

Getting Involved in Research

Deciding to Perform Research

Whether you plan on continuing your education in graduate or professional school, or plan to enter the job market, performing independent research can help get you there. Getting involved in research gives you the opportunity to learn valuable laboratory skills, be responsible for your own project, and also what it means to be part of a larger picture. Just like working for a large company, when performing research your project might be small compared to the impact it has on the entire laboratory. Not only is performing research valuable to you as a way to prepare for your future career, but it is also valuable to the schools and employers to which you apply. The fact that you have performed independent research indicates that you are organized and focused. More importantly, you have developed skills in problem identification and the initiative to get involved in finding a solution.

Finding a Research Position

Like trying to find the right job, it is important to find a research position that fits your interests. This means finding a project that would be interesting to work on, finding a laboratory that fits your personality, and finding a professor who fits your needs. Are you someone who prefers more guidance and supervision or would you rather have a superior who allows you to do your work independently with as little guidance as needed? Can you travel off campus to perform research in the surrounding area? These are some of the questions you need to consider when trying to find an opportunity that suits your needs and interests.

Where to look:

- **Career Center Website**
Review the list of research resources on the Career Center website. The website provides links to multiple research opportunities and organizations, www.aug.edu/career_center.
- **Experience Account, via ASU Career Center**
Your Experience Account can help you find research opportunities in several ways. Many times research opportunities can be listed as internship or co-op opportunities. Review the internship/co-op postings in your Experience account. Remember to check your account frequently as the Career Center receives postings on a daily basis. (If you do not have an Experience Account, simply visit the Career Center and register for one.)
- **Department and Faculty Websites**
If you have filtered through the listed opportunities and not found one that fits your needs, it's time to go straight to the source. Most professors are not actively searching for another research assistant, but they are usually open to the possibility of expanding their lab.
 - Start by talking to upper-classmen or other students you know who are conducting research. Most of the time, they will be able to give you names of professors who have previously had undergraduates in their lab.

- Another strategy is to find out the name of the professor in charge of the undergraduate program in your department and contact him/her; he/she will know the professors who have undergraduate lab members.
- Finally, start looking through each faculty member's website in your department. On each department homepage, there is a link to a website for each faculty member; these websites typically have contact information, a description of research projects, and links to recent publications. If you find a project that interests you, contact the professor and make an appointment to discuss the research. Start by discussing the research and where the project is headed in the future. Be sure to do a little homework and have some questions ready in your mind. If you are still interested in the project after your meeting and think the professor is a good fit for your needs, ask if there are any open spaces in the lab. Remember to bring a resume and any supplemental materials just in case the professor would like to know more about your qualifications. If the professor does not have any openings, ask him/her if he/she can recommend any colleagues and continue on with your search.

How the Career Center Can Help

The Career Center offers a vast range of workshops, as well as staff and resources that can get you started on the right path to getting the research position of your choice.

- **Resumes**

It is a good idea to have a resume with you in case the professor or PI asks about your qualifications. Whether you're writing a resume for the first time, or you just want to make it better, the Career Center can help. We offer resume workshops throughout the semester, resume labs that allow you to have your resume reviewed by visiting companies and organizations, a library with several resume resources, and peer assistants and career counselors who are also available to review your resume.

- **Interviews**

Some of the positions you find may require a formal interview while others are a more casual meeting with a professor on campus. In either case the Career Center has a wide range of resources to help you make the best impression. The Career Center Library has books on interviewing tips and common questions. Additionally, we offer workshops and mock interviews throughout the semester.

- **Decisions**

You may discover more than one opportunity you are interested in, or might get accepted into two or more opportunities. If you're not sure which one is best for you, make an appointment with one of the career counselors, and she can help you focus on what's important to help you make the right decision.

How to Make the Most of Your Research Experience

Your success in finding a research position that fits your needs is just the beginning. Once you've started your research, it is extremely important that you take advantage of everything this opportunity has to offer you. The first step to a valuable research experience is spending enough time in the lab to make sure that your project is completed on time. Professors know how busy most students are, but the more time you spend in the lab, the more the professor will notice your dedication to your project. If you are successful with your project, the professor may consider involving you in larger projects which could lead to publication.

Not only is dedication a necessary part of success, but it will also give you the opportunity to get more acquainted with the professor. While you are in the lab, make an effort to keep the professor updated on your progress, continue to ask questions as you learn more about the overall goals of the lab, and spend some time trying to get to know the professor on a personal level. Make a point to talk to other undergraduate and graduate students in the lab that might be able to help you with your project or help you develop skills. Finally, networking is key! Make every effort to meet as many people in the department as you can.

RESEARCH POSITIONS CHECKLIST

Decide whether or not to conduct research

- Talk to upperclassmen and professors to find out more about what conducting research entails.
- Review your schedule to determine if you have free time to conduct research; take into consideration the time you spend with your schoolwork and extracurricular activities.
- Begin to think about the logistics of getting involved in research such as whether or not you will be able to leave campus, will it be for pay or for credit, etc.

Determine your interests

- Think about what topics in your department interest you; consider classes you have taken that you found intriguing and the possible research topics that supplement those classes.

Search for positions

- Use the search engines and databases listed to get a sense of the kinds of positions that are available.
- Use the departmental websites to develop a general list of faculty whose research projects seem interesting and have potential.
- Before applying to any programs or contacting any professors, learn more about their projects by reading the summaries of their research and their recent publications.

Apply for positions

- Prepare your resume: The Career Center has library books, handouts with information about resumes, workshops, career labs as well as career counselors and peer assistants who can review your resume.
- Prepare for your interview: Whether it is a formal interview or a casual meeting with a professor you always want to be prepared. The Career Center has numerous resources as well as workshops and mock interviews that can help you hone your skills. Think over possible questions that might come up during your meeting and be sure to bring any supporting documents that might be helpful (i.e. transcripts, written reports, etc.)

Decide on a position

- When offered a position, you may accept right away or ask for time to consider the offer. If you are having trouble deciding, make an appointment with a career counselor who can help you decide which opportunity is the most appropriate to your interests, skills, and goals.