

2021 PhD Student Orientation

Omer Reingold
Director of Graduate Studies



Welcome to CS Stanford

- **The department stands on three pillars, students are one (together with faculty & staff).**
 - The department is yours just as much as ours.
- **Each one of you is here for a good reason.**
 - We are looking forward to working with you.
 - Your success is also our success.
 - We are here to support you.
- **You are shareholders, workers and customers of the department**
 - Protections and resources of a workplace.



Welcome to Wonderland

- **Wonderous:** a playground of knowledge and ideas; a lot of freedom; brilliant colleagues (junior and senior).
 - Enjoy it (nothing to wait for).
- **Baffling:** a lot that is new and different
 - Basic orientation.
 - A lot to learn about research and about yourself - give yourself time.
 - Uncertainty is inherent part of research. Embrace it, be playful (an adventure).
 - Rely on others.



A Crucial Partnership

- **A student adviser relationship:** often the most impactful relationship in a student's career.
 - Many different styles.
 - When it works it's great.
 - When it doesn't it could be a real problem for both student and adviser (rare but a concern).
- **Your one job for year 1:** align with an adviser.
 - May not be the one you thought you would.
 - Hence - **rotations**
 - Rotations allow students and faculty to get to know each other (real improvement)
 - Allow students to re-evaluate their interests.



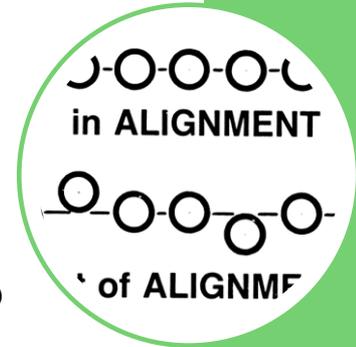
Rotations

- **Students drive the process**
 - You approach faculty, ask to rotate
 - Plan ahead!
- **It's a market:**
 - Students evaluate faculty during rotations.
 - Faculty evaluate students during rotations.
 - Some students (and faculty) are more popular.
 - Not everyone get their first choice (students or faculty).
 - Sometimes works better.
- **Works the best if you are not set on a particular adviser.**



Alignments

- **Things to think about:**
 - Research interests: faculty will spend more time on projects they are excited about
 - Compatible style: do you enjoy talking with them?
 - Hands-on vs. hands-off.
 - How much time do they spend with students?
- **Talk to their existing students:**
 - How often do you meet with the adviser? For how long?
 - Greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- **Talk to senior students:**
 - What do you know now that you wish you'd known during your first year?
- **It's worth extra work:** know what you are getting yourself into.



Rotation Tips

- Rotate only with faculty you can potentially align with, until you have at least one firm offer that you are happy with.
- **Ask beforehand:**
 - "How many new students do you expect to take this year?"
 - "How many students will be rotating with you?"
 - "How many of your slots have you already committed?"
 - "What are your expectations during the rotation?"
- **Ask afterwards:**
 - "How did I do? What parts were you least happy with?"
 - "Are you prepared to offer me an RAship now? If not, when will you make the decision, and how will you make it?"
 - An evasive or heavily qualified answer probably means "no."



Rotation Tips II

- **Take rotations seriously:**
 - Easy on the classes.
 - Careful with rotations leaking into each other.
- **Take initiative, be active, get involved:**
 - Do something concrete (don't be picky).
 - Work with other students.
 - Learn from senior student.
- **Be realistic:**
 - Probably can't write a paper in a quarter, may never lead to publication.
 - Learn about an area, a faculty, and a style of doing research.
 - Research experience.
 - Make connections with other students and faculty.



Parting Thoughts

Psychology is a lot of what it is about.

- Not waste time evaluating yourself.
- Research is a job - no Einsteins.
- Compete only as needed, collaborate often.
- You are the CEOs of your enterprises.

Not a sprint. Take your time to

- Learn this profession, learn yourself.
- Go deep, to think and play, to specialize.
- Enjoy research.
- Enjoy life (socialize, exercise, expand).

