

Research Rotation Resource Page (R3P)

Created by the DBBS Student Advisory Committee and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Student and Alumni Affairs Team



What is the R3P?

The Research Rotation Resource Page, or R3P, is an online database containing the contact information of students who have either rotated in or joined laboratories around Washington University's campuses, both Danforth and Medical. R3P was established to give incoming students an honest and objective source of student experiences in research labs around campus by connecting incoming grad students with those who have volunteered to share their experiences.

How do I use the R3P?

There is no one way to properly use the R3P. However, a general guideline for getting the most out of the R3P is as follows:

1. Browse the [DBBS website](#) to identify PIs relevant to their research interests.
2. Go to the [DBBS Portal](#) Student Hub and log in. Underneath "Useful Links" on the right-hand side, you will see the "Faculty/Student Networking (spreadsheet)." Using this list, you can identify students who have rotated, joined, or recently graduated from those labs. Use the [DBBS Current Student list](#) to find the student's contact information.
3. Follow our detailed instructions (see below) for crafting an email to ask for an informational interview. We recommend introducing yourself and asking if the volunteer is available/interested in discussing their rotation/thesis experience in a one-on-one fashion. The current pandemic necessitates zoom meetings or phone conversations.

E-mail Introduction Template

Now that you've identified someone for an informational interview, it is important to reach out and introduce yourself over email. Not sure where to start in sending an e-mail for an informational interview? Follow this formula as a template to get you started!

Subject:

Try to include "Research Rotation Resource Program (R3P)" in your subject line. Examples:

- *Research Rotation Resource (R3P): informational interview?*
- *Request for Interview: Research Rotation Resource Program (R3P)!*
- *Introducing myself for an informational interview: Research Rotation Resource Program (R3P)!*

Greeting:

Address the student using their name and an introduction of your choice. Examples:

- *Dear [student name], (then continue to the next line)*
- *Hi/Hello [student name], (then continue to the next line)*
- *Good morning/afternoon [student name], (then continue to the next line)*

Introduction of Yourself:

Tell the student your name and a little bit about yourself. Your major, degree level, and hometown are great pieces of information to include. Not all acronyms for majors and degrees mean the same thing to alumni and to students, so it is a good idea to write out your full degree. Examples:

- *My name is Hannah Johnson and I am a 2nd year Evolution, Ecology, and Population Biology student from Savannah, Georgia.*
- *My name is Liang Gu and I am an Computational and Systems Biology PhD student from Beijing, China.*
- *My name is Stanley Davis and I enrolled in the Cancer Biology program in 2020. I currently reside in Ballwin, Missouri.*

Explain Your Reason for Writing:

Let the student know why you are interested in meeting and how you found their information through R3P. Examples:

- *I found your information on the R3P, and I am interested in learning more about your lab and rotation experiences. I am reaching out to touch base with you for an informational interview.*

Share More About Yourself/Add a Personal Touch:

The student will not have received your information, so they will need a little bit of background about your interests. You can help paint a better picture of who you are by sharing additional details about yourself and adding a personal touch to your email. Topics like hobbies, extracurricular interests, and some high-level goals are all great introductory details. Example:

- *I also want to share a little bit more about myself. Outside of classes/work, I enjoy cooking, running, and traveling. I am also a huge sports fan and attend as many Cardinals games as I can!*
- *I am involved with advocacy and science communication work in my field but am also interested in careers in bioindustry.*

Set Action Items:

Throughout your correspondence, set action items for your next interaction. In this instance, letting the student know that you're looking forward to hearing from them and politely requesting a response would be appropriate action items. Example:

- *I am looking forward to learning more about your experience. Please let me know if there are any questions you have for me and when you would be available for a meeting! My availability for the next week looks like the following: [insert available times].*

End the E-mail:

Optional closings to end the e-mail before signing your name are:

- Sincerely,
- Best regards,
- Thank you,
- All the best,

Note: Sign your e-mail with the name you'd like to be called by. If your name is "Nicholas", but you prefer to go by "Nick" use that. Take note of the name the student uses to sign their e-mails and use that name when you address them.

Full Template:

When you put all these pieces together, you end up with an e-mail something like this (use your own relevant information to fill in the parts in *blue*):

Dear Ali,

My name is Hannah Johnson, and I am a 2nd year Evolution, Ecology, and Population Biology student from Savannah, Georgia. I am interested in learning more about your lab and rotation experiences. I am reaching out to touch base with you for an informational interview.

I want to share a little bit more about myself. Outside of classes/work, I enjoy cooking, running, and traveling. I am also a huge sports fan and attend as many Cardinals games as I can! I am involved with advocacy and science communication work in my field and on campus but am also interested in careers in bioindustry.

I am looking forward to learning more about your experience. Please let me know if there are any questions you have for me and when you would be available for a meeting! My availability for the next week looks like the following:

- *Monday, 1-3pm*
- *Thursday, 3-5pm*

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Hannah

Please note, this template is meant to be used as a guide. We encourage you to use your own wording and your own voice! Remember that graduate students are busy, and you may not hear back right away. You can also reach out to multiple students from the same lab to get varied perspectives.

This resource was created based on content from:

<http://www.englishforbusinesscommunication.com/how-to-formally-introduce-yourself-in-emails/>

Once a Meeting Has Been Set

For the incoming student:

- Prior to the meeting, read up on the lab's work! The fit between the lab and the student is important, but your interest in the lab should also stem from their work. Pubmed is a great starting point to find research articles published by the lab, and search engines like Google can give you more general information about the PI and lab, including a lab website!
- Thank the student for agreeing to meet to discuss their experiences rotating/working in the lab. Their participation in the R3P is entirely voluntary, and the students who have opted in are doing so in an effort to help others (after all, we're all in this together, right?)
- Try to ask questions that can give insight into the PI's expectations regarding work/life balance, day-to-day involvement, lab culture, etc.
 - What does a typical work week look like for a rotation/thesis student in Dr. Smith's lab?
 - How often is Dr. Smith available if I have a question about my project?
 - If Dr. Smith isn't available, who can I go to regarding my questions?
 - Does the lab communicate with each other frequently? Or does everyone do their own thing?
 - What type of journals does Dr. Smith submit to? In the event of article rejection, how has Dr. Smith reacted?
 - How long do thesis students spend in Dr. Smith's lab?
- Try to avoid questions based on hearsay. While certainly exciting, the R3P is intended for students to obtain *objective* information, not gossip. Examples of such questions to avoid are as follows:
 - I heard a rumor that Dr. Smith detests lab members who wear Chanel No. 5. Is this true?
 - I heard that Dr. Smith has it out for this professor. Could you 'spill the tea'?
 - Word around campus is that these two lab members in Dr. Smith's lab HATE each other. What's up with that?
- Sometimes, questions that may be relevant for assessing fit may fall in between hearsay and objective facts regarding the PI's record (e.g., PI well known for partying at retreats, had a falling out with a student/lab member, etc.). Navigating these proverbial waters can still be achieved with objective questions:
 - I've heard that Dr. Smith intentionally delayed submitting a student's paper to keep them in lab for longer. Is this true? Was this an isolated incident?
 - I've noticed that Dr. Smith's lab largely skews straight, male, and computational. Is this merely coincidence, or would I, as a queer female developmental biology student, be embraced?

For the student that was contacted for the interview:

- Be honest, but objective! Avoid subjective language when possible.
 - "Did you and Dr. Smith get along?"
 - "We had our disagreements, but ultimately it was a matter of fit that led me to not join their lab." Should the incoming student inquire further about the nature of the disagreements, try to stick to the chronology of the events and use more neutral but descriptive language to avoid name-calling (e.g., "micro-manager" vs. "overwhelmingly involved")
 - "What are Dr. Smith's expectations for rotation students? What are Dr. Smith's expectations for students that join their lab?"
 - "When I met with Dr. Smith regarding a rotation, they assured me that my classes came first. However, Dr. Smith also said that the students who joined his/her lab spent significant time in the laboratory. Ultimately, I was able to effectively balance my class time and lab time, but I felt like Dr. Smith's language was habitually ambiguous."
 - "I heard that Dr. Smith keeps students for longer than the agreed-upon rotation time. Is this true?"
 - "I cannot speak with confidence about the agreed-upon length of the rotation. However, I know that rotation students have, on average, spent (insert time duration here) in the time that I have been/was in the lab."
- 4. Once the meeting has been held, be sure to thank the interviewee for taking the time to meet with you. Gratitude goes a long way!