

Uncovering The 'Hidden Curriculum' at Amherst

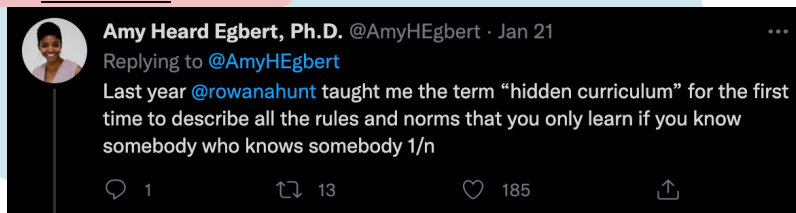
What is the Hidden Curriculum?



Defined by Dr. Amy Heard Egbert in a recent Twitter thread, the Hidden Curriculum is "the rules and norms that you only learn if you know somebody who knows somebody." The rules of the hidden curriculum feel ever-changing. At the undergraduate level, these 'norms' can be found in research opportunities, finding summer internships, or applying to graduate school. Students must know how to reach out to professors, when/where to apply for summer internships, and how to network with faculty, among other things. These skills are not taught in classes, but rather learned from the word of others. Whether it be professors, staff/faculty, or even parents, this information comes from an outside source. This guide aims to help be that "someone" and 'uncover' the hidden curriculum by gathering some tips and resources for Amherst students!



Link to Dr. Amy Heard Egbert's thread



Amherst Research Opportunities

As an undergraduate-only institution, Amherst offers research positions to students as soon as their first year of undergrad. Students are able to be a research assistant for a professor, participate in a summer program called SURF (Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship), and even write an Honors Thesis project during their senior year. While these opportunities are great, how does one ensure they're able to get into a lab? Here's some tips on the process of getting involved in research, having a successful SURF application, and general Amherst-specific research resources:

Research Interests!

Professor With Interesting Research

Research Interests!

Hello Professor _____,

I hope you're doing well! I wanted to reach out and introduce myself. My name is _____, and I'm an Amherst student in the class of _____.

I've (**heard about/read about**) the research you are doing, and I would like to learn more about what happens in your lab! (***here you can add in some personal details about why you are interested in the lab, or look at their website/research and give an example of why you are excited about it**)

I would appreciate a chance to meet with you and discuss your work and any research opportunities you may have-is there a time in the coming week you'd be able to meet? (***Feel free to change this timeline, or suggest a possible date or time that works best for you**)

I'm looking forward to talking with you!

Sincerely,

Send

Amherst Research Tips

- **Reach out to Professors:**
 - Half of the battle with getting into a lab is putting yourself out there. As scary as it can seem, professors LOVE talking to students about their research. Check out the faculty websites and read up on their research! Send them an email expressing your interest and see if they have any open opportunities. Feel free to use the template to the left to shape your email! *They may not have open opportunities- but by introducing yourself they might think of you when they do! Connection is important!
 - *The Biology department also has this interest form (linked here) that you can fill out as well!
- **The SURF Application**
 - While SURF is open to all students, the application can be quite competitive. Professors often pick students they already know well, currently have a position in their lab, or they've at least had in class once before. Although this isn't an official part of the application (linked here), many students set up conversations with professors expressing interest in working as a SURF student in their lab. Sending an email like the one outlined above, or just introducing yourself to the professor before sending in your application can be extremely helpful as a way for the professor to get to know you.
 - *NOTE: SURF is extremely competitive, do not be discouraged if you don't get to do SURF! There are many other ways to get involved in research (like the Gregory S. Call Funding).
- **Stay Persistent!**
 - It may feel like everyone around you is able to get into a lab, or is getting SURF, or doing research of some kind. You are doing your best- and the opportunity will come when the time is right! Stay persistent, keep checking in with professors and putting your name out there! You are just as deserving and capable!



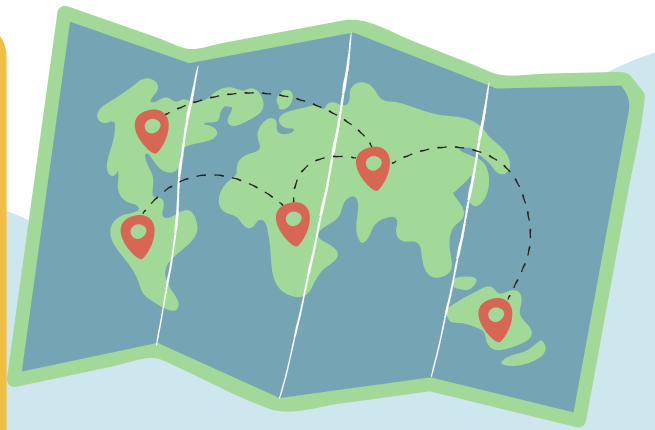


Non-Amherst Summer Opportunities

While Amherst offers summer opportunities for students, you can spend your summer outside of Amherst as well! Taking a break from campus and doing a bit of exploring and getting experience elsewhere can be extremely valuable. How does one find/apply for other summer experiences?

Tips for Summer Elsewhere

- **Use the Loeb Center and Handshake**
 - The Loeb Center is the career center here on campus, and visiting their [website](#) (linked here) is a great place to start! You can book an appointment with them to discuss what you may be looking for. You can also create a Handshake profile, where you can search for internships and jobs. Using Peer Career Advisors (PCAs), you can have your resume reviewed and posted on Handshake. Once there, you can look for what interests you! The Loeb Center can also help you to fill out the application, prepare for any interviews, and build confidence for a successful application! This is just a small glimpse into what the Loeb Center does, visit them, give them a call, or send an email to get the full experience of all they have to offer!
- **Apply Early and Often**
 - Applications for summer internships usually open up in late fall and are due in early winter (think October-February). It is never too early to start looking at internships for the next year! Keeping a document of jobs or internships you are looking at can be extremely helpful, and starting the applications early can make the process less stressful.
- **Talk to Professors and Other Students**
 - Amherst professors often have relationships with other schools and know of research positions or jobs! Ask professors in the departments you would like to work in, and they can even help you with letters of recommendation! Many departments even have webpages with summer research, like the [Biology page](#) linked here!
 - Peers and alumni have also been in the same exact spot you are now, don't be afraid to use the [alumni directory](#)!



Don't Forget: Summer BREAK is a break!

As easy as it is to get caught up in the need to be doing something over break, rest is productive and you deserve it! The school year can be tiring, and ensuring that you get a mental and physical break in some way is so important! Try to find some ways to dedicate time to yourself (journaling, going for walks, sleeping etc)!

After Amherst

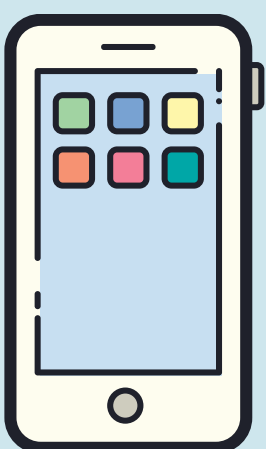
So you've finished your four years at Amherst, that's great! But what comes next? More school? A gap year? Who the heck knows? (That last one seems to be the most common answer!)

Having a STEM degree from Amherst is a fantastic accomplishment, and now you want to put it to use! Applying for graduate school and jobs seems so overwhelming, where do you start? What does it mean to have a masters, or a PhD? How do I get there?



Tips for Career Exploration

- **What are my Options?**
 - Finding out what career options are available is a great first step! STEM students sometimes think Med school is their only option- while it's a great choice, there's so much to explore!
 - Check out this [webpage](#) (linked here) created by Professor Trapani highlighting many careers in STEM!
 - Meet with Dr. [Carolyn Margolin](#), the program director of Amherst Career in Science and Technology at the Loeb Center!
- **What is Grad School? How do I get there?**
 - Graduate school can be a fantastic next step for students interested in specific curriculum in a field, or students that want a career in research or academia! For more on Grad School, follow these resources:
 - [The Loeb Center's Guide to Graduate School](#). This guide explains what Grad school is, how to find out if it's right for you, how to apply, and many other great tips!
 - [Professor Goutte's Advice on Grad School](#)
- **Network! Network! Network!**
 - As awkward as it can be, communicating with others in the field you're interested in can be so useful! Most people are very kind and want to talk to you about their work! Talk to professors, email professionals in the field, use the alumni portal, and even use social media to find out more about potential career moves!
 - [The Loeb Center's Guide to Networking](#)
 - LinkedIn is another great place to learn about what people in your field are up to! Amherst also has some [special networks/groups](#) within LinkedIn!





In The Context of HSTEM

Disconnect 2

This guide was motivated by disconnect 2 discussed in HSTEM. Disconnect 2 is: The advantages that contribute to STEM success vs the deficiency model focus. This disconnect was highlighted in readings throughout our class, especially in *The Privileged Poor* written by Tony Jack, an Amherst Alumni. Jack highlights the experiences of disadvantaged students admitted to elite institutions, making it clear that "access is not inclusion". This guide aimed, in a very small way, to increase the inclusion at our own elite college. As a student that didn't know many of the tips in this guide as a first year student, much of this information would have been extremely helpful in navigating my four years in Amherst's STEM department.



Quotes and Inspirations



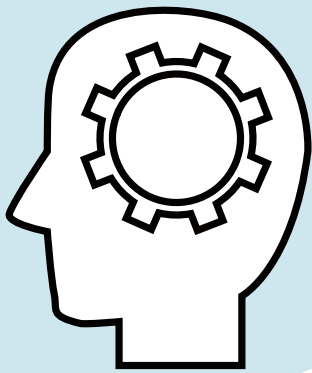
"When James Baldwin reflected on America, his home, he noted, "I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." We must all exercise this essential right. For every one who attends college, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, remember that your college is your home. Amherst— as different as it was from poor, segregated Coconut Grove— was mine. Wherever you go, you have the right to be there, and you have the right to criticize it. You are its citizenry." -Tony Jack, *The Privileged Poor*



"Deficit thinking-assuming students lack interest or preparation- and the resulting "fix the student" mindset are not working to close the racial and ethnicity gap. In order to reap the benefits of diversity, it is important to go beyond student-centered activities. It is necessary to also create institution-centered approaches that will change the culture of science and education so that students feel that they belong and that the system expects them to be successful." -David J. Asai, "Race Matters"



"The inclusive excellence model puts the focus on educators and institutions to deliver an educational model in which all learners can thrive. To accept that the argument for inclusive excellence is not for the lowering of academic standards but for the enhancement of access to STEM education through culture change and improvement of pedagogy will require a radical shift in beliefs and attitudes among educators." -Alo C. Basu, "Are We Ready? The Future of Inclusive Excellence in STEM."



TAGS

Learning Objective: L6
Course Components: C4
Disconnect: D2
HSTEM Process: P4
Relevant Campus Partners: The Loeb Center



A Final Note

I would like to recognize that this guide is not suggesting that the current 'hidden curriculum' at Amherst is equitable. This small guide is hopeful of making a difference for current Amherst students with some important and helpful information. I hope this is a piece of a larger discussion in making many of the opportunities presented here more available to students, and an overall inclusive practice in our Amherst community.

Citations

Asai, David. "Race Matters." Cell Magazine, May 2020

Basu, C Alo. "Are we Ready? The Future of Inclusive Excellence in STEM." March 2021. <https://www.thethinkingrepublic.com/fulcrum/are-we-ready>

Jack, Anthony Abraham. *The Privileged Poor : How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*, Harvard University Press, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/amherst/detail.action?docID=5649585>.

