Guidelines for graduate student 4th rotation: Guide for Faculty.

CSD and other graduate students typically do three lab rotations, and consult with rotation advisors to decide on which laboratory to pursue their thesis work. Sometimes, none of the three labs will be suitable for the student for a variety of reasons. In this case, the student can do a 4th rotation over the summer, after the preliminary exam. However, the 4th rotation is unique in that it carries several special circumstances:

1. The 4th rotation lab is usually the only choice a student will have for a thesis lab, with rare exceptions.

2. Graduate school rules stipulate that students who cannot find an acceptable and accepting lab by the beginning of their second year will be dismissed from the program.

3. The Graduate school will often fund students for the 4th rotation, but this may depend on circumstances and resources, and requires prior inquiry. It is possible that other funding sources must be found after July 1, typically research or departmental funds of the rotation advisor.

Exceptions include: 1. Student has a preferred lab but that lab is waiting on June-August funding decision, and so the 4th is an alternative. 2. Student has a potential lab but is not sure (or not satisfied) and has strong interest in a 4th lab. 3. Variation of #2, where 4th lab was not available to CSD rotations during the fall-spring period. 4. Other exceptions may apply, but please note that 4th rotations should have strong rationale and require approval of the GAC and program director (see “Requirements” below).

Therefore, these circumstances merit special requirements and guidelines that should be followed before a 4th rotation is undertaken. Essentially, the faculty advisor should vet and interview the student, just as they would for a postdoc applicant, BEFORE agreeing to take on the student for the 4th rotation. Acceptance of the student for a 4th rotation should be a commitment by the advisor to accept them into the lab, providing clearly stated expectations are met (see below). If the advisor cannot meet these requirements or does not wish to follow them, he/she should not take on a 4th rotation student.

The following requirements must be met BEFORE a 4th rotation begins:

1. The fourth rotation faculty advisor must have the space and interest in training a graduate student for their PhD thesis.

2. The fourth rotation advisor must have secured funds to support the student, not only for the summer rotation, but also for their continued thesis work after the rotation period.

3. The student must not be competing for a position with any other personnel (e.g. other student, postdoc candidates, or other lab personnel). For example, if the PI wishes to take on two 4th rotation students (from any program), they must be able, interested, and willing to take both.

4. The faculty advisor should agree to accept the student into the lab provided that clearly stated expectations (see #5) are met during the rotation.
5. The student must receive from the faculty advisor a written document stating expectations of the student for the 4th rotation. The student and mentor should jointly discuss these expectations. Failure of the student to clearly meet these expectations can justify declining the student a position, but this will likely lead to dismissal from the CSD program.

6. For special cases in which a 4th rotation is desired but not necessarily essential (see “Exceptions” above), prior approval of the GAC and CSD program director is required. The student must present in writing the reasons for a 4th rotation, and may need to meet with the GAC. Because of variable circumstances, specific modified requirements and guidelines tailored to those circumstances will be given to the student and 4th rotation faculty in these cases.

The following guidelines are strongly recommended for faculty BEFORE agreeing to the 4th rotation:

1. The faculty advisor is advised to review the student’s records (grad school application and grad school performance records; available from the CSD program administrator). The advisor is also strongly encouraged to communicate with the GAC, previous rotation advisors, course instructors and other references provided by the student, both to evaluate the suitability of the student for the lab and to identify any potential issues that might need to be addressed during the rotation.

2. The faculty advisor should interview the student, just as they would interview a postdoc candidate, to determine if there is sufficient mutual interest in working together. In addition, it would be wise to have the student meet all other lab personnel, again just as a postdoc or other job candidate would.

3. The faculty and student should meet regularly to assess progress and any issues with the rotation.