

## A No-Nonsense Guide to Getting Involved in Research

### 1. Find your Passion!

What boggles your mind and stimulates you to question and explore? What could you spend hours pondering and prodding the complexities of? Finding out what you are passionate about and what area of research you would enjoy pursuing is the first step to a successful research experience. Here are some tips on how to find your true calling:

- **Attend Poster Sessions and Conferences:** This is a great way to sample a diverse set of research projects being conducted in your potential field of interest. Plus, you will have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with researchers and discuss common areas of interest to further explore.
- **Attend Department Seminars:** Most departments organize periodic seminars or a lecture series, open to all students, where you can hear and learn more about the research that faculty and graduate students are currently pursuing.
- **Communicate your Interests to Professors:** Did you find a certain lecture particularly interesting? Go ask your professor more about the topic and share your enthusiasm with him/her. Professors will often be able to guide you to the right people who can help further develop your passion and provide research opportunities in that area.
- **Network and Inquire:** Whether it is faculty advisors, fellow student researchers, graduate students, or members of the Center for Undergraduate Excellence, do not be afraid to seek out answers to your questions and get advice from those with experience.

### 2. Choose an Advisor

With so many scholars to choose from, it may seem like a daunting task to sift through them all and find the ones of greatest interest to you. While this is a necessary task for finding the right fit, here are some things to remember during this stage:

- **Visit the Department Homepage:** Every department website has a link to faculty research, where you can find brief summaries of the current research and questions being asked.
- **Email Faculty Members of Interest:** Make a list of at least 3 professors you would be interested in working with and send them an email introducing yourself and requesting to setup a time to meet with them in person. Often, professors are very busy and may not respond to your email, but don't let that deter you. Be polite and persistent, follow up on your emails, and even try calling the professor or showing up at his/her office. Additionally, remember that you may not have to have prior research experience in order to get involved – everyone starts somewhere.
- **Shadow Researchers:** If possible, shadow another student researcher. Ask to watch experiments in progress (if applicable) and attend group meetings so that you can get a better feel for the research environment. For those in the sciences, shadowing in a lab may be anywhere from a few hours to multiple lab visits, depending on your level of

interest. Not all experiences of this nature are equally rewarding, so sample a few labs until you find what works.

### 3. Do your Homework

Now it's time to meet with the faculty advisor and perhaps even begin discussing a potential project. How do you prepare for this meeting? Here are some tips that are sure to help:

- **Read the Professor's Published Papers:** Reading through at least a few of the professor's recent publications will help familiarize you with some of the technical vocabulary and concepts you may hear about during the meeting.
- **Prepare Questions:** Having a set of questions in mind will help keep the conversation running smoothly. You may inquire about the nature of equipment to be used, prior knowledge and skills needed, recommended courses, flexibility in work hours, or expected time commitment.
- **Aim high:** Express your eagerness to learn. Inquire about your exact role and level of involvement. Could you get co-authorship on a publication resulting from your contribution? Either way, Professors will be delighted by your motivations and professionalism. Lastly, it is never too late to get involved in undergraduate research, but the rewards are often larger for those who begin early!