

EVALUATING POTENTIAL MENTORS

The following is a comprehensive list of questions that may be useful in evaluating whether a particular mentor is a good fit for your needs. You can ask some of these questions directly of the PI or members of his/her research group. It is often better to address sensitive questions indirectly; answers can be inferred from word choice and body language during conversations with group members.

A) SCIENTIFIC ISSUES:

- What are the mentor's intellectual interests and passions?
- What is the mentor's scientific reputation?
- Is the mentor working in a "hot" field or a slower, less competitive field?
- Is the mentor comfortable letting students and fellows develop projects with limited guidance? Must projects be closely aligned with his/her research interests or not?
- Does the mentor have a history of successful collaborations, on- and off-campus?
- Does the mentor regularly attend scientific meetings together with students and fellows? Does he or she get invited to speak at meetings?
- In what types of journals does the mentor publish? What is the mentor's recent publication record?

B) PERSONALITY:

- Is the mentor outgoing and sociable or quiet and reserved?
- Does the mentor's personality seem compatible with your own?
- How does the mentor respond to stress?
- Does the mentor value diversity? Does it seem that gender, racial, cultural, or other biases affect his or her relationships?
- Does the mentor enjoy socializing with members of the research group?
- Is the mentor easily approachable?
- Is this mentor a good role model for you?
- Would you feel comfortable taking criticism from this person?

C) WORK HABITS:

- Is the mentor organized, methodical, and disciplined, or does he/she prefer a more flexible approach?
- Is the mentor good at developing and adhering to long-term research plans?
- Does the mentor work regular hours? How much time does he/she spend with the research group?
- Is the mentor good at multi-tasking or does he/she prefer to complete one task before beginning another?
- Does the mentor like to "talk through" ideas with others or work in isolation to formulate and clarify thoughts?
- Is the mentor available for meetings and conversations or can it be difficult to find a convenient time for communication?
- Does the mentor expect students to spend a certain amount of time in the lab? What about in the evening and on weekends?

D) MANAGEMENT/MENTORING STYLE:

- Does the mentor hold regularly scheduled meetings with trainees or does he/she prefer unscheduled informal discussions?
- Does the mentor provide a good balance of positive input and constructive criticism?
- Is the mentor proactive in meeting with group members before a problem escalates?

- Is the mentor heavily involved in the day-to-day workings of the research group, or does he/she take a more hands-off approach?
- Are group members kept informed about the mentor's schedule and whereabouts?
- How much additional work not directly pertaining to the trainee's research does the mentor delegate to students and fellows?
- Does the mentor have additional administrative responsibilities and how do these responsibilities affect his/her availability and responsiveness to the needs of group members?
- Is the mentor comfortable letting students and fellows interact with other research groups and investigators independently or does he/she prefer to be heavily involved?
- How much guidance does the mentor provide about topics such as paper writing, public speaking, project design, peer review, etc.? Does the mentor include trainees in these activities in a way that promotes learning?
- How many students or fellows has the mentor worked with in the past? What happened to these trainees after they left the research group?
- Does the mentor have well-defined expectations of students and fellows and are these expectations communicated clearly and adhered to?
- Does the mentor treat students and fellows as junior colleagues? Do they feel like valued members of the team?
- Does the mentor include trainees in the formulation of research goals and in other intellectual discussions about science?
- Does the mentor take an active role in trainees' professional development beyond the immediate concerns of their research?
- Do the mentor's students and fellows publish significant papers?
- Do group members attend and present at important regional, national, and/or international meetings?
- Do group members have the opportunity to review manuscripts and grant applications?

E) THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT:

- What is the composition of the research group? Are there other students or trainees to interact with?
- How much space is there to work? Does it seem sufficient?
- Do group members interact socially? What about outside of work?
- Is the environment collegial and collaborative or cold and competitive?
- Are there cliques and favorites or does everyone seem to get along?
- Are issues dealt with up-front and in a straightforward manner? Does the PI participate in discussions and help provide strategies for dealing with issues?
- Do people in this research group seem generally happy?
- Are there collaborations among members of the research group?
- Is there a regular group meeting and what it is like?

F) FINANCIAL ISSUES:

- Does the mentor have adequate resources to support new students and fellows? This includes funds for stipend and supplies, and also funds to support other needs such as travel and attendance at meetings.
- Is the mentor ready to retire or be evaluated for tenure in the near future? If so, how will this affect your research project?

G) ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

- Is the mentor willing to learn about doctoral program requirements and participate in graduate program activities?
- What is the average time to graduation for students studying with this mentor? How does this time compare with the overall average for the graduate program?
- Will this mentor be supportive of your interest in teaching (if applicable)?
- Will this mentor be supportive if you choose to explore career options away from the bench?