PhD Rotation Guidelines

Purpose, Timing and Length of Rotation:
The expectation is for a one-semester rotation to be completed in the Fall semester of the 2nd year. Rotations are intended to foster collaboration and multi-disciplinary competencies for the development of students’ dissertation research plans. The timing is intended to strengthen the student’s preparation to write an NRSA proposal, potentially integrating two approaches or methods across labs.

Rotations can be moved to the Spring in some cases, but this should be approved in advance by the primary advisor, rotation advisor, and the grad chair (and BBB director, if relevant).

Rotations can continue past 1 semester, if both the primary advisor and rotation advisor agree. It is desirable to anticipate and discuss longer rotations before beginning the rotation. Reports for fall rotations are due January 15 and for extended rotations on the 1st day of classes in the 3rd year.

Arrangements and Approvals:
The rotations are intended to be flexible to fit student goals, but it is important to plan in advance and communicate with the primary advisor, the rotation advisor, and the BBB director (if applicable). There is wide variation between laboratories in the advance notice they require in order to provide opportunity for a student to rotate, and in some cases departmental resources could be needed to enable a rotation. Therefore, brief rotation proposal (see below) should be declared in the progress/planning reports provided for the spring graduate evaluation meeting. Students are responsible for initiating rotation planning with their dissertation advisor and potential rotation advisor early enough to meet this deadline. Final approval of rotations will be announced as soon as possible after the spring graduate evaluation meeting.

Rotation proposals should be brief—one paragraph or an outline—aimed at spelling out expectations for everyone involved, and the final report should meet those expectations. Please specify in the proposal what is expected from all parties, the product that should result, and the timeline. Think of this as optimizing your investment in fostering the development of your dissertation plans.

Selection of Labs:
Students outside the BBB track should choose any rotation that complements the approaches or methods taken in their home laboratory. The choice should be developed jointly by the student, dissertation advisor, and rotation advisor. Students in the BBB track should gain more biomedical experience, and the choice should be developed jointly by the student, dissertation advisor, rotation advisor, and the BBB director. The methods employed in one’s first year project dictate the type of breadth that is required for a rotation (e.g., a student employing behavioral methods for the 1st year project must rotate to gain a biomedical approach). Some labs combine behavioral and biomedical approaches, and it is possible for a student to “rotate” in their home lab if, for example, their first first year project was primarily behavioral and their “rotation” will involve a biomedical approach, or vice versa. Rotations can be through a lab at Brandeis or outside of Brandeis, if this is a good use of time and is approved by the primary advisor, rotation advisor, and BBB director (if applicable) in advance.

Scope of Project:
These can vary from gaining experience with additional methods to full-fledged collaborative projects. Proposals should clearly reflect the plan; the format will vary based on the needs of the student and nature of the project (e.g., they could spell out the methods or knowledge to be acquired, or sketch out an initial idea for a collaborative project). The final report will also vary, from a laboratory report of methods learned, to preliminary data, to a full-fledged manuscript. The time commitment can range
from full time work on the rotation project (outside class and TF commitments) to any combination of continued effort on home lab and rotation lab projects that is deemed beneficial for the student by the advisors. The recommended minimum effort in the rotation laboratory is the equivalent of one course.