

Josh McDermott's Mentoring Style

I aspire to have each person in the lab occupy a distinctive research area. Ideally each person's research area is close enough to what others in the lab are working on that each person has natural colleagues within the lab, but sufficiently distinct that there is no chance of feelings of encroachment or competition. We always avoid competition within the lab and with other labs in our department, and ideally with other labs outside MIT.

I am generally willing to work on anything interesting that we can do well and on which we can make a distinctive contribution. Project ideas are a collaborative process that usually emerge from extended discussion and planning. I aspire to have each person in the lab working on the most exciting thing they can think of, subject to constraints of feasibility and uniqueness.

I meet every week with every grad student and postdoc in the lab. I aim to stay fairly closely involved in each project, with the goal of helping each lab member bring their projects to a successful conclusion culminating in a definitive publication. I try to be available for additional consultations during the week as needed, but sometimes I get busy and am less available.

Most projects in the lab are led by a single primary person, but I encourage collaborative projects and am trying to foster more of them.

I value rigor and replicability. We typically only publish results that we have internally replicated (these replications are often incorporated into the paper, to give the reader the same confidence we have in the result). We try to make our code and data publicly available upon publication, subject to practical constraints. My students tell me that I favor completeness to a greater extent than some other PIs. This grounds out in having larger projects and papers instead of lots of short papers on smaller projects.

I regularly solicit feedback from lab members on my mentorship and lab management, and use this feedback to improve and refine how I run the lab.

I am equally supportive of academic and non-academic career paths for lab members. I encourage students to consider industry internships during their PhD to explore non-academic job options.