

## **Finding an Undergraduate Research Position**

### **Guidelines by Kendra Pyle, updated October 2017**

Besides the emails that I send out about research positions and paid lab technician positions, you can also contact faculty about volunteer research opportunities. Faculty typically want students to commit to a minimum of 10 hours a week, and prefer students who will make a long-term commitment to the lab. Volunteer positions sometimes lead to paid positions.

Review the faculty research pages at <http://www.bmb.natsci.msu.edu> (Research, Research Faculty) or <https://plantbiology.natsci.msu.edu/> (Faculty & Research). Click on the professor's name for their Contact page. Click on the "Research" tab. Some professors have a separate lab webpage listed. Look for a "Research" tab. Read about the professor's research. If you are looking for a volunteer position, find several faculty members whose research interests you. You can also check research pages for faculty in other departments, such as Chemistry; Microbiology; Horticulture; Plant, Soil, and Microbial Sciences; Pharmacology & Toxicology; Physiology; Neuroscience; Integrative Biology, and Biosystems Engineering.

After reviewing the faculty research pages, send out inquiry emails to the faculty members of interest:

- 1) You need to be professional! Make sure that you proofread your email for spelling and grammatical errors.
- 2) Include a greeting: Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,
- 3) Introduce yourself and let them know you are looking for undergraduate research opportunities or applying for a position in the lab.
- 4) It's important to tailor each email to the specific lab. Talk about why you are interested in the professor's research. In addition to reviewing the faculty member's research pages, read one or more of their journal articles (check Publications tab on the Contact page). Look for articles where the professor is listed as the first or last author. The last author in science articles is usually the Principal Investigator (PI) – the head of the research lab.
- 5) Talk about what you can contribute to the lab. What are your strengths?
- 6) Thank the professor for their consideration.
- 7) Use a signature at the bottom of your email, including your name, major, email, and phone.
- 8) Attach a resume or CV\*if it is requested. Be sure to visit Career Services to get your resume polished before you send it. Sign up for an appointment: <http://careernetwork.msu.edu/> (Services & Locations, Career Advising)

\*CV stands for curriculum vitae. They are used in academics and are longer than a resume. They include additional headings such as research interests, publications, presentations, and courses taught. A resume will be fine for applying for lab positions.

You can also look for research positions on the Venture Undergraduate Research database: <https://venture.msu.edu> (Click on Categories – relevant positions are usually listed under Biological Science and Agriculture). Some paid research positions are also listed on Handshake. Go to <http://careernetwork.msu.edu/> and click on "Student Login" on the upper right corner of the page under Handshake. For on-campus research, try keyword search "research" and click "On Campus Student Employment" under Job Type.

It's takes persistence to find a position! Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back. Many students are looking for research positions, and faculty members don't always have time to respond to all inquiries.