LAHSC RESEARCH BIBLE

The Basics of Undergraduate Research:

Undergraduate research: the ever-daunting aspect of undergraduate education. Many wonder where to begin, what benefits participation could hold, and the overall point to engaging in research to begin with. The LAHSC Research Bible aims to answer all your pressing research questions. By centering student perspectives and answering common questions, we hope you leave this document with less fear about research and more knowledge about the process! From this, you'll learn some departmental tips, how to approach a professor, the differences between RA-style and independent research, and answers to commonly asked questions as well as read about some student testimonials from their research.

Undergraduate research refers to investigation conducted by undergraduate students with aims to make a scholarly contribution to knowledge. Research offers the opportunity for students to engage more closely with their field of study than in a typical classroom setting, asking students to utilize and refine their qualitative and quantitative research skills while handling real-life data. Research may be done independently, typically funded via scholarships, or alongside a faculty member, either in a one-on-one mentorship or lab setting. Generally, faculty members are very open to undergraduate research assistants, always seeking help in their respective fields. Research at the undergraduate level, though an undoubtedly important feature of a well-rounded resumé, allows students the unparalleled opportunity to participate in active pursuits of intellectual development, critically engage with their chosen field of study, and establish meaningful relationships with faculty members. Whether as an RA for a massive lab, sorting through data entries on a day-to-day basis, or as a primary writer/researcher for a scholarly publication, undergraduate research is an important part of the student academic experience. We aim to make this piece of undergraduate education more accessible through the LAHSC Research Bible.

Liberal Arts & Departmental Tips:

As liberal arts students, there is such a variety of research to get involved in that it may feel overwhelming to navigate such a world of such distinct opportunities. All COLA departments here at UT conduct research, and some even include it in their curriculum plan. So, what are some of the departments students are interested in for research and what are some tips for approaching this process?

General Liberal Arts

There are many general ways to get into undergraduate research in COLA. The Eureka research website is pretty simple to navigate, and it is a great place to start looking at different projects on campus. You can search for projects or filter them by tags, regions, or departments. Each project will give you a brief overview of what they are exploring, and you will also see the project lead and their contact information. The website recommends attending an info session or advising for guidance before reaching out to the project leader.

A structured research program offered by COLA is the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP), where students receive training and exposure to research. The program is open to all COLA majors in any year of their undergraduate study, and it is divided into two main modes. The first mode, the Cohort URAP, is designed around undergraduate students joining an organized, faculty-led research unit on a topic they are interested in. The second mode, the Individual URAP, assigns students to an apprentice-faculty pair, where they are mentored through the research experience.

A summer option for first-year students is the Home to Texas program. Students from Texas hometowns go back home for the summer to participate in a nine-week summer internship, take professional skills and summer research courses, and contribute to community research projects. Eligible students apply for the program and, if chosen, are matched with an internship opportunity.

Another way to get started with research is to go often to office hours for classes that you enjoy. Ask questions about topics that you are interested in, and don't be afraid to let your professor know that you are interested in doing research! Cold emailing is also a good way to show your interest to your professor. There are so many different ways and tips to getting involved in specific research projects, and below are some quick tips for approaching research in just a few of the different departments here in COLA.

Government

UT offers a government research internship course (GOV 362L) and government stats classes that are very helpful for gaining insight into basic research methods. Cold emailing professors and going to office hours is a good strategy for research projects in the government department. Self-funded research is also a great approach with a ton of scholarship opportunities!

Economics

Knowing how to code is a valuable asset for students seeking to get involved in undergraduate research for economics. The economic department offers a Undergraduate Research in Economics fellowship as well as a Listserv to alert students of current research opportunities.

Psychology

There are a large number of psychology research labs and opportunities on campus for a variety of different interests! It is a good idea to contact several labs that you are interested in since different labs will have openings at different times. Don't get discouraged if you don't hear back from a specific lab!

The psychology department also offers various structured research experiences. The psychology Undergraduate Research course (PSY 357) is a very flexible course that develops the research skills of eligible students through different research contexts. A mentorship option for students is the Psychology Undergraduate Mentorship Program (PUMP), which assigns undergraduate-graduate pairs to conduct a research project. The Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) is a program open to undergraduate students at any college or university in Texas, and it takes place on UT's campus. All of these opportunities are great for students looking to get involved in undergraduate research!

Sources

Frequently Asked Qs | College of Liberal Arts | The University of Texas at Austin
Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program | College of Liberal Arts | The University of Texas at Austin
Research Internship Course: GOV 362L | Government | Liberal Arts | UT - Austin
Undergraduate Research in Economics Fellowship | Economics | Liberal Arts | UT - Austin
CoLA Undergrad Research Programs | College of Liberal Arts | The University of Texas at Austin
Research Opportunities | Psychology | Liberal Arts | UT - Austin

How to Approach a Professor:

Getting started

If you already have a research topic in mind, look for professors whose areas of study match up with yours. If you want to work with a specific professor or haven't decided on your research topic, try to at least narrow down what field of study you want to focus on before reaching out. **Research your researcher!** Look up journal articles they have written, professional bios, and curriculum vitae to find out what they are interested in, currently researching, or have researched in the past. Take notes and **prepare questions**!

Reaching Out

Write an email to the professor you want to work with. Emphasize shared interests and the attributes that will make you a successful undergraduate research assistant or independent researcher. It's common for professors to hear from undergrads that they have never met, so you don't need to have had a class with them or already know them. However, if you found a professor because of a recommendation by another professor or student, **establish that link in your email**. Clarity is important: make sure you tell the professor **exactly what you are looking for** from the project (ie, internship position, paid research assistant, independent research credit, etc.) and remember to **proofread**.

Steps for writing an email

Start with a short introduction (who you are, your major, your field of interest), then explain why this specific professor's work interests you and connect it to **your own research goals and interests**. Finally, ask for a time to meet and discuss potential research opportunities (read their work ahead of time! Prepare questions!). Remember to use a **formal tone** in this email.
Email Templates and Examples: Sample Faculty Mentor Emails | TEXAS Undergraduate Studies

First Meeting

Take some deep breaths! Professors want to see that you are **confident and excited** about the opportunity to work with them. You don't need to dress super fancy, but you should **look presentable** (think business casual). **Start by introducing yourself** and remember to address the faculty member as Professor [blank] or Dr. [blank]. **Ask questions** about the professor's work, what will be expected of you, and the next steps to take.

Other Tips

You might have to start in lower level positions, but keep in mind that as you gain skills and experience, you will eventually be able to take on higher-level responsibilities. **Consider how much time you have** to commit to a research project and communicate that with your supervisor

(don't overestimate your free time). **Show up consistently and on time**—be reliable! And finally, **don't get discouraged by rejection**: faculty members will often recommend you to other professors.

Sources and more information

U. North Carolina: Tips for Writing an Email to Faculty about Research
Ask a Professor: How to Ask Your Professor for Research | BestColleges
Ohio State: The Do's and Don'ts of Contacting Professors about Research | SENR
UT Undergrad Research: Getting Started In Research | TEXAS Undergraduate Studies

Independent vs. RA-Style Research: Why Independent Research Isn't So Scary!

How do I start a research project at UT?

First, you want to attend an information session held by TEXAS Undergraduate Studies that are regularly occurring so just find one that fits into your schedule. The information session will explain the main differences and may even help you create connections with professors.

If you can't attend a research session, consider asking yourself what are your interests for researching? Make a list!

If there is a professor that is researching what you are interested in or something similar, then it is advisable to join the professor's research or conduct research for them, as a Research Assistant (RA). Some of the benefits of researching for a professor is that it can be more structured with direct advising, and it may be a paid position! The best way to join a professor's research is to simply ask, and there are tips and tricks on how to approach the conversation in the above section.

If what you want to research is very niche, then it is advisable to conduct independent research. One benefit of individual research is that the individual can set their own time frame and due dates. It is an opportunity to delve into an independent project that reflects your unique interest and shows your commitment to learning. In addition, there are several journals around UT that publish independent research, several of which have competitions for prize money!

Student Testimonies:

Testimony #1: Junior, Government & Linguistics Major

What project did you work on?
"Global Disinformation Lab & Urban Ethnography Lab in the UT Sociology Department".
How did you find this research opportunity?
"Through an email from the linguistics department and because my professor runs the 2nd (Urban Ethnography) lab."
What did your day-to-day work look like on the project?
"Going through databases, kinda boring & the other one was like observation notes on weekends and weekly team meetings to go over observations."
What was your biggest takeaway from this project?
"I quit the first lab because I didn't like it - taught me how to quit and say no. I loved the 2nd lab, but the professor left for a sabbatical and stopped after, but I learned how to take observation notes and start writing a paper."

Testimony #2: Sophomore, Sociology Major

What project did you work on?
"1) Scooping review with Dr. Cheadle, 2) Home to Texas with Becky Petit, 3) Project Seed with Dr. Kim."
How did you find this research opportunity?
"1) Cold email, 2) summer program, 3) class presentation."
What did your day-to-day work look like on the project?
"Day-to-day work included weekly meetings, coding, and research on UT databases."
What was your biggest takeaway from this project?
"Research is hard and tedious but interesting."

FAQs:

1. What is research?
    a. Research is a creative or intellectual investigation or activity that makes a unique contribution to the knowledge of a discipline.
2. How will I benefit from participating in undergraduate research?
    a. There are so many benefits to participating in undergraduate research! You will grow your skills and knowledge while exploring your interest in a subject. Research also looks great on a resume or CV!

3. How much of a time commitment is participating in research?
    a. It really just depends on the project and discipline.
4. Who can do undergraduate research?
    a. Any student! Some projects may have requirements, such as classes or GPA, but there are plenty of opportunities for anyone seeking to get involved in research.
5. Where do people find opportunities for undergraduate research?
    a. It's common to find a research opportunity through a professor or graduate student. You can find a faculty member's profile on their departmental web page and read more about their interests and current projects to see if you would be interested in reaching out to them. Other sources for finding research include Eureka, as well as organized research units and programs on campus for getting involved in research.
6. When should I start doing research?
    a. It really depends on you and when you feel ready to start! What is most important is not necessarily when you begin, but rather finding the best opportunity to match what you are looking for.
7. Can I do my own research?
    a. Yes, many students choose to conduct their own research projects. For many research opportunities, students will work on their own smaller project that is part of a larger one. With an independent research project, students typically begin with their own work and ideally meet with a faculty supervisor. The most well-known example of independent research is an honors thesis. There are also various scholarship opportunities available for funding independent research.

Sources

Getting Started In Research | TEXAS Undergraduate Studies
Research Opportunities | College of Liberal Arts | The University of Texas at Austin
Frequently Asked Questions | Undergraduate Research | Vanderbilt University
General Questions | Undergraduate Research Center