Undergraduate Research FAQ

GETTING STARTED

Q: Where should I start if I am interested in getting a research position?

A: Start with what you know. Have you taken a course that was really interesting? What are you curious about? Curiosity is what drives research and a little bit of reflection might help identify an area of research that you are interested in. Visiting the Undergraduate Research Center is also a great first step. Attend one of our URC Discovery Cafe workshops and Visit our website to discover info and programs we offer as well as other research programs across campus. On our website you can also find examples of undergraduate Research Rockstar videos and searchable PDF files of our annual conference abstract books. Searching our abstract book can help you identify faculty members who might have similar research interests as you. This are just a few steps you can take to get started, still have questions? email us at urc@ucdavis.edu.

Q: How can I learn about different research opportunities on campus?

A: There are several ways to get information about research positions: join the URC and/or your department's listserv, follow the URC (@ucd_urc) and other centers/departments on Instagram and Facebook, join a student organization focused on research in your major and/or interest areas, talk to friends who you know are involved in research, and talk to your TAs and/or faculty members are just a few ways you can begin to learn about the different research opportunities and available positions on campus.

Q: What is the difference between a resume and CV?

A: A resume emphasizes skills, is generally used when applying for a position in industry, non-profit, and public sector, and is typically no longer than 2 pages (with an additional page for publications and/or poster presentations if highly relevant to the job). A CV (or curriculum vitae) emphasizes academic accomplishments, is typically used when applying for positions in academia, fellowships and grants, and the length depends upon experience and includes a complete list of publications, posters, and presentations. Visit the Internship and Career Center for more help on getting your resume and/or CV reviewed by an expert.

Q: If a position asks me to submit a resume or a CV, which should I submit?

A: If a position asks you to submit either a resume or CV, submit the one you have... just be sure to tailor it for the position you are applying for. When in doubt the best thing to do is to ask for clarification from the faculty member. If you do not have a resume or CV, contact the Internship and Career Center and set up an appointment to get started on your resume or CV.

Q: Do I already need to have research experience?

A: There is no requirement to have prior research experience for most undergraduate research positions or programs at UC Davis. If there are any prerequisites for the position, they will generally be listed on the position announcement. When in doubt, the best thing to do is to ask for clarification from the faculty member. Many faculty have specialized research areas, methods and/or instrumentation that is different from what you learn in classes so you will also receive training in the research group or lab. You can also emphasize other experience you have from classes, projects, tutoring, jobs, etc. Showcase your curiosity and motivation!

Q: Is there a database or website that I can use to search for undergraduate research positions?

A: At this time UC Davis does not have one comprehensive website or database that lists open research positions and many faculty do not post positions as it depends on various factors. Here are the steps you can take to find a research position that is right for you: (1) visit urc.ucdavis.edu and check out our searchable PDF abstract books from the annual undergraduate research conference as this is a great way to see examples of undergraduate research taking place on campus and which faculty have supported undergraduate students in their labs and on their research projects, (2) search the department websites and lab websites of faculty/labs you are interested in joining, (3) think about the courses that have made a good impression on you and think about contacting those faculty members for possible research opportunities, (4) talk to your friends who you know are doing research and ask them how they got started and (5) search through Handshake as some research positions are listed in the portal.

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CONTACTING FACULTY

Q: How do I contact faculty members I am interested in working with?

A: The best way to get into contact with faculty members you are interested in working with is through email or office hours (in-person or virtual). When emailing faculty, make sure to email from your UC Davis email address. Talking to faculty at office hours is also a good time to introduce yourself and let them know directly about your interest in their research. This can work for traditional or virtual office hours. If faculty members are participating in networking events, faculty panels or other events (including virtual/Zoom events), be sure to take advantage of these opportunities to introduce yourself and ask a question as they can be great opportunities to network and connect with potential faculty mentors.

Q: When should I contact faculty members about working with them on their research?

A: There is no specific time-table of when you should contact a faculty member. A good practice is to begin contacting faculty <u>at least</u> a quarter before you want to begin your research. For example, if you are interested in beginning research with a faculty member in the spring quarter, you would want to consider contacting them in the winter quarter. However, it is possible to contact faculty at anytime, keeping in mind that during the beginning and end of quarters are typically the busiest for faculty. Summer is also a good time to connect with faculty as they may be planning for the academic year.

Q: How long should I wait for a faculty member to respond to my email?

A: A good practice is to provide the faculty member 2-3 business days to respond to your email. If you send a faculty member an email and you get an "out of office message," make note of their return and be sure to follow up with the faculty member once they are back. If you have not heard back after 2-3 days, be sure to follow up again as this is extremely important when applying to positions. It is possible that a faculty member has missed your email or got busy and did not reply. Following up with them shows initiative and commitment to finding a position. Make sure that your email is professional and shows your motivation and interest in the research they do.

Q: What do I include in my email to a faculty member?

A: The most important thing you need to communicate to faculty is your motivation for wanting to join their lab/team/research project. Begin by introducing yourself (your major and year in school), let the faculty member know why you are contacting them (if you are applying to a specific position in their lab, mention it by title), share with the faculty member why you are interested in their particular research/lab (try to be specific, such as "I am really interested in your Roman Empire project because…"), share what skills you will bring to the lab/research team (this can be technical skills such as coding and/or "soft" skills such as having strong time management skills), and finish off your email by providing your general availability in case the faculty member wants to set up a meeting with you. Before sending your email be sure to have someone review it to ensure there are no typos. A good tip is to read the email out loud to yourself. This helps to identify typos, run on sentences, and so much more.

Q: Should I include my resume/CV when I email faculty members?

A: Yes, we strongly recommend including your resume/CV when emailing faculty members. Inform the faculty that you are including it in your email, and attach your resume/CV as a PDF document to ensure the format of your document remains consistent.

Q: What classes should I include on my resume/CV?

A: Only the most relevant information should be included on your resume/CV. This is the same for classes. If you are applying for a STEM project/lab, you will only want to include STEM related classes.

Q: Should I include my transcript when emailing faculty members?

A: In general, you do not want to provide more than what the faculty member/lab is asking for. If you are asked to submit a transcript, an unofficial transcript will be sufficient unless otherwise noted.

Undergraduate Research FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: How important is GPA when applying for research positions?

A: There are many factors that go into selecting a research assistant to join a research team. Sometimes GPA is taken into account but this is not the case across the board and is dependent on the individual faculty member. Most faculty put a much greater emphasis on your level of interest in the topic, curiosity, and personal motivation.

Q: Do I have to interview for research positions?

A: Whether formal or informal, there is generally some sort of interview process when searching for an undergraduate research position. The interview is a time for the faculty member to get to know you and for you to get to know them. Be prepared to answer questions about why you are interested in that particular research lab/project, what skills you have, your motivations for engaging in undergraduate research and maybe even your goals are just a few examples of questions you can expect. You should also be prepared to ask the faculty member questions at the end of your interview. Sometimes interviews are conducted one on one with you and the faculty member or with a small panel of people from the research lab/project. This is great experience for you to practice your interview skills.

Q: How many faculty should I be contacting at once?

A: There is no limit to how many faculty you can contact; however, you want to be sure to personalize each email you send to faculty members that shows you know the type of research they are doing, and include specific details about your motivation and interest in working with that particular faculty member on that specific lab/research project. You should only be applying or inquiring about positions/opportunities you are genuinely interested in accepting if you are invited to join a lab/project. Do not send a generic email to multiple faculty at the same time.

Q: When should I start doing research?

A: This is dependent on the individual student. Some students feel like they are ready to start research right away and others feel like they want to wait a quarter before starting. The most important thing is to consider what type of research experience you are looking for and begin looking for opportunities that match your desires. Don't know what you are looking for? Check out our URC Discovery Cafe series or contact the URC at urc@ucdavis.edu and one of our team members can help you get started.

Q: What does undergraduate research look like?

A: Research takes many forms, and what it looks like varies depending upon your major and interests. Some examples of research tasks/activities include surveys and interviews, data analysis, laboratory benchwork, fieldwork, archive work, modeling/computations, design projects, creative arts compositions, creative writing/poetry, film production and social justice/policy are just some of the hands on experience students can expect when engaging in undergraduate research.

Q: Is it common for a student to participate in multiple research groups/labs?

A: Students may have multiple experiences throughout their undergraduate career. Although this is possible, it is recommended that students participate in only one research experience at a time, keeping in mind that a full research experience takes at least one year to complete. Participating in one research area for a longer period of time helps you discover more about the area and develop advanced skills. An extended research position is also more likely to lead to publication and other advanced opportunities.

Q: Can non-STEM majors get involved in science research?

A: There are many different opportunities to discover new knowledge and contribute to academic research and creative activities on campus in all disciplines. A student's major does not restrict the type of research in which a student can participate. Research can be done outside of one's major to complement interests. If a faculty member/lab has prerequisites, they will likely be listed on the position announcement or their website.

Undergraduate Research FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: What are some of the benefits of undergraduate research?

A: There are many benefits to undergraduate research! While most students are told that this is a great way to meet faculty and get a good recommendation letter, there are many benefits that go beyond a letter of recommendation. By participating in undergraduate research you can earn credit towards your degree, build technical skills, sharpen your critical thinking skills, learn how to apply knowledge and methods to real-world applications, attend and present research at national conferences and becoming more competitive when applying for awards, graduate school and fellowships are just a few benefits that you can gain.

Q: What types of careers/jobs involve research?

A: There are many careers/jobs that involve research at various levels. Some examples of careers/jobs that involve research are professor/academia, business development, journal editors, career development, public policy, marketing/sales, environmental science, curriculum development and entrepreneurship are just a few. The options are endless!

Q: Is being a full-time student a requirement for doing research?

A: To participate in research at UC Davis during the academic year students must be enrolled at UC Davis as a student. There is no university policy that states a student must be enrolled full-time to participate in undergraduate research. You can also enroll in research for units. Generally, students enroll in 1-3 units of variable unit courses such as 194 or 199; however, you can enroll in up to 6 units after consulting with your major advisor and faculty research mentor so that you can spend more time with research.

Q: Where can I access campus safety training?

A: You can access free campus lab safety training at https://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu/training/labatory-safety. Students can also access free training through the UC Davis Learning Management System (LMS). Prior to accessing safety training and other LMS trainings, an account must be requested and created by emailing sdps@ucdavis.edu. Once your account is set up, you will have access to a variety of safety trainings that will prepare you for undergraduate research at UC Davis, and also enhance your preparation for internships and careers after graduation. You will also have additional safety training that is specialized for some research labs.

Q: Are we expected to provide our own safety equipment or will it be provided for us?

A: For most labs, safety equipment will be provided. Your faculty mentor, often referred to as the principal investigator (PI), will orient you regarding the specific details.

Q: Are faculty willing to let students do their own research?

A: Yes, students are generally working on their own research project, but it may be closely related to a larger ongoing project. It depends on the faculty members capacity to support an independent research project. For students who do have the opportunity to start their own research project, they have typically been working for the same faculty member/lab for some time. Many students will start out working closely a graduate student or postdoc mentor so that they can learn skills while assisting with an ongoing project, then they will progress to a more advanced or independent project while still receiving mentoring.

Q: What if I join a lab and discover that the research area or lab culture is not a good fit for me?

A: The most important thing in this situation is open and professional communication with your faculty mentor so that you do not negatively impact any future undergraduate research opportunities for yourself. Want some tips on how to have this conversation? Contact us at urc@ucdavis.edu and a team member will help you talk through your options.

Undergraduate Research FAQ

RESEARCH DURING REMOTE LEARNING

Q: Is research taking place on campus?

A: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UC Davis campus has currently restricted in-person activities and encourages remote operations, meaning that only very few staff and students are currently on campus and this includes research labs. UC Davis research activities that take place on campus are limited right now for all researchers, but as those activities increase, so will the opportunities for undergraduates. The campus is following guidelines from the Office of Research for a "research ramp-up" protocol, which is a phased in approach to starting research back up on campus. However, the progress of this phased in protocol is dependent on county and state officials recommendations to opening back up.

Q: How do I know which faculty members are currently doing research?

A: Emailing faculty members directly and asking them if they are currently conducting research and if they are accepting new research assistants is the best way at this time. You can check faculty webpages to see if they have posted information about their current lab operations or recommendations about when to contact them, or if positions are available.

Q: What does research look like during remote learning?

A: It depends on the individual faculty member and/or the project. Some research can be done remotely while others cannot. Some common research methods and tasks that can be done remotely are literature reviews, transcribing interviews, reviewing transcripts, collecting data remotely (e.g. online surveys, zoom interviews), data analysis, archival research, coding and programming, and writing up research summaries, reports, manuscripts, etc.

Q: What are some ways I can be/stay involved in undergraduate research during the pandemic?

A: The remote learning format has presented some challenges to engaging in undergraduate research, however, there are some action steps you can take during this time. You can ask to attend a research group meeting of a faculty member you are interested in working with. You can conduct informational interviews with faculty, post-docs, lab managers, graduate students and undergraduate students. Attend virtual department seminars, workshops, lectures or office hours as these can be a great networking opportunity. Many conferences are now moving to a virtual platform so looking for and attending virtual conferences in areas you are interested in can lead to connections and opportunities related to undergraduate research. Check out the URC Virtual Travel Awards! Read various research journal articles on your topic of choice (easy to find with a Google search). You can also explore JoVE.com, the world-leading producer and provider of science videos with the mission to improve scientific research and education. Millions of scientists, educators and students at thousands of universities, colleges, hospitals and biopharmaceutical companies worldwide use JoVE for their research, teaching and learning. These are just some thing you can do during the current remote learning environment that would help you stay engaged or can prepare you to engage in research once we return to campus. Check out a list of online resources at the Undergraduate Research Center for more examples and information.

Q: Can I participate in research at UC Davis if I am not a UC Davis student?

A: The focus of the Undergraduate Research Center at UC Davis is to provide programs and services focused on currently enrolled and incoming UC Davis undergraduate students, including transfer students. If you are currently enrolled at another institution (and not an incoming transfer student), then you can still contact individual departments and faculty about research opportunities. UC Davis does host several NSF-funded Research Experience for Undergraduate (REU) programs that are coordinated directly by the departments and often recruit students from other institutions. Search for an NSF REU site here.