Application Tips from Current Neuroscience Students
(written by Karina Thiessen, PhD candidate, and the GPN EDI committee)

How to Identify and Secure a Supervisor

Your supervisor will be your primary mentor during your graduate studies. It is very important that the supervisor-trainee partnership is a good fit for both of you.

Getting Started: Identifying Prospective Programs and Supervisors
The first step is to identify who you might want to work with and where. This can be overwhelming: there are a lot of universities and researchers out there. Start out by browsing university programs and faculty profiles. For example, all faculty members associated with the Graduate Program in Neuroscience are listed on our webpage, and you can navigate to their lab webpage by clicking on the profile picture. We recommend looking at their current projects, recent publications (especially publications where they are first or last author), and their graduate students' profiles to see what their research focus is. Does it generally align with yours? Consider the types of research questions you want to explore and the methods you want to use.

Once you have narrowed down a list of potential supervisors, email them to determine if they are taking on new graduate students. In this first email, tell them briefly about your research experience and interest in working with them, and see if they might be available to discuss graduate student opportunities with you. Sometimes their website or their profile on the UBC Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies will indicate if they are recruiting a new graduate student, but it is good to contact them regardless. If you do not hear back within one week, you may want to send a brief follow-up email. An email template can be found here: http://med-neuroscience-2021.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2022/10/Email-Templates.pdf.

You can start a spreadsheet to help you keep track of all of this information. For example:

University	Degree Program	Supervisor Name & email	Research area	Emailed? (Yes+date, No)	Response?	Accepting graduate student
UBC	MSc Neuro-science			July 2, 2022	Y	Y

Meeting with a Prospective Supervisor
Once you have emailed a prospective supervisor, they might agree to meet with you. If you do not hear back or if the response is negative, do not despair. Oftentimes faculty members would really love to take on new students but do not have sufficient funding to allow them to grow their lab. Try to cast your net wider and think outside of the box, and do not give up. If a professor

agrees to meet with you, think of it as a two-way conversation for both you and the prospective supervisor to test out if this person might be a good fit for you, and if you might be able to perform well in their lab.

Be prepared to talk about:
- Your previous research experience
- Your research interests and why you want to work with this prospective supervisor
- Your career goals
- Your other interests
- If you are applying for external funding

You may want to ask them:
- What is your mentorship style?
- How often do you meet with your graduate students?
- How do you give feedback?
- What is the lab structure?
- What is the most important quality you are looking for in a graduate student?
- How do you promote a positive working environment?
- Does the laboratory operate on structured working hours? Do they vary?
- What are the expectations for funding? Will I need to secure external funding? Will I be working as a teaching and/or graduate research assistant?

Consider if their responses align with what works best for *you* and your working style. Is it a good fit? Do you prefer working more independently or with more support?

Keep in mind that this first meeting does not usually qualify as an interview. To be admitted to the Graduate Program in Neuroscience, you must meet [eligibility criteria](#) be vetted by our [admissions committee](#). Once your file has made it through the initial screening and has been evaluated by the committee, you will likely have at a series of interviews with your prospective supervisor, any potential collaborators or co-supervisors, and your supervisor's current graduate students.

Here are some other considerations for these interviews:
- Talking to your prospective supervisor's current graduate students will often provide you with the most accurate insight into the laboratory environment. You can reach out to them and ask to meet. You may want to ask them:
  - What is the laboratory environment like?
  - What is your supervisor's mentorship style? Do you find it helpful?
  - What are some of the positive aspects of this laboratory? What are some of the challenges?
  - Do the graduate students get along?
  - Do graduate students have opportunities to publish as first authors?
  - What does a typical day/week look like for you?
  - How is the work-life balance in the laboratory?

- Funding. The Graduate Program in Neuroscience requires that all students have a minimum stipend. This stipend is generally paid for by some combination of external funding (e.g., graduate student scholarships), teaching assistantships, and research assistantships. Ask about available funding and mention if you are planning to apply for external funding.