The Journey of Discovery: Undergraduate Research!

The University of Delaware offers a wide array of exciting opportunities and resources for undergraduates to conduct research in their fields of interest. In fact, the options are so numerous that it can sometimes seem daunting. That’s where the Undergraduate Research Program comes in. It is our job to help you navigate these unfamiliar seas and help you land a research situation suitable to your interests and capabilities. Think of this document as your Navigational Guide to Undergraduate Research at UD, it contains important information as well as useful tips and tricks.

Plotting a Course: Beginning Your Research Journey

Before any great expedition can be commenced, there are some preliminary logistical matters that must be attended to. There are three categories of research here at UD: research for credit, research for pay, and volunteer research; each of which has its own unique set of pros and cons.

- Research for Credit
  - Students are required to complete a set number of hours per week according to the number of credits of research they are taking
    - 1 credit hour: 3-5 hours per week
    - 2 credit hours: 6-9 hours per week
    - 3 credit hours: 10-12 hours per week
  - Students will register for “Independent Study” through the secretary of their departments

- Research for Pay
  - Students receive a salary/stipend for their work instead of receiving academic credit
  - Funds may come from a faculty member’s grant or work study funds depending on availability
  - This is a relatively uncommon occurrence at the undergraduate level
  - Scheduling must be determined with faculty advisor

- Volunteer Research
  - Flexible- no required number of hours per week. Scheduling determined with faculty advisor
  - Particularly suited to freshman and underclassmen who want to get involved with research at an early stage
All Hands on Deck: Utilizing the Office of Undergraduate Research

After considering which research arrangement would be ideal for you, the next step is to set up an appointment with the Office of Undergraduate Research. If you consider yourself the captain of your research ship, then we at the URP are your crew—ready to aid and advise you on your maiden voyage!

- Refer to the “Research Opportunities” tab of the URP website http://urp.udel.edu/content/research-opportunities
  o On the “Faculty Projects” page is a link to the faculty project listings, which is a great place to start your search
    ▪ The faculty project listing is broken down by department; click on all of the ones that interest you! You don’t have to conduct research in your own department—most related fields are fair game. For instance, a History major might find a project in Anthropology to be particularly suitable
    ▪ Note that this list is not updated regularly and some projects might be old/completed. For this reason the next step is to directly consult the department websites
  o Department websites often provide more up-to-date and complete faculty project lists
    ▪ Note that some projects have prerequisites or GPA requirements
  o Lauren Barsky, Associate Director of Undergraduate Research (lbarsky@udel.edu) and Elizabeth Diker, Undergraduate Research Graduate Assistant (lzdiker@udel.edu) are happy to help you look through these resources to determine what is relevant to your interests

Setting Sail: Narrowing Down your Options

After you’ve had your appointment with the URP to discuss your options, the next step is to do some further research into the faculty members and projects that caught your attention. Look into past publications from faculty and read recent abstracts in order to really get a feel for what kind of work they do. Faculty publications and general statements of interest can often be found by searching for their pages under the Faculty sections of their respective departmental websites.

After you’ve narrowed down your options, it is time to start emailing faculty members. Remember, these people are doing research that they are passionate about and invested in—and as such they want to work with students who are also excited about the work. Do not contact a faculty member simply because you think their project would look good on your resume. Research is not mercenary!
Weathering the Stormy Seas: Contacting Faculty Members

Contacting faculty members whom you often don’t know can seem like a formidable task, but once you learn a basic set of guidelines it can be easy. Do not let yourself be intimidated. The worst that can happen is that you get rejected. In which case, it probably was not the right fit anyway. Start by emailing your top choice. Give him or her 3-4 days to respond, but do not be discouraged if this doesn’t happen; faculty members are often very busy and simply don’t get around to reading/responding to all of their emails in a timely fashion. Included here is a model for what an email to a professor inquiring about research should look like. Think of this as a bare-bones template detailing information that must be included. However, feel free to adapt and use it how you see fit.

Template Email Example

Dear Professor [INSERT NAME, remember to include appropriate title, such as Dr.],

My name is [INSERT NAME], and I am writing to inquire about the possibility of conducting research with you during the [NAME TIME PERIOD- FALL, WINTER, SPRING SUMMER]. I am a [INCLUDE YEAR AND MAJOR]. I’ve read about your work on [INSERT THEIR RESEARCH INTERESTS AND/OR ANYTHING YOU FIND OUT THAT IS RELEVANT OR THAT YOU FIND INTERESTING FROM THEIR WORK]. I am interested in learning more about your work and research interests.

Undergraduate research interests me because [FILL IN WHY YOU ARE INTERESTED-GRAD SCHOOL, EXPERIENCE, ETC…] I have also attached my resume to this email, for your consideration.

I have also looked up your office hours as being [INCLUDE OFFICE HOURS AND LOCATION] and plan to visit during one of those times next week to discuss these matters with you in person. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hopefully hearing from you.

Best Regards/Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION]

[INCLUDE A COPY OF YOUR RESUME]

After you have emailed the faculty member, follow-up by visiting him or her during office hours. Treat this as a serious matter -- dress well and bring a hard-copy of your resume. Remember, it is not just about how joining this research can be beneficial for you, but more importantly how you can be beneficial to this research.

Faculty members may have to say no for a variety of reasons- the lab is full, they are going on sabbatical, or perhaps you don’t yet have the necessary prerequisites. That is okay, really, a lesson in how to handle rejection is a valuable lesson nonetheless. Thank them for their
time regardless and ask them if they have any further suggestions for you — such as another faculty project which might be a good fit. Do not burn bridges!

If your first option doesn’t work out, repeat this process with your second choice, and so on.

**Making Berth: The End of the Journey!**

After you have contacted faculty members and (hopefully) received some positive responses—remember to finalize your scheduling arrangements and register for any necessary classes. Lauren Barsky can register you for UNIV 368 or UNIV 468 (Undergraduate Research) for 0-6 credits for the Fall and Spring semesters depending on your year. Additionally, in Winter Lauren can register you for UNIV 368 or 468 for credit (will cost tuition) or for UNIV 369 for zero credits.

Remember to make the most of your undergraduate research experience, take notes, ask questions, and learn everything you can. Talk to faculty members, graduate students, and fellow classmates in order to make strong connections.

_**O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,**_

_The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won. . ._

- Walt Whitman

Feel free to contact us with any further questions or concerns. Good luck!

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