

10 Tips to Find a Position in a Research Lab

One of the most common questions asked of advisors is, "How do I find a lab where I can do research as an undergraduate?"

Here are some guidelines for success:

- 1.** We have a specific research program in Rausser College of Natural Resources called **Sponsored Projects for Undergraduate Research (SPUR)**. This is a Rausser College research program just for Rausser College students in fall, spring, & summer. Submit your own research or apply to work with faculty. Be sure to apply before the deadlines!
(<https://nature.berkeley.edu/undergraduate-research/spur/>)
- 2.** Explore the **Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP)**. Connect with faculty from all over campus through URAP's many undergraduate research programs. Pay attention to their firm deadlines as well!
(<http://research.berkeley.edu/urap>)
- 3.** Peruse **faculty research interests posted online** in Rausser College and related departments. Look for faculty doing what you would like to do.
(<http://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/faculty-expertise>).
- 4. Email faculty on your own.** A simple email which can lead to research. Faculty appreciate when students take the initiative. Compose a separate email to each potential sponsor, indicating briefly your background, interests, and what in that person's laboratory is particularly interesting. Generic letters are almost always ignored.
- 5. Start early.** It takes time to arrange a research project, and many faculty require completion of certain courses before engaging in research involving complex procedures and expensive and often irreplaceable equipment.

6. Even the best emails frequently receive no reply. Don't give up yet.

- Visit the faculty lab and find a grad student or postdoc (but not a technician, bottle washer, or administrative assistant) and ask to talk with them for a few minutes.
- Find out what they do, and what others in the lab are doing. You may have to talk to someone else if the first person is not very communicative or well informed.
- Tell them your interest in joining the research team for a project. See if you can find an area of common interest in which you could do something practical.
- If you succeed with this interview, ask the student/postdoc to talk to the professor about you doing a project.
- Follow up with another email a week later and maybe even visit the lab again, this time with a prospective proposal (1 page or less) attached to an Independent Study and Research Form, if you are interested in earning units.
- In the end, you do need a faculty signature to earn independent study units, so you need to meet with the boss at least once.

7. Don't restrict yourself to faculty in Rausser College. You may do research in any department on campus. Use the faculty directory!

8. You may even do research off campus. LBNL and UCSF are golden opportunities, and their undergraduate student to faculty (or scientist) ratio is ZERO! Many of them are hungry for the opportunity to interact with and mentor undergraduates, and UCSF faculty are still UC professors with standards identical to ours. Biotech and pharmaceutical companies are also possibilities, and even some local hospitals (like Children's Hospital in Oakland) offer research opportunities.

9. Experience can be gained through all flavors; don't limit yourself to laboratory research! Look into independent study, volunteering, work study, or internships.

10. Above all, be flexible, be creative, and be persistent. If you add up all the possibilities, your odds securing a position are better here than at most private universities with far lower student to faculty ratios. Around 60% of Rausser College students do research by the time they graduate!