

ITMAT TRIP: Mentor-Mentee Matching & Lab Commitment Guide

Objective: Find a lab where you feel intellectually engaged, supported, and excited to contribute.

Step 1: Understand the Matching Process

- **Introductory Meeting:** Once you've officially enrolled in TRIP, you will meet one-on-one with Dr. Carsten Skarke to discuss your research interests and career goals.
 - In your TRIP application, you may have already described your scientific interests and listed potential research mentors; this information will help guide the conversation.
 - Before this meeting, we also recommend reviewing the list of [ITMAT Faculty by Research Programs](#) to identify any faculty members whose work interests you.
 - Dr. Skarke may suggest additional mentors based on responses to our faculty survey, which identifies labs offering summer research opportunities for undergraduate students.
 - **Initial Matching:** After your meeting, you'll be matched with one or more potential mentors based on your career interests, educational background, and the availability of mentor labs that are able to host TRIP students.
 - **Introductory Meetings:** You'll meet with selected mentors to learn about their research and lab environment, and expectations. These conversations are a chance to explore fit and ask questions before committing to a lab.
 - **Your time to Shine:** Once Dr. Skarke has introduced you to a potential mentor, be diligent in scheduling a meeting in a timely fashion. These meetings typically occur on Zoom or Teams, but there may be an in-person option for students who are on Penn's campus or local to the Philadelphia area.
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Step 2: Prepare for Mentor Meetings

Ask questions that help you assess fit:

- **Research Focus:** What are the lab's current projects? What project would I be involved in?
- **Mentorship Style:** How do you typically work with undergraduates? What level of support do you provide?
- **Expectations:** What are your expectations for summer undergraduate interns in terms of time, skills, and deliverables?
- **Team Dynamics:** Who else will I be working with? Will I have a peer mentor or lab manager?

- **Opportunities:** Are there chances to present, publish, or continue work after the summer?
 - **“Skin in the Game”:** TRIP asks me to present my research project on several occasions throughout the 10-week program, culminating in the TRIP Symposium. What are the mechanisms in your lab to prepare and make me successful for this?
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Step 3: Evaluate Fit

After your meetings, reflect on:

- Am I excited about the research?
 - Do I feel comfortable asking questions in this lab?
 - Do I understand what my role would be?
 - Does the mentor seem invested in mentoring me?
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What If You Don't Connect with Your Suggested Lab?

- **It's OK!** Not every match is perfect.
 - **Next Steps:**
 - Let Dr. Carsten Skarke know early
 - Share feedback on what didn't feel right
 - You may be offered additional mentor options or asked to revisit your interests.
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Step 4: Committing to a Lab

Once you've found a good fit:

- **Confirm your match** with your mentor and notify Dr. Carsten Skarke and Jessica German
- **Clarify expectations** around your schedule, goals, and any prep work needed before the summer begins.
- **Commit to the experience** by being a reliable, curious, and communicative team member

- **Stay on top of onboarding tasks** required by TRIP, Penn and/or CHOP research mentors – these may include paperwork, training modules, or access requests. Timely completion is essential to ensure a smooth transition.
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Need Help?

Reach out to Dr. Carsten Skarke (cskarke@penncmedicine.upenn.edu) or Jessica German (jbgerman@upenn.edu) anytime for support navigating mentor relationships or lab dynamics.