

How to Find, Approach, and Interview Potential Faculty Mentors

The PRISM application requires you to identify potential mentors from the Stanford School of Medicine. The following provides some guidance on how to identify those faculty members. You will have an opportunity to contact potential mentors after you hear whether you have been accepted to PRISM, but you may choose to approach faculty while you are applying. We have also included below some tips for preparing for the interview and the types of questions you may consider asking.

Thinking about WHO:

- Think about your research interests:
 - What are your career aspirations?
 - What excites you in your research field?
 - What is a productive area that fits your values and your career plans?
- Who is engaged in research that is complementary to your interests?
- What kind of mentor best fits your needs?
 - Famous mentors have connections and resources but may travel a lot and have big labs.
 - Up-and-coming mentors may be in the lab every day but may be still developing resources.
- Do you prefer hand-on guidance or a more removed approach?
- Are they nurturing? Is that important to you?
- Are they collaborative? Competitive?
- What kind of connections do they have in academia? In industry?
- Where have former postdocs from that lab ended up?
- **Read their work and work from their lab widely and critically**

Approaching potential mentors:

- Be prepared to introduce yourself often in a succinct cover letter or email). Include the story of your current research (question, approach, results, significance); your career goals, your plan to achieve them, and how a postdoc position in that lab plays in that plan; your postdoc project interests (be creative!) and proposed approach; and how this collaboration is a perfect match
- Explain that you have applied for the PRISM program to be sponsored to come interview at Stanford (March 23-25, 2017), and indicate your interest in interviewing with the lab, irrespective of whether you are accepted to PRISM

Preparing for the interview:

- Read up on the field in general, read the last several papers from the group, and research their current interests and projects
- Think about the lab's ongoing work
- Conceive of complementary projects that aren't on their current inventory
- Prepare a 30-minute talk in advance; in this talk make it clear why you did what you did and the foundation of the work
- Be prepared to answer sometimes hard questions (don't be defensive)

Questions to ask current/past group members (be selective, the focus should be on your science):

- About them: Ask about their science, the lab environment
- About the PI: Is the PI a micro- / macro-manager? How often do you meet? Are they available for guidance? Do they play favorites? Are lab meetings confrontational or supportive? How responsive are they with manuscripts? How are authorship/project ownership handled?
- About opportunities: Are there opportunities to teach/mentor? Leadership development?
- About the lab environment: What is the lab work ethic? What is the vacation policy in practice? Is there encouragement/financial support to attend major meetings? Who represents the groups at department functions? Is there formalized, regular feedback? How long do postdocs usually stay?

Questions to ask the faculty mentor:

- What are the mentor's expectations of a postdoc?
- How is a postdoc's research program determined?
- How many postdocs has the mentor had? Where did they go? How many others are in the lab (grad students, staff, etc.)?
- How many papers are being published, and where?
- What is the mentor's policy on travel to meetings?
- Would I have practice in grant writing, teaching and mentoring, oral presentations, reviewing manuscripts?
- How long is financial support guaranteed? On what does renewal depend? Are there adequate research funds to support the proposed research?
- What is the mentor's approach to help in finding a next position?

Adapted from John Boothroyd's "Finding the Right Postdoc for YOU," Preparing for Faculty Careers, and "Questions to Ask When Choosing a Postdoc Advisor," Pathways to Science.