

Expectations Discussion Questions - MBG Graduate Student

The intent of this document is to facilitate a discussion between students and major advisors about topics such as mentorship style, scientific responsibilities, assessing student progress, communication in the lab, and more. There are different ways that one can use this document. For example, a student can write a paragraph or two describing their expectations that is shared with the faculty member prior to a discussion about a possible rotation. Alternatively, these questions can be used as a guide for a meeting between the student and the faculty member and student. The student and advisor can decide what questions listed below are important to discuss rather than discussing the entirety of the document. However, we encourage everyone to read the entire document to choose a subset of questions for further discussion.

I. Rotation specific discussion points

What does a successful rotation look like?

Note -- you may not have answers for all of these questions beforehand, but they should serve as discussion points to have with your rotation advisor.

1. Given the amount of time spent taking classes during year 1 in the GGD program (4.5 credits graded minimum per semester), approximately how many hours do you think should be spent in the rotation lab each week?
2. What types of interactions do you want to have with labmates? (i.e. collaborating on projects, sharing lunch hours, discussing projects/literature)
3. What are you expecting to learn from lab meetings (i.e. labmates projects, gaining presentation/communication skills, learning about lab communication styles)?
4. Are you expecting to give lab meeting as a rotation student, and would you like help with presentation styles and how to give presentations beforehand?
5. What background reading would be helpful for you to gauge the breadth of the research in the lab (i.e. grant proposals, literature, reviews, textbook chapters)?
6. Do you have a particular project in mind or are you looking to get involved with ongoing projects in the lab?
7. What do you expect to complete of the rotation project(s)?

II. General (rotations and joining the lab)

Mentorship style

1. How often do you prefer to meet with your advisor to discuss projects and progress?
2. Do you prefer discussions to be formal and planned ahead of time, conducted casually, or both? Does this vary based on discussion topic?
3. What does it mean to you to work independently? What does this look like for you?
4. Do you prefer to take initiative to begin the next steps on projects or prefer your advisor to be involved to discuss this?
5. Do you have preferences for who trains you on lab methods and techniques? For example, do you prefer training from your advisor, research staff, post-docs, other graduate students?
6. If a project takes a different direction than what was initially planned between you and your advisor, do you want flexibility to take the project in a different direction?

Scientific responsibilities

1. Do you know of areas you need training in to help you write manuscripts?
 - a. Do you have a specific writing style?
 - b. Do you have any writing habits you already know about (i.e. preferring to write from home, dedicating long stretches of time to writing vs. shorter blocks, etc.)?
 - c. Would you prefer to write a manuscript draft yourself, split up the sections with the advisor or other authors (i.e. intro, figures, results, discussion), or open to different options?
2. Do you prefer to work on your own projects individually, do you prefer projects to be a collaborative effort (e.g. with other students, post-docs, lab technicians), or does it depend on the project?
3. Are you comfortable working on collaborative projects within the lab and between labs? How do you expect your advisor to help establish and manage collaborations?
4. What do you think is the best way to go about solving the technical problems you encounter (e.g. having trouble optimizing IHC, difficulty genotyping, coding issues, etc.) and who do you expect to be available to help address these problems (e.g. graduate students, lab technicians, the advisor)?

Assessing student progress

1. How do you prefer your advisor to assess your progress and give you feedback (i.e. lay out goals together and review them, casual discussions in lab, presentations in lab meetings, written feedback vs. verbal discussion)?
2. How often do you prefer to discuss progress and give/get feedback?

Project organization

1. Do you have a preference to work on the same topics/grant as other students or researchers in the lab or on a topic or grant on your own?
2. Do you have a preference for when and how ownership of a project is assigned?
 - a. For example, when in the process of a project do you prefer manuscript authorship to be decided?
 - b. How would you prefer it to be addressed if there is a change in authorship during the course of the project?
3. How do you expect your advisor to manage teamwork?

Side projects

1. Are you looking for a lab where you can develop your own side projects?
 - a. If so, are you comfortable talking with your advisor about side project ideas?
 - b. How do you prefer to talk to your advisor about new projects?

Communication in lab

1. How can your advisor create a space during lab meetings that encourages you to actively participate? What does active participation mean to you?
2. How do you prefer to communicate with your advisor (email, knock on door, both)?
3. Do you expect to give regular lab meeting presentations and is there a style of presenting that you prefer (i.e. short casual updates to get advice and feedback, longer presentations of projects that are more developed, a mix?, others?)?
4. How can your advisor create and support a positive and productive lab environment? What do you see your role and the role of other lab members in supporting a positive and productive lab environment?

Diversity and Inclusion

1. In what ways are diversity, equity, and inclusion important to you?
2. Would you be comfortable talking to your advisor about any issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
3. Are you interested in participating in initiatives to support DEI in your lab, field, or other spaces?

Conflict Resolution

1. Do you prefer conflicts between lab members to be handled by the advisor or privately between the two parties?
 - a. Does this differ for you based on the conflict: e.g. disagreements, or experiences related to bias based on race, class, nationality, disability, visa/citizenship status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion vs. non-identity related conflict?
 - b. How should instances of conflict be communicated to the advisor?
2. Do you have any questions you'd like to discuss with your advisor about conflict resolution after reading the **GGD bluebook conflict resolution section**?

Hours spent in lab

1. Do you regularly expect to work nights and weekends, or is this occasional, as needed?
2. Do you need flexible work hours?
3. Are there hours of the day that are most productive for you or that you prefer to do particular tasks during (i.e. writing in the morning, benchwork in the afternoon)?

Career goals

1. What are your current career interests after completing your Ph.D. (if you have an idea)?
 - a. Research intensive academic faculty
 - b. Primarily undergraduate institution
 - c. Administration
 - d. Research outside of academia - ie industry or government
 - e. Law or science policy
 - f. Science communication, science writing
 - g. Anything else?
2. Do you expect your advisor's support if you choose to explore time away from research doing relevant career internships, regular teaching assistantships, or other workshops and resources for career development?

III. Other Questions/Concerns

What do you see as your greatest strength and weakness?

Is there anything else you'd like to discuss with your advisor about your work habits, communication style, or expectations for training?