Before you apply to the Molecular Biology and Biochemistry (MBB) Graduate program

SFU has two types of graduate programs: research-based and professional programs.

MBB has a research-based graduate program, therefore, MBB requires that you have a "sponsoring" faculty member (supervisor) before beginning your application to graduate school at SFU/MBB.

Looking for a Supervisor

Here are a few tips for how to start looking for a potential supervisor:

Click through our department's website (http://www.sfu.ca/mbb.html).

Read through the faculty list and find out if there is a faculty member at MBB who is doing research related to your area.

Do a web search on the faculty member's name. Many of our faculty members are frequently consulted by the media, and you can get a well-rounded picture of their research interests.

Read their publications. Do their theoretical, conceptual or methodological approaches interest you?

Look through SFU's Media Experts Directory. Search the Directory for the faculty member's name or for the subject area of your research. (For example, you may find that your interest in "immunology" may bring up a number of faculty members.)

Contacting Potential Supervisors

Once you've identified one or two potential supervisors, you should contact them by email. Here are some items to include in your initial brief contact email:

Your name
Academic background (your GPA must be over 3.0, or equivalent)
Academic awards or highlights
Research experience
Why you wish to enter graduate studies
Why the faculty member's area of research will match with your research goals (cite the faculty member's publications if relevant)
Make it clear that you are familiar with their work and how their research interests mesh with your own (if there is a research idea in one of their papers that you would like to explore in your work, explain that briefly)
A research proposal, if appropriate
Ask them specifically if they are accepting new graduate students for the coming academic year.
Tips for the First Contact Note
Do not send form letters as most faculty members will recognize and delete those without responding.

Do address your letter carefully. For example, if you are sending a letter to "Susan Smith, PhD", address as "Dear Dr. Smith" or "Dear Professor Smith." (Salutations such as "Respected sir" or "Dear Mr. Smith" will demonstrate that you haven't done enough research to find out her gender or professorial rank.)

Do customize the letter as much as possible to begin building a relationship between yourself and your prospective supervisor.

Do keep it as brief as possible. For example, in your first contact, you probably don't need to include your transcript, but do mention your GPA.

Do proofread your letter and have someone else proofread it for you. If you're new to this process, consider this your first academic proposal. Poor grammar and spelling errors will reveal quite a bit about your academic abilities and attention to detail.

Your relationship with your supervisor forms the foundation of your graduate program experience. It's best to start building it even before you begin the application process.

Building a relationship
If the prospective supervisor responds to you, you may wish to learn more about where you'll be spending your time over the next few years.

Ask politely if you can contact the supervisor's current graduate students.

Find out more about the supervisor's graduated students: What types of careers are they in? Is that what you'd like to be doing in a few years after you've completed your graduate program?

Consider travelling to speak in person with the potential supervisor and tour the university.

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