

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Students Wishing to Transfer to Other Labs

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Purpose: Faculty Advisors in the EEB Graduate Program strive to provide the training and support needed for EEB graduate students to grow into the best scientists possible. However, sometimes students may encounter challenges in their Advisor-advisee relationship, in their lab environment, etc. This FAQ is meant to catalyze dialogue needed to make changes and to equip students with information about their options. It is strongly recommended that students consult with the EEB GPD as early as possible.

FAQ applies to: EEB students at any stage or year class

Use with: EEB Grad guide ([pdf](#)) | Transfer to MS form ([doc](#)) | Withdraw form ([doc](#))

Question: *I am beginning to detect challenges in my current lab or with my current advising situation. What should I do?*

(A) **More communication with your advisor:** Sometimes students may struggle with a mismatch between expectations vs. reality of life in a lab. Sometimes, students and advisors may need to commit to active work on aspects of their advisor-advisee relationship, mentoring style, and lab life (e.g., meeting frequency/accessibility and quality; the way in which criticism is delivered; the level of input and effort expected to solve problems; expectations of advisor; interpersonal problems with lab members; intellectual mismatches or misfits; Title IX issues). However, these concerns must be clearly communicated. Advisors may not necessarily intuit unspoken problems or anticipate unvoiced issues.

Suggestions:

- Have you communicated (written, verbal) with your advisor about the issues?
- Have you clearly stated your needs and wants? (It may help to write them out)
- Have you offered possible concrete action points, if possible, to implement to meet those concerns?
- If you are experiencing a Title IX issue, have you or a “responsible employee” reported the problem following Biology and IUB’s policies? If you are experiencing discrimination or harassment, have you completed a Bias Report? (See Biology’s [page](#) for resources).

(B) **Talk to others about your concerns:** Sometimes struggling students feel isolated. It really helps to connect with others and to verbalized issues. It can help to listen to feedback from others.

Suggestions:

- Do any of our tips for grad school ([pdf](#)) or mentoring guidelines ([pdf](#)) help?
- Have you talked with your lab mates? Former members of the lab? Other students in EEB? Fellow students in groups at UGS [Graduate Mentoring Center?](#)
- Have you met with members of your Advisory / Research Committee? It is their job to help you navigate obstacles to your success as a student. They should listen and brainstorm as professionals, setting aside any work or personal relationships with your advisors.
- Have you shared your concerns with the EEB GPD? The GPD can help you solve these problems or may discuss access to needed resources, etc.

Question: I am potentially ready to ask for change in my advising or lab situation. What are my options as an EEB Graduate Student?

Please remember that you are a member of the EEB Graduate Program, not just a member of a faculty's lab. Hence, in principle, you can join other labs. If a lab change is imminent: is it strongly advised that students discuss these options (pros and cons) with the EEG GPD before beginning dialogue with their current and prospective advisors. The GPD will maintain confidentiality and help to ensure professionalism¹.

Options (please consult with the EEB GPD about any of these):

(A) *Stay in the lab, work on dialogue with your advisor.*

Sometimes, increased or better/more precise communication can resolve problems. You can ask for help on 'scripting' this conversation from your mentors, members of your Committee, the EEB GPD, etc. The EEB GPD can also try to mediate in three-party dialogue (GPD, advisor, and student) or binary conversations as an intermediary.

(B) *Stay in the lab, but work seek out help from an outside mediator* (e.g., from Dean of Students, GMC). IUB has professional staff who can help you and your Advisor make changes, if you both are willing to participate and try. These staff reside in the Dean of Students Office ([Office of Student Conduct](#)), the [Student Advocates Office](#), the UGS [Graduate Mentoring Center](#), etc.

(C) *Stay in the lab, but seek a co-advisor.*

Some students benefit from co-advising. This possibility becomes established with dialogue – between student, current advisor, and possible co-advisor. That dialogue would need to work out issues of research and also financial commitments for summer pay (if applicable). Any faculty in Biology can serve as a co-advisor. Faculty outside of Biology must become Adjunct and Affiliated with EEB.

(D) *Move to a new lab with a new Advisor.*

Students are free switch labs in principle. However, in practice, students need to establish that possibility with dialogue (to ensure intellectual match, room and materials exist, financial support exists). Students are not guaranteed the ability to move labs (as a good fit or alternative may not present itself). However, if options exist, students can move to other labs in EEB or Biology. They can also join labs outside of Biology, but their new Advisors must become Adjunct and Affiliated with EEB (to ensure that the student would receive training appropriate for the Program). Students may wish to maintain confidentiality with possible advisors in these conversations.

Please note: Options (C) and (D) likely require filing new forms with either the College Graduate Office (for Advisory Committees, pre-candidacy: start [here](#)) or the University Graduate School (for Research Committees, post candidacy: start [here](#)). These forms are straightforward, but the Grad Advisor in Biology can always help you.

(E) *Complete a MS degree in the current lab.*

Some students and their Advisors may feel that a transfer to the MS program is best. The process is simple (a [form](#) and two letters) and is detailed in the EEB Grad Guide ([pdf](#)). Please note that Biology's policy for

¹ If your advisor is the GPD, you can talk with the Biology DGS and/or EEB SAC

allocating SAA-AI lines may change the student's priority for funding. This issues should be detailed in a letter from the DGS at the time of the transfer.

(F) ***Complete a MS degree in another lab.***

It may be possible to complete a MS thesis project in another lab. Please see (E) for information about necessary paperwork ([grad guide](#) | [form](#)) to complete.

(G) ***Withdrawal from the EEB Program.***

Students can leave the program and the University Grad School at any time. Please work with the GPD to complete the proper paperwork ([form](#)).