

## Department of Molecular Biosciences Policy on Switching Graduate Mentor

### I. Mechanism

A student may request to switch graduate mentors, and move to a different lab to continue their degree, if certain criteria are met (see section "II. Eligibility").

A student considering switching mentors should schedule a confidential meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) to discuss their options (other contacts are also available, see section "III. Alternative contacts"). If appropriate, the DGS will also meet separately with the student's faculty mentor to obtain complementary information about the situation. After learning about the case from the student (and, if appropriate, the mentor), the student will be presented with general information about the mechanism for switching mentors, their eligibility (see "II. Eligibility"), and will also be directed to this document.

If eligible to switch graduate mentors, the student will meet with other potential MB faculty mentors or appropriate affiliate faculty mentors, and either:

- A. Identify a faculty mentor who is willing to immediately start mentoring the student in their lab, or
- B. identify one or more faculty mentors who are willing to have the student participate in short, mentored laboratory experiences, allowing the student and the potential mentor to determine if a productive mentoring and training relationship can be formed. (The length of each lab experience will be determined coordinately by the DGS and the faculty mentor in question.)

The DGS will give the student a defined period of time, of no more than 3 months from the date of their initial meeting, to identify a new mentor by either of these mechanisms. The DGS will assist with, and monitor this process, but it will be entirely the responsibility of the student to initiate contacts, and identify a faculty member willing to be their primary mentor.

If the student has identified a new lab by the deadline - either by getting immediate agreement from a faculty member ("I.A" above), or following a successful laboratory experience ("I.B" above) - the student will be able to formally switch mentors.

If the student is unable to identify a new lab to switch to ("I.A" above), or is unable to find a lab in which to conduct a mentored laboratory experience ("I.B" above), or any and all mentored lab experiences were unsuccessful (as determined either by the student or by the relevant faculty mentor), the DGS will inform the student that he/she will be unable to switch mentors. In this case the student may voluntarily leave the MB graduate program (see <https://coga.ku.edu/progress-to-degree/status-changes/discontinuance>). Alternatively, since the Department of Molecular Biosciences considers that a graduate student without a mentor cannot make progress towards the degree, the DGS will initiate the process to dismiss the student from the program.

In some circumstances, a Doctoral student who is unable to switch mentors to remain in a Doctoral program may be able to move to a Master's program. This will only be possible if the

student can identify a faculty mentor willing to mentor the student towards a Master's degree, and the student must complete all coursework requirements to earn a Master's degree (see <https://catalog.ku.edu/liberal-arts-sciences/molecular-biosciences/ma>).

## **II. Eligibility**

A student can only switch mentors under one of the following three circumstances:

- A. Their current mentor leaves the University of Kansas, but the student is unable or unwilling to join their mentor at their new institution, or
- B. the current mentor passes away, retires, or becomes disabled or otherwise cannot continue to mentor the student, or
- C. the mentor-student relationship has become un-productive, un-resolvable personal or professional differences mean that the relationship is no longer positive, and the student and/or mentor feel it would be in the best interests of the student to move to a new lab.

Additionally, only students in good standing, who are making satisfactory progress towards the degree, are able to switch mentors. (For detail on what constitutes "Good Academic Standing" please see the following KU policy document: <https://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/good-academic-standing>).

Students are cautioned that even when they are eligible to switch mentors, constraints on faculty time and resources may make it impossible for them to switch to a new mentor.

Any student considering a switch in mentor who has questions or concerns about their eligibility, or the process of switching mentors, is strongly encouraged to meet confidentially with the DGS (see "I. Mechanism") or an appropriate alternative contact individual (see "III. Alternative contacts").

## **III. Alternative contacts**

In most circumstances the appropriate initial contact for a student considering switching graduate mentors is the DGS.

If, for whatever reason, the student is uncomfortable initially bringing their concerns to the DGS, they may contact the Molecular Biosciences (MB) Chair. If this is also impossible, the student is directed to contact a member of their graduate committee, which could include the Graduate Studies Representative (colloquially, the "outside member"). Finally, if circumstances are such that the student feels they can only discuss their situation with an individual completely independent from the department, the student is directed to the College Office of Graduate Affairs (COGA, <https://coga.ku.edu/>) or to the KU Ombuds Office (<https://ombuds.ku.edu/>).

In cases where the student wishing to switch mentors initially discusses their situation with someone other than the DGS, they are recommended to provide that individual with a copy of this document, so they will be aware of department's policy for switching mentors.