire decision on this). Also, some labs have a history of 7-year graduate students, while others consistently graduate in 5 years- you may want to ask the PI or other students about this.

Once you have made your decision, email the top three professors asking for particular 2 -month rotation slots. **It is FINE to arrange all three rotations at once and is indeed preferable.** If a given faculty member cannot accommodate you, then email a fourth professor. Arrange a time and day to start. (Most faculty are flexible if a given rotation takes a little longer- don't worry about this at all; just keep them posted as to your actual start date). If you like, ask for reading material to prepare for your rotation.

Please write the other professors back and say you have chosen other labs. It is fine. No one will be upset. But they need to know.

Then simply show up on the day you agreed to do so. You will likely have a bench and a lab mentor assigned to you. If for any reason you have changed your mind about a committed rotation, please give as much notice as possible. But be aware that this is not a very nice thing to do, as in the meanwhile, the professor may well have turned down other students.

What NOT to do:

1. Don't interview more than five professors who have indicated an interest in your rotation.
2. Don't email a professor and say you want to start "this Monday". IN most cases, that is simply not enough time to prepare the lab for a new arrival.
3. Don't commit to a given laboratory unless you really ARE committed to your decision. (Commitment is saying "I will definitely rotate in your laboratory"). And please don't just not show up if you have committed (this has happened!).