

Locating a Research Mentor

In undergraduate research, you will be working with a research mentor, a faculty or staff member who provides support to another individual during a research project.

In many cases, you can find exciting and rewarding research opportunities on your home campus, working with a professor who may even teach in your major. However, each campus is limited with only so many research faculty. Always consider looking for opportunities off-campus because research, creative, and scholarly projects are incredibly diverse.

Identifying Your Interests

Step 1: Questions to answer when locating your interests.

1. Have there been inspiring topics from the courses you have taken?
2. What do you do/read when you have 30 minutes to 1 hour of free time?
3. Which potential careers you are considering? Any areas connecting with those careers?
4. Do you have a connection to fields of interest to make a difference? For example, those with a family history with cancer have personal connections to cancer research projects.

Step 2: Activities to narrow your answers.

- Search online for the topics above and filter out topics that are not engaging to you.
- Can interests be merged or combined? Does one project benefit your future interests?
- Consider if any of your interests connect with any faculty/staff at your institution.
- Talk with (1) any professor during office hours about your interest in research, (2) career services about future options, and (3) your academic/faculty advisor.

Online Resources to Locate a Mentor

- Search for “[Your institution’s name] [insert research interest area]”
 - Replace your institution’s name with “undergraduate” and add “summer” for global results for summer research
- Using [Google Scholar](#), type “[Your institution’s name]’ [insert research interest area]” to locate articles published by individuals at your institution and locate multiple potential mentors as the co-authors on an article.
 - Using your library’s resources, you can access more full-text articles.
- Departmental and research center sites can help you determine research areas of the faculty. Remember that information may be outdated.
- ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Zotero, for example, include researchers uploading project papers you can read. Connect with researchers on these platforms.
- Your college student job board may include research assistant positions.

Connecting with Potential Research Mentors

Always approach faculty in a respectful, polite, concise, and thoughtful manner.

Do Your Research First

It is not expected of you to be an expert in the field of the faculty member you will want to connect with, but it is an expectation you know what they are working on and know why you want to work with them.

- Read the abstracts and skim the papers from their most recent publications
- Review their various websites they may have and ask current research about their work

Emails

Emails are an easy way to connect with a potential research mentor and can be your first professional first impression.

- Use an informative, yet concise, subject title. Do not use general subjects such as “Research Inquiry”
- Introduce yourself and any connections you may have with them. State you are interested in their research as a potential project for you to pursue. (1-2 sentences)
- Demonstrate you know what they study by using specific language in their field. If you could copy/paste the email to other faculty members, it is too general. (1-2 sentences)
- “Show” passion. Why does their research area interest you and what you could bring in regards to skills, experiences, and techniques to the project. (2-4 sentences)
- Reference a resumé or curriculum vita in your email.
- Recommend times to meet like their office hours or general times you are free.
- Close with your contact information and thank them for their time.

It is acceptable to follow-up with your initial email after 2 weeks. You should paraphrase your interest and, if they have graduate students or other undergraduate researchers, state that you would be interested in meeting with them first.

Appointments

- Prepare answers to why you are excited about the field or the project and your availability.
- During the appointment, get to know their research and their expectations to determine if the research area and personalities would be a good fit. If it is not a good fit, that is okay.
 - Keep in mind the time so they do not talk during the entire appointment. It is important to participate in the conversation and discuss your interests and skills.
 - If they offer you the position, you can either thank them for their offer and ask to take at least a day to consider the offer or accept the offer.
- If your appointment is over the phone or over the internet, you should designate the initiator of the meeting, check you have strong service, have their contact information in case the call is disconnected, and have practiced using the format with the friend.
- Follow-up with an appreciative email as a continuation of the relationship building process.
 - If there were questions you could not answer, address them. If they offered help or resources, remind them by being appreciative.
 - If they offered you a position during the appointment, be sure to follow-up with an affirmative or denial within the timeframe given and no more than a week later.

Locating a Research Mentor Checklist

This checklist is meant to be used alongside the Locating a Research Mentor Guide.

Identifying Your Interests

- Answer questions and complete activities to identify and narrow your interests.

Locating a Mentor

- Talk with professors, librarians, career development staff about your interests
 - Each of these people may know a faculty and, therefore, point you in the right direction quickly
- Search for “[Your institution’s name] [insert research interest area]”
 - Replace your institution’s name with “undergraduate” and add “summer” for global results for summer research
- Using [Google Scholar](#), type “[Your institution’s name]’ [insert research interest area]”
- Explore academic, social networking sites, such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Zotero
- Check your college student job board

Meeting a Potential Research Mentor: Do Your Research First

- Read the abstracts and skim the papers from their most recent publications
- Review their various websites and ask others, including research students, about their work

Meeting a Potential Research Mentor: Emails

- Use an informative, yet concise, subject title.
- Introduce yourself and any connections you may have with them.
- Demonstrate you know what they study by using specific language in their field.
- “Show” passion.
- Reference a resumé or curriculum vita in your email.
- Recommend times to meet like their office hours or general times you are free.
- Close with your contact information and thank them for their time.
- Follow-up, if needed.

Meeting a Potential Research Mentor: Appointments

- Prepare answers to:
 - Why you are excited about the field and the mentor’s work and your availability.
- During the appointment, get to know their research and their expectations to determine if the research area and personalities would be a good fit. After the meeting, consider:
 - Can you work with the faculty?
 - Do you like the work that the faculty pursues?
If it is not a good fit, that is okay.
- If your appointment is over the phone or over the internet, you should:
 - Designate the initiator of the meeting,
 - Check you have strong service,
 - Share contact information in case the call is disconnected, and
 - Practice using the format with a friend.
- Follow-up with an appreciative email as a continuation of the relationship-building process.