HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT POTENTIAL LABS?

- Attend the required Friday, August 18 activities.
- Email faculty in whose research you are interested--ask about opportunities in the lab; make an appointment to meet.
- Talk with BCB Graduate Students about different labs.
- Meet with your temporary advisor your first week to discuss your interests; let your advisor give you some recommendations.
- You will have the opportunity to hear about faculty research weekly through BCB 691, Faculty Seminar.
- You are responsible for locating and setting up your own appointments and research rotations, but ask your temp advisor, your student mentor, the BCB Supervisory Committee members or Trish if you need help.
- File the Rotation Planning Form by September 8. Try to set up all three rotations at once.

WHAT WOULD A TYPICAL ROTATION LOOK LIKE?

- Meet with the faculty member to discuss what you will do in the lab and what your research interests are
- Review and discuss possible research projects during your rotation in the lab
- Decide which project you will work on
- You are expected to attend lab meetings and contribute
- Because of classes during the day, to get the most of the lab experience, you may need to work on your lab rotation in the evenings or weekends as well.
- At the end of the rotation, summarize your rotation project at a lab meeting, and submit the rotation evaluation form to Trish
- Meet with faculty member to discuss the rotation experience, what worked well, what did not, and if you would change anything

HOW CAN I MAKE THE BEST USE OF A ROTATION?

- The selection of your major professor is the most important choice you will make in graduate school. You are trying to decide which lab will be your research home for the next five years. You will become an expert in the area you are trained in.
- Recognize that a rotation is similar to a job interview where you, the lab members, and the faculty member decide if you are a good fit for the lab. You are finding out which lab culture is the best fit for your personality and interests. The faculty member and his lab are interested in hard-working graduate students; your work ethic and ability to work well with others in the lab will dramatically influence that lab's success.
- Primary goal is to identify a thesis laboratory with funding.
  - How are students in the lab funded generally?
  - Being enthusiastic about the rotation project and willing to work may motivate the professor to find the money to fund you permanently.
- Even if you are not interested in the research or find a lab that is a better fit during rotations, the relationships you foster with the faculty member and the students in the lab may last the length of your career. You will make connections with individuals who have expertise. Make the most of your time with them. You may want to ask the faculty member to be on your program of study committee.
- Your rotation in a lab does not happen in a vacuum; a faculty member may talk with other faculty with whom you rotated and members of his/her lab before making a decision. Please treat each rotation as an important part of the overall decision process, both for you and for the lab you wish to join.
ROTATION EXPECTATIONS

- Talk with the faculty member about their expectations.
- Faculty would like students to be professional. What do faculty mean by this? If you agree to be somewhere at a specific time, then be there. If you indicate you will do something by a specific time, finish by that time.
- What times/days does she/he expect you in the lab?
- When are the lab meetings?
- How should I keep the data I collect?
- How can I obtain keys to the building and the laboratory?
- Who is your main contact in the lab on a day to day basis?
- What are the research opportunities in the lab?
- Will you give a presentation at the end of the lab?

BEST PRACTICES IN A ROTATION

- Read the lab publications. Read relevant background papers for the lab.
- Attend as many lab meetings as possible.
- Interact with other members of the lab and find out what they are doing.
- Ask questions when you don't know what to do next.
- Ask good questions. What are good questions? Questions should show you are thinking about the project or experiment.
- Transition to independent thinker.
- Learn more than just the basic techniques in the lab.
- What techniques do you favor?
- Learn about the equipment in the lab and what it can do. If you don’t end up in that lab, it might be useful for future experiments.
- Learn how to document your work – especially early on. Document, and then document some more about the projects you are doing, what your plan is, what your goal is. Doing so from early on is really important, so you can show your mentor your progress, so you can remember what you did and why, and so you can promote your work and improve it as you show it to others. SVN is a program that allows you to document your coding … there are probably many other products out there.
- Your day will be filled with classes and preparing for classes so spending time in the lab can be difficult. To get the most out of the laboratory experience you may need to come in at night, odd hours and weekends. You will learn more. Work ethic counts in the eyes of the faculty member and lab mates.
- Did we mention read the publications for that lab! Relate what you are reading to your laboratory experiments.

THE BEST FIT

- Which research questions excite you?
- Make note of how the faculty member interacts with their students and how often--some students prefer to talk to their major professor every day while others prefer to find them when needed.
- Find the major professor that is the right fit for you.
- What kind of lab environment do you think is the best fit?
- Are people in the lab helpful? Find the lab environment where you learn, feel supported, and enjoy coming to work.
- Talk to the members of the Lab.
  - Do you get an opportunity to design your own experiments?
  - What are the research opportunities in the lab?
  - Is the faculty member hands on or are you expected to think on your feet?
What is the personality of the faculty member in relationship to students?
What do they like; what don't they like about the lab.
If you need help, is the major professor easily accessible?

HOW SOON SHOULD I HAVE ALL OF MY ROTATIONS CHOSEN?

- It is best to set up all three rotations as soon as possible. The rotation planning form is due September 8. Other programs have students who will be setting up their rotations, so it is best to talk with all professors whose research interest you as early as possible.
- If you can’t set up all of your rotations by September 8, begin your first rotation and let Trish know where it is. Get the completed form to her as soon as possible.
- If you choose your rotations during the first week and submit the rotation planning form, but then change your mind, please let the faculty member know so they have the opportunity to have other students rotate through the lab.
- Inform Trish of the change.

WHEN SHOULD I BEGIN MY FIRST ROTATION?

- You should begin your first rotation no later than Monday, September 11.

I BEGAN A ROTATION AND I KNOW THIS LAB IS NOT FOR ME.

- Since the goal is to find a permanent lab that is the right fit and that has funding, begin looking for another lab immediately to finish this rotation within. You should continue in the lab where you are at until you locate the new laboratory.
- Let Trish know of any changes.

I SET UP 3 ROTATIONS BUT NOW I WANT TO CHANGE.

- Go ahead and set up the new rotation.
- When it is confirmed let the faculty member that you planned to do the rotation with know that you will NOT be rotating in the lab.
- This will give the faculty member a chance to talk with other potential rotation students.
- Let Trish know of any changes.

WHAT IF THE ROTATION PROJECT I AM WORKING ON RUNS LONGER THAN EXPECTED?

- By 7 weeks in a lab you should have a good idea if the lab is one you are interested in.
- Do not stay past the end of rotation date.
- You may need to leave before completing the project.

YOU SHOULD MEET WITH THE MAJOR PROFESSOR AT THE END OF EACH ROTATION

- You may be asked to present at the end of the rotation during lab meetings
- Discuss with your major professor what you have learned.
- Discuss what questions addressed by the research group interested you most.
- Ask about possible projects should you decide to join the lab.
- Discuss your research progress during the rotation (your notebook should be completed and legible).
- You should file a rotation evaluation form with Trish. Find a link to it on the BCB Rotations webpage.
- Do not commit to a lab until you have completed rotations.
WHEN SHOULD I BEGIN MY SECOND ROTATION?

- You should start your second rotation no later than October 30.

WHAT ABOUT THANKSGIVING WEEK?

- You should speak with the faculty member you are rotating with to discuss this week. There are no classes.

WHEN DOES MY SECOND ROTATION END?

- Your second rotation ends December 15.

I REALLY LIKED MY SECOND ROTATION. CAN I CHOOSE NOW?

- No. Ask the faculty member by what date they would need to know if you would like to discuss joining their lab
- Let them know you are required to do three rotations.
- Do not commit to any laboratory until you have completed all three rotations.
- If the faculty member has other students rotating in their labs, they will not be able to make a decision until the last student has completed their rotation.

HOW LONG IS THE BREAK BETWEEN SEMESTERS?

- The break is three weeks. You do not have to be on campus during this time.

WHEN SHOULD I BEGIN MY THIRD ROTATION?

- You should begin your third rotation no later than January 8.

I REALLY LIKED MY SECOND ROTATION AND TOLD THE FACULTY MEMBER I WOULD BE BACK AFTER MY THIRD ROTATION, ONLY NOW I REALLY LIKE MY THIRD ROTATION AND WANT TO STAY.

- If you change your mind, let that faculty member know.
- We remind the faculty that they should not put pressure on the students to make decisions prior to the end of their last rotation, but sometimes it happens.

WHEN SHOULD I MAKE MY DECISION AS TO LABORATORY?

- Begin discussions around March 1.
- Let Trish know when you have made your laboratory decision … try to let her know before April 13.

WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS I SHOULD ASK UPON COMPLETION OF MY ROTATIONS TO THOSE FACULTY WHOSE LABS I MIGHT LIKE TO JOIN.

- If I choose this lab, what do you believe my contribution will be to the lab?
- What is the average time to completion of a degree in your lab?
- How many publications on average do your students produce during their training?
- Will you as an advisor be fairly accessible?
• Will I have the opportunity and financial support to present at off-campus meetings? Regional, National, International. Frequency?
• Will I have the opportunity to help and be mentored in writing lab grant proposals?
• What would be my employment conditions: wage/stipend, hours expected in the lab, vacation & holiday?
• Is this stipend a Research Assistantship or a Teaching Assistantship?
• Should I expect to TA while I am in your lab? How many semesters?
• What other course requirements should I expect to take that are specific to your department or to this lab?
• Do you have other expectations for your students, for example a field season, or collection times?

WHAT FORMS DO I NEED TO FILL OUT (BECAUSE THERE IS A FORM FOR EVERYTHING)

• You can find a link to the “Request to Establish a Home Department” on this page:
  http://www.bcb.iastate.edu/forms-and-publications