

Cancer Biology Graduate Program Mentor Selection Guide

Selecting a mentor is one of the most important decisions you will make during your graduate program. Your mentor will have a significant role in the selection and progress in your dissertation research, as well as your overall success in, and enjoyment of, the graduate program. A good mentor can have a lasting impact on your professional success long after you complete the PhD. In the Cancer Biology Program, we require three research rotations to help you select a dissertation mentor. Once you have completed your rotations, you should consider the following in helping you decide which mentor/laboratory is right for you. If after completing three rotations you do not feel comfortable entering into a permanent mentoring agreement with anyone, you may be able to do a fourth rotation with permission from the Program Director.

The following list of questions will help you determine whether a potential mentor/project/lab will be a good fit for you:

1. Does the person have mentoring experience with other students? If so, did the students publish a first author paper before, or just after, graduation? If the mentor already has a student, discuss the mentor/lab with the current student. If the faculty member does not have mentoring experience, why does he/she have an interest in taking a student at this time?
2. What dissertation project does the mentor have in mind for you, and is it a funded project? If the grant support will run out before you will graduate, discuss how the mentor plans to fund remaining experiments.
3. Is the project well thought out, and does the faculty member have significant experience in this research area? If you are not sure, it may help to get a second opinion, and ask the program director, or graduate director for input.
4. Are you comfortable asking the potential mentor questions? Does he/she appear to be listening to you? This relationship will last a minimum of three years and likely longer. Will you be able to communicate successfully with the mentor day in and day out over a few years' time?
5. Is the mentor available at reasonable intervals? If you are not able to reach the mentor, or he/she is away often, it may be difficult for you to have your progress evaluated, or to schedule committee meetings, etc.
6. Does the mentor conduct regular lab meetings, and if so how often? Consider attending a lab meeting to see how it is run, and what is expected of lab members.
7. Do you feel comfortable in the potential mentor's lab, and is the lab culture inviting?
8. Is the potential mentor prepared to help you apply for outside funding where applicable, and to meet graduation requirements? The program requires a first author publication, and participation in program activities. Fellowships you might receive in the future will also have their own specific requirements for presentation, travel to conferences, publications, etc.

9. Is the mentor willing to pursue financial support mechanisms when your guaranteed support is exhausted? Is the mentor able to support you financially, if no funding mechanism is available to you? This would include your stipend, tuition, and insurances at approximately \$40,000/year.

Before committing, it is highly recommended that you ask the potential mentor for an abstract or outline, and reference articles to describing the proposed project you will work on. Discuss possible options for adjusting the project if it doesn't seem to be working well in the beginning. The mentor should be open to both discussing these possibilities, and to tweaking the proposed project if necessary. Once you have this information you may wish to get a second or third opinion before agreeing to accept the mentor/project.

Here are a few questions you may want to ask if you are asking for a second opinion. You can also ask them of your committee members at your first committee meeting:

- Is this project possible in its current state
- Is there anything you would suggest that would enhance this project
- Is this something I can achieve in 3-4 years?

The last step in selecting a mentor is to request approval from the Director, who will present your choice of mentor to the CBGP Steering Committee. The Director and CBGP Steering Committee have final approval of all mentor/student agreements.