



What about Rotations? Suggestions for MEMP PhD Students

Based on discussions amongst the IMES faculty and the positive experiences of recent MEMP cohorts receiving this updated guidance, we are advising you to think carefully about what information you need in order to be comfortable committing to a lab. It turns out that the experiences needed to make an informed decision - technical interests and approaches, project areas available and of mutual interest, compatibility with the faculty member's mentoring style, lab culture, etc. - can be thoroughly explored through a variety of activities, including:

- reading papers
- attending lab meetings
- talking to students and post docs
- shadowing lab members to observe their day-to-day activities
- meeting with the faculty member, also known as the principle investigator, or PI

In other words, full rotations are not necessary. This evolution in thinking about the lab search process is motivated by observations and feedback from faculty and students. On average, MEMP students were taking increasingly longer to settle in labs, without any indication that longer lab searches produced better outcomes. Many of our faculty have declared their beliefs that rotations are not a good use of students' time, or the labs' time either.

MEMPs have so many options, and so many labs to potentially filter through, that rotations become particularly inefficient and uninformative. Having your own project (and spending time pipetting in a lab) will not help you decide if you want to be in that lab. Instead, time is better spent first focusing internally on what you want/need in graduate school (see resources at top of <https://hst.mit.edu/faculty-research/finding-lab>) and then gathering the information needed to answer key questions about interest, fit, and culture.

Therefore, we recommend that you consider lots of labs up front (September), gather information about multiple labs in parallel (October thru December), and pick one lab to start in by January. Our expectation is that the majority of you will be happy with your initial choice and stay there, while a few may wish to treat your February-March experience as a trial period and select another lab later in the spring with no adverse consequences.

As an added benefit, choosing a lab by February gives you a relative advantage in HST.500 in the spring and puts you on track to complete your OQEs sooner, leading to a more efficient path thru grad school.

It is important to note that every faculty member has their own approach and in all cases ***the PI's process for new lab members takes precedent over this general advice from the program.*** If you have explained that your program does not require rotations, and if a prospective PI wants you to rotate in their lab, you should do so. It is often possible to arrange mini-rotations of 6-8 weeks in one or two of your top lab prospects in the fall-to-January time frame.



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