**Lab Rotation**

The study program lists the obligatory courses ‘Research Orientation’ (3 ECTS), ‘Lab Rotation 1’ (6 ECTS), and ‘Lab Rotation 2’ (9 ECTS). Research Orientation takes place in the 2nd block of the 1st semester, and provides students with information on which to base their choice for Lab Rotation. The Lab Rotations are internships, which may each be done in separate research groups (‘labs’) or both in the same one. The Study Guide contains Course Descriptions; this text provides more elaborate information about what to expect, what to strive for, how to conduct the internship, what end products to aim for, and how it is assessed. Study guide descriptions leave many questions about these issues; this text is meant to fill that gap.

The important things to know are the following:

* Lab Rotation is not a ‘course’ in the traditional sense (i.e. not a ‘taught course’). It is basically an internship. On the basis of your exposure to the Tilburg and Nijmegen research programs in your first year (especially the information you receive during Research Orientation, but also through seminars you may have attended and articles you may have read), you have probably formed an idea of whose research fits well with your interests. Now is the time to give that more, and more serious, shape. The idea is that you spend approximately a semester and a half (Lab Rotation 1 and 2 together are credited with 15 ECTS) with one or two research teams, functioning as a research assistant or junior researcher. Technically, your team can consist of just one senior researcher, but it is strongly recommended to search out groups, consisting of at least one senior researcher and one or more Postdocs or PhD students). Whether you choose two different groups or stick with one throughout Lab Rotation 1 and 2 is up to you. The advantage of switching is that you learn more skills and broaden your network more; the advantage of combining is that you have more time to focus on a particular project, which may translate into better opportunities to get a paper or a conference presentation out of it.
* The first thing to do, therefore, is to select a research project or a supervisor. If you feel you don’t have enough information yet about the research landscapes in Tilburg and Nijmegen, get in touch with your tutor or someone else whose judgment you trust. The coordinators are always available for this task, but be aware that for finetuning, it’s best to talk to someone who knows the specialization area well, and probably also the people involved. Your chosen area or areas may or may not be similar to the topics of your Term Paper or of the elective courses you have chosen so far.
* A typical, and recommended, research environment is an externally funded project, as such projects are generally carried out by teams that consist of at least a graduate student and a senior researcher; often, there will be more graduate students and/or Postdocs. Especially the latter make perfect supervisors for Lab Rotation activities as they are 1) relatively experienced and 2) have more time for you than most senior researchers. However, the scope of your training environment may be smaller or larger. To start with the former, it is possible to work with just one particular senior researcher. While not recommended (the person is likely to be busy and so of limited availability, and you learn more from four people than from one, no matter how good he/she is), sometimes it may be the right thing to do, for example if the topic is narrowly defined and the researcher has a lot of research time (i.e. does limited teaching). Larger teams than a 3-4 person project exist, too; in fact, you can create one for the duration of your internship. Researchers are generally aware of colleagues in their own or other departments (or universities) that do stuff similar to their own work, but lack the time or energy to explore the links. You could combine them as co-supervisors (along with members of their respective teams) and carve out a training environment that makes use of the combined expertise. Obviously, this option requires a bit more careful preparation. The coordinators can help bring people together.
* Lab Rotation activities are not limited to the semesters for which they are listed in the curriculum. It is important to plan carefully, though, as you also have the thesis waiting later in the year (30 ECTS). **You are encouraged to draw up an informal contract with your supervisor at the beginning, listing at least the end goals and the approximate date at which you will end your internship.** Past experience shows that it is hard to establish when ‘enough is enough’ if this hasn’t been agreed on before, also because internships are often quite fun and useful, so you’d like it to go on and on.
* The internships can be done in all departments in Tilburg and Nijmegen, and in any combination of departments, PI groups and ad-hoc combinations. Departments, the basic organizational level in Tilburg, are organized around a research program with a particular focus, but your interests may cover more than one focus, or, perhaps more interestingly, the grey area between the interests of two different research teams.
* **The end product is a portfolio in which you document your activities.** The preferred format for this is a short description listing the various activities and a bunch of appendices that provide illustrations of these activities and products (e.g. a Powerpoint presentation, a draft article, a set of data, an annotated transcript, etc.; details depend on the type of research). The description may also contain a short evaluation, in which you go over the various activities and clarify any discrepancy between the original plan and the eventual outcome. **The portfolio is the basis for your grade, along with your supervisor’s general assessment of the quality of your work.** Supervisors are asked to keep in mind that you are being trained, so that your work should not be judged as the work of a PhD student. A second reader assists the supervisor in reaching a decision about the grade.
* This requires that you keep a record of your activities. Do this; you’ll forget things otherwise, and a single poster as output may look rather meager if it is not accompanied by an impressive list of all the activities that went into the research underlying it (things like research design, item selection, transcription, reading literature, coffee and brainstorm sessions with your colleagues, analyses, interpretation efforts, submitting an abstract, etc.)
* More than ever, you should keep going to seminars, colloquia, talks and other events organized by the various departments. Include a list in your portfolio. Even better would be a presentation in a seminar; this would fit in well with the goals of the Lab Rotation.
* Keep in touch with your tutor and/or the coordinators. Lab Rotation has of necessity a pretty vague course description, since much of what goes on is dependent on the project you’re in (the stage it’s at, the people involved, traditions in the specific field, etc.), so you may have questions along the way about what may be expected of you, and what you could expect of the members of the team you’re part of.
* In many cases, there will be a close connection between the Lab Rotation and the MA thesis. You can certainly treat the training as the first stage of your thesis; in some past cases the data collection for the thesis, or at least some form of piloting, was done in the internship, creating more time later on. But there is no necessary link between Lab Rotation and Thesis.