**Finding a Research Mentor**

The best way to get to find a research mentor is by attending office hours on a regular basis. Your faculty instructors may be your future research mentor, or they can help you find a research mentor. This all depends on your ability to form a relationship! Attend office hours and strike up a conversation.

Below are some additional suggestions for you.

**Begin by identifying your research interests and potential research mentors:**

1. Determine what interests you the most in your discipline. Find a research area that you want to dedicate time and energy to learning more about. For example, molecular biology, plant conservation, or perhaps something that is interdisciplinary, like disease ecology.
2. Use the [Biology Department Faculty](http://bio.unc.edu/people/)directory to identify Biology faculty working in your area of interest. Talk to friends who are already doing research to get their advice about potential mentors. As a Biology major, you can also perform research (and get credit) by doing biological research in non-Biology departments on campus. Please think broadly and search for labs in other departments using this link: [Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program](http://bbsp.unc.edu/research/). If you want to conduct research, but do not necessarily want academic credit (units) for your work, do not limit yourself to researchers at UNC! The Research Triangle has many universities and researchers who may also be a good fit for your interests. To learn more about research and course credit, review the following link: <http://bio.unc.edu/undergraduate/research/research-courses/>
3. Every faculty member’s research usually centers on a few core research questions – do these questions resonate with your personal interests? Use Google Scholar or the UNC library databases to look up the faculty member’s recent publications and read some of them. Generate a ranked list of potential mentors based on your findings. Identify at least one thing about each person’s research that is interesting to you and that you would like to know more about. Write down your own research questions; do not be embarrassed if your questions seem basic or vague – everyone starts this way!

**Contact potential research mentors**

Email is a good way to make initial contact with potential mentors. By sending an email you give a mentor a chance to review your materials before responding. It is essentially the first step in an interview, so be sure the email reflects your best effort. Make absolutely sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors, use formal language, and keep it brief. If you are comfortable, it is also fine to phone or stop by a potential mentor’s office hours to ask about a research experience.

**When you are writing your email(s), consider the following:**

* Research mentors are busy people, so keep your email short and to the point (approximately 1 paragraph).
* Use the mentor’s official title (eg. Professor or Dr.)
* Introduce yourself: your name, year, and the purpose of the email.
* Specifically refer to the areas of the mentor’s research that you find interesting, and tell them briefly why you are interested. Be sure to use your own words and do not copy text from the research description on his/her website. Your mentor is expecting you to be new to science, but will want to see that you can articulate clearly the specific areas of science that you are interested in pursuing.
* Be clear that you are looking for a research experience. Clearly define your main goal (e.g. shadowing someone in the lab to get exposed to research vs. doing an honors thesis research project).
* Highlight what you have to offer: what distinguishes you from other students (e.g. prior experience, specific lab skills already used in the researcher’s lab, the number of hours per week you can devote, specific courses you have completed that are relevant to the research at hand).
* Show enthusiasm for learning how to do research. There is no expectation you will do research perfectly, but you should be eager to learn!
* Finally, request that if the mentor is not able to take an undergraduate researcher, that she/he recommend a colleague who might be.

**You may wish to attach/include the following to your email:**

* An up-to-date copy of your resume that highlights the skills you have to contribute to the lab;
* Provide a brief estimate of the number of hours/credits you can be available to do research, and when you would like to begin, but leave room for negotiation;
* Give a *brief* overview of your academic credentials (e.g. your GPA and relevant course work), or attach a PDF of your unofficial transcript;
* Provide your complete contact information (email, phone, mail).
* **Do not** write one email and send it to all research mentors regardless of how they differ in their research interests. Form emails are easy to spot and easy to delete. Make sure each email is short, personal, and captivating.
* **Do not** expect an answer immediately. Give your potential research mentor 3-5 days to respond.
* **Do** follow-up if your email goes un-answered. Researchers are busy people who get numerous inquiries about their research daily. Be polite, but persistent and re-send your email if you have not heard back in 7 days. Remember that many researchers travel during the summer months, so you should time your email inquiries carefully.

**\*\*If you want more information about how to structure your email, read “Tips for Writing a Contact Email”**

**If you are invited to meet with a future research mentor:**

* Be on time;
* Be yourself, but it will be helpful if you come across as enthusiastic and motivated;
* Be ready to discuss why you want to do research in general (what are you academic and career goals?), and why do you want to do research with this mentor specifically (what is it about his/her research that is interesting to you? Is there a particular project on which you would like to work?);
* Read about the researcher’s work before you meet with them. There is usually a research overview on the researcher’s website with references and links to published work. Or use Google Scholar or Web of Science (through the UNC library) to download recent publications. Read one or two of the researcher’s papers and prepare questions. Generally, mentors will not expect you to fully understand the research, but making the effort to learn about it on your own demonstrates that you are a critical thinker and are self-motivated.
* Ask about the expectations of undergraduate researchers in the lab (e.g. time commitment, credits offered, type of work).
* Ask about who would be your direct mentor in the group. Often researchers work with postdoctoral scholars or graduate students and you may only have limited contact with the researcher themselves.
* Bring a copy of your unofficial transcripts and resume if you have not already submitted one.

**Important:** Research groups have limited space, so it may be difficult to find a research mentor that is looking for, or willing to take, another student. **Do not take it personally if they decline your request**. You may go through your top ten (or more) potential mentors before you find a match. Stick with it! You will find someone.

**Research Resources: UNC and Beyond!**

[Biology Department Faculty](http://bio.unc.edu/people/)

[Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program](http://bbsp.unc.edu/research/)

[Office of Undergraduate Research](http://our.unc.edu/): provides opportunities for undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill to engage in innovative research, mentored scholarship, creative expression, and entrepreneurship.

[Career Services](https://careers.unc.edu/): helps students find internships and answer career related questions.

[SMART- Summer research in the STEM](http://our.unc.edu/students/funding-opportunities/smart/) - 9-weeks paid research program for rising sophomores in STEM disciplines, with the goal to increase the number of underrepresented minority students who pursue research careers

[SMART- Transfer- Summer research in the STEM](http://our.unc.edu/students/funding-opportunities/smart-transfer/) - 9-weeks paid research program for rising senior transfer students in STEM disciplines

[Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE-ERU):](https://www.med.unc.edu/oge/stad/sure) The Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE-REU) Program in Molecular Biosciences at UNC-Chapel Hill provides talented undergraduate students the opportunity to carry out independent research projects under the guidance of faculty mentors in the following areas: biochemistry, molecular biology, cell biology, cellular biophysics, structural biology, computational biology, genetics, genomics, and proteomics.

[Carolina Summer Fellowship Program – Pharmacology](https://www.med.unc.edu/pharm/summer-undergraduate-research): The Department of Pharmacology annually sponsors a competitive summer undergraduate research fellowship program for rising seniors in undergraduate science programs. (Other students will be considered, although with lower priority). This program is designed to give students planning a career in the biomedical sciences an opportunity to conduct research under the direction of a research pharmacologist.

[Summer of Learning and Research (SOLAR):](https://www.med.unc.edu/oge/stad/solar)  A summer undergraduate research program at UNC in the biomedical sciences for rising college juniors and seniors from underrepresented groups.

[UNC School of Medicine](https://www.med.unc.edu/oor/omsr/resources-for-students/research-opportunities-1): Learn more about research opportunities at the School of Medicine

[UNC School of Nursing](http://nursing.unc.edu/research/): Learn more about research opportunities at the School of Nursing

[UNC School of Dentistry](https://www.dentistry.unc.edu/research/opportunities/): Find faculty in the School of Dentistry who are looking for undergraduate researchers.

[National Science Foundation – Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU](http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.jsp)): Search this database for summer research opportunities in the US and internationally. These positions are competitive (you have to submit an application), but most come with a stipend (i.e. they take care of costs and provide a small salary). All levels of research experience are welcome to apply.

[Environmental Protection Agency](http://orise.orau.gov/epa/applicants): the ORISE Internship/Research Participation Program at the US EPA may be a good fit for your interests. The EPA has a local office, but you may find other venues to work at during the summer