Getting Started in Undergraduate Research

Why undergraduate research?
By participating in undergraduate research, you’ll gain:
- Insight into the process of research and knowledge creation in your chosen field of study
- Deeper mastery of essential technical and non-technical skills
- A sense of accomplishment; persistence and a tolerance for obstacles; self-confidence
- Contacts and references that you’ll need for admission to the graduate/professional program of your choice, or your first job

Getting a job, research experience, or a reference letter is about building RELATIONSHIPS.

- Ask your instructors and TAs about their research, and share your interests with them.
  - Not only will you make a connection with a scholar, but that person may also be able to connect you with a faculty member who has expertise in your area.
  - Even if the professor you speak to is not currently seeking an undergraduate researcher, s/he may know of colleagues who are seeking research assistants or who have part-time jobs open.
  - Make sure you have an answer when they ask, “Why do you want to do undergraduate research?”
- Talk to undergraduates already working with a faculty member about their experiences. Attend Frontiers in Undergraduate Research (in October & April) to learn what other students have done.
- Prepare a résumé and bring it to an appointment with a potential research mentor.
  - This will let them see your qualifications and help you get feedback on your résumé.
  - Your résumé is something you can leave behind to remind the research mentor of your interest after you are gone.
  - If you are a Work-Study Student, make sure to mention that!
- Always make a professional first impression, whether online or in person.
- Go to an appointment with questions prepared. Show that you have done the legwork to find out about this research and that you are serious about getting involved.
Additional tips for finding a research mentor:

- Spend some time browsing the website in your department or in a field that interests you. This is a good way to find out what research projects are typical in your area of study.
- Enroll in a course with a research focus. Departmental advisors can be helpful in suggesting such courses. Some departments also have existing undergraduate research programs or training available.
- Always follow directions carefully in applications. Proofread. Don’t miss out because of a stooped missteak. Spell-check is not always your friend.

Opportunities to do research can be found right here at UConn, or as far away as Antarctica. These positions can have a variety of different names: “Fellowships,” “Internships,” “Co-ops,” “REUs,” or titles like "Associate." Don’t worry about what it’s called – just get the experience!

Helpful Links:

- UConn Student Jobs (JobX; use “research” as a search term) https://uconn.studentemployment.ngwebsolutions.com/Cmx_Content.aspx?cpld=4
- OUR list of on- and off-campus research opportunities http://ugradresearch.uconn.edu/find-research-opportunities/
- Get your résumé critiqued! http://www.career.uconn.edu/resume_critiques.html
- Go to a Career Fair and make personal connections: http://www.career.uconn.edu/career_fairs.html
- Frontiers in Undergraduate Research Symposium: http://ugradresearch.uconn.edu/present-your-research/frontiers-in-undergraduate-research/

“There are very unique aspects to research that you can't learn anywhere else. The fact that success and failure is relative. That a positive result may take an exceptionally long time to develop and that you may have to go through a number of pitfalls, changes in research protocols, in approach, in ideas, to get to that point. Showing that type of insightfulness, that type of intelligence, that type of drive and commitment speaks volumes for a person.”

– Steven Gay, Dean of Admissions, UM Medical School