



EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

“Securing research opportunities is an individualized, self-directed process. It involves independent and persistent work as you search for possibilities, identify key contacts, communicate with investigators, and engage in a conversation about a possible match. This unstructured process takes creativity, self-reflection, and strong communication skills. These qualities will be essential to your work in research, so the search process is the beginning of a learning experience that involves curiosity, uncertainty, and commitment. Enjoy the adventure!”

Carole Bisogni (once a beginning undergraduate researcher)
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Professor

Tips for Starting Your Research Journey

- 1. Read about faculty research on their web pages and make a list** of faculty members whose work interests you. CHE faculty members conduct a wide range of research projects including basic laboratory research; clinical, social and behavioral research with human participants; field-based studies; evaluation of programs, designs, and materials for real-world settings; and analysis of large data sets. CHE students may also work with faculty members across campus. Think about the types of projects that match your interest and skills.
- 2. Discuss your interests and timeline with your faculty advisor or instructors of relevant courses.** Their research may interest you, or they may be able to suggest some contacts. Research experiences generally work best for all involved when students spend multiple semesters with the same research group. In this model, students progress from assisting others with projects to becoming more involved in the development and direction of a project, including training new undergraduate researchers. The right time to start research is highly individual and depends upon a person’s research interests, prior research experiences, course schedules, and the expectations of the research program you wish to join.
- 3. Meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) in your major** to learn about research opportunities in your department and elsewhere. Ask about the courses that would help you prepare for research experiences. Learn about the honors program opportunity and requirements in your major.
- 4. Contact faculty members well in advance.** Connect with faculty members the semester before you wish to start. Some professors may not have openings in their programs until later semesters. Email professors whose research interests you and ask to meet. Do not send mass e-mails. Send individual messages that explain how the faculty member’s work matches your interests. They need to know that you have done your homework about their program.
- 5. Know that faculty members vary in the ways that undergraduates are involved and the requirements for joining their research program.** Some faculty members enthusiastically welcome first-year students, whereas others may require several courses or other experiences.

6. **Prepare a research resume with your local contact information** to give to the professor for later reference. List relevant courses and grades, your career goals, and any other experiences you have had. Many non-research work experiences are relevant to research projects (e.g. working with people, language skills, working with equipment, data entry and management, working as a team member).
7. **Be familiar with the professor's research** prior to meeting with him/her. Read one or more of his/her papers so that you are familiar with the general types of research approaches and methods that are used.
8. **Be sure that you are seriously interested in getting involved in research.** Faculty want students with a strong work ethic, who are organized and willing to work both independently and as a team member. They will need you to stay involved throughout the whole semester, so time management and commitment are key criteria for being accepted into a research program.
9. **Know the different ways that students are compensated for their work.** Typically, students do research for credit, taking an independent study course in the department of their research advisor and using this experience to substitute for one regular course. Some students do research for pay and a few begin as volunteers. Be willing to do research for credit at first; not all professors will be willing or able to pay you. If you will be enrolling under independent research (4010 courses), you will need to complete the independent study form to add the class. Pick up this form at the Registrar's Office (146 MVR). Be aware of department and college policies related to independent research courses.
10. **Take the courses that will enhance your credentials to join a research program.** Many research programs require coursework before you can join the research program. Introductory courses in the subject area, statistics, and research methods may be particularly important.
11. **Use the CHE Career Exploration Center (162 MVR) for help** in preparing resumes, writing cover letters, preparing for interviews, and searching for off-campus experiences. Email: hecec@cornell.edu
12. **Know about the honors program option in your major.** All CHE majors offer honors programs for academically eligible students who want substantial involvement in research through courses and an independent project. Requirements vary by major, but all involve multiple semesters of research with a faculty mentor, a written thesis, and the presentation and approval of the thesis in the final semester. Check out department websites for more information or ask your faculty advisor or department DUS.

Key Resources

Human Ecology Career Exploration Center: <http://www.human.cornell.edu/career-development/index.cfm>

Cornell University Office of Undergraduate Research: <http://www.research.cornell.edu/undergrad/>

Cornell Undergraduate Research Board: <http://courses2.cit.cornell.edu/CURB/>

VIVO: Research & Expertise Across Cornell (Search engine for faculty working in different areas): <http://vivo.cornell.edu/>

Human Ecology Directors and Assistant Directors of Undergraduate Studies (DUS):

Biology and Society: Kay Obendorf (sko3@cornell.edu)

Design and Environmental Analysis: Kathleen Gibson (kjb4@cornell.edu)

Fiber Science & Apparel Design: Charlotte Jirousek (caj7@cornell.edu)

Human Biology, Health & Society: Charles McCormick (ccm3@cornell.edu), Cha-Sook You (cy12@cornell.edu)

Human Development: Qi Wang (qw23@cornell.edu), Christine Schelhas-Miller (cls10@cornell.edu)

Nutritional Sciences: Charles McCormick (ccm3@cornell.edu), Cha-Sook You (cy12@cornell.edu)

Policy Analysis and Management: Thomas Evans (tevans@cornell.edu)