

## MHI/MPI Policies and Flowchart on Changing Research Groups

### ***BRET stated language on changing labs:***

*“Experience has taught us that despite a rotation system for choosing a mentor, not all mentor-mentee matches are successful in the long-term. If a student has consulted with their thesis committee chair (provided they are sufficiently advanced to have one), their Director of Graduate Studies, and an Auxiliary Mentor of their choosing, and come to the decision that changing mentors will allow them to thrive in their graduate studies, **the BRET Office will provide financial support to the student during the transition to a new group.** Specifically, the BRET office will support any student who matriculated through the IGP, QCB, or was a direct admit to a School of Medicine program that accepts students from the IGP and QCB, to conduct up to two month-long rotations in any group within the School of Medicine led by a member of the graduate faculty that has expressed an interest in considering the student for pursuit of their thesis research. To begin this process, please contact the Senior Associate Dean for BRET.”*

Nutshell: BRET will support a student for two months so that they can test out a new lab. To begin the transition process, please contact Senior Associate Dean for BRET.

Such decision can be very stressful. Please remember that you can reach out to your Director of Graduate Studies, or your Committee Chair, or both to discuss any issues that make your mentee-mentor relationship, or lab situation difficult. Below is a flowchart of steps to follow, when a specific mentor-mentee relationship is not progressing as planned.

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## Mitigation Flowchart or issues brought up between mentor and mentee

1) The student should meet with the DGS, with or without the committee chair or an auxiliary mentor (list of auxiliary mentors can be found here: <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/auxiliary-mentoring/> ) to discuss the issue(s) and see if there is any avenue for resolution.

2) The student can also choose to meet with their thesis committee chair, or auxiliary mentor without the DGS, to discuss issues and intent to transfer labs.

Note that the student's *committee should be vigilant* regarding changes in the mentor-mentee relationship, altered performance or mental state of the student, or if the student or mentor bring up issues citing established and discussed expectations between mentor and student. In that case, the committee Chair should contact the DGS to make them aware of these observations and seek feedback.

3) If the issues cannot be resolved, and the student decides to leave a research group, they should first contact the Senior Associate Dean for BRET and their DGS to initiate the process for interim support. At this point, the student should also notify their thesis committee of this decision. This is important, so as to maintain a professional relationship with the original thesis committee members especially if some of these individuals may serve on the new committee, upon selection of a new thesis lab.

4) The student – as is typical for any professional environment – should give adequate notice (minimum 2 weeks) to the current research group. This should be done in writing, via email and the DGS should be copied for record keeping. This should allow the student to close out their work in the lab with minimum inconvenience to the PI and laboratory. This is viewed as a component of professional development. The student should also again, notify the thesis committee, as this committee will change with the change of labs. Before leaving their current laboratory, the student must submit their up-to-date lab notebook and records to their previous PI and a document containing the location and description of any materials they have generated or procured in the lab. Students may not remove materials or intellectual property (including unpublished data) from their old lab without specific permission from the former mentor. This is in accordance with procedures currently in place for departing lab members (graduates or summer students and staff).

5) If the student wishes to stay within MHI or MPI, they must find a new lab by contacting program faculty in whose research they are interested. The DGS can assist in this, but it is the student's responsibility and success is not guaranteed by the program. A proposed new mentor must be willing to provide bench space, funds for the stipend and student fees including health insurance, all remaining tuition payments, supplies for the proposed project, and, of course, mentoring. If the student happens to be supported by a T32 Training Grant, ongoing support may be possible pending approval of the Training Grant Director. However, the student cannot assume that their training grant will continue to support them after they change labs. If the student is supported by an Individual

Fellowship, they must contact their Program Official to determine whether their Fellowship support will continue following the change in mentorship. Documentation of approvals and confirmation of continued support need to be submitted to the DGS for final approval before the switch in labs can be made.

6) Once a new lab is selected, the student will reset their thesis committee in concert with the DGS and new PI. Once the new committee is assembled it is sent to the GEC for approval.

Note that a student moving to another MPI /MHI laboratory will need to select a new Dissertation Committee and propose **a new project that is distinct from that in the former laboratory** (unless the former PI agrees to allow the student to use some of their data or if the former PI has died). The new committee may require that a student demonstrate sufficient knowledge in the new area of study through a formal exam, a written proposal, or both. In the event that there appears to be overlap between the new and previous research projects or between the new project and other work in the former mentor's lab, the DGS, in collaboration with the Graduate Education Committee, will evaluate this. If they find that too much overlap exists, a new project must be conceived.

7) The final thesis committee will make the decision regarding whether the total body of work constitutes a thesis. During the first meeting the new committee will outline expectations and how the process will move forward. If the student includes data from their first laboratory in their thesis, the original PI will have the opportunity to review the thesis. If the PI finds issue with the included content, the GEC will be consulted to arbitrate.

8) Students should note that the Graduate School expects students to complete the Ph.D. requirements within 4 years after passing the Qualifying Exam. Thus, students who change labs should expect to expend more effort in order to graduate in a timely manner, or be in contact with the DGS, along with their new mentor in order to request the appropriate extensions – as needed – from the graduate school.

Do not wait until it is too late! If you have something to discuss, please reach out to Jay or Maria.