

The Workbook

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND U



UC Irvine

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program

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Welcome to Your Research Journey

Your comprehensive guide to undergraduate research at UCI

How to Use This Guide

This resource is designed to introduce you to the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) and help you navigate the process of getting involved in research at UCI.



Navigate at Your Own Pace

Work through sections based on where you are in your research journey



Interactive Exercises

Complete reflection activities to clarify your research goals



Access Resources

Find links to tools, templates, and additional support

Purpose of This Guide

- **Provide an overview** of what UROP is and how we support UCI students
- **Offer guidance** on starting your research journey at UCI
- **Help you understand** the research landscape and opportunities available
- **Support your decision-making** with reflection exercises and practical tools

Whether you're completely new to research or looking to enhance your current experience, this guide will help you navigate your path forward.

Table of Contents

Navigate your research journey with confidence. Each section builds upon the previous one, but feel free to jump to topics most relevant to your current needs. Click the headings below to jump to the page.

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What is the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP)?

We're Here to Support Your Research Journey

The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) is an office at UCI dedicated to supporting undergraduate research and creative activities across **all disciplines**. We are not a program you apply to, but rather a resource open to all UCI undergraduate students.



Common Misconception

People often say they "want to do UROP," but what they usually mean is that they:

- Want assistance with getting involved in research
- Would like to apply for our recognition and funding opportunities
- Are interested in our opportunities for showcasing research

How Does UROP Support Students?

We recognize that everyone is at different stages, so we've created a research roadmap that's fluid and adapts to your individual needs, research interests, and research timeline.

Important: While we don't directly place students in research positions or match them with professors, we provide valuable resources, guidance, and opportunities to help you navigate your personalized research journey.

Research Roadmap

Below are common steps on a research journey.



If you are just getting started on your research journey, we offer information sessions, workshops, and other resources:

- Undergraduate Research and U Information Session
- Applying to Research Opportunities Workshop
- Finding a Faculty Mentor Workshop
- Research Discovery Program (**First year UCI Undergraduates only**)
- 1:1 Peer Advisor and Professional Staff Appointments

If you are currently in a research opportunity with a UCI faculty mentor, we offer recognition and funding opportunities:

- Research Experience Fellowship (REF)
- Interdisciplinary Research Teams (IRT)
- Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP)
- Travel or Publication Award

Note: These opportunities are subject to change. Please [check our website](#) for the most current opportunities.



If you are currently in a research opportunity with a UCI faculty mentor and are ready to share your work, we offer opportunities to showcase your research:

- Project Pitch Challenge (Fall)
- UCI Undergraduate Research Symposium (Spring)
 - Oral Presentation Spotlights
 - Poster and Performance Showcase

We offer help for those who are interested in taking advantage of our UROP opportunities. We have recorded information sessions and application guides that go into more detail to help you apply.

- Check out our [UROP calendar](#) for live in-person sessions and Zoom meetings
- Visit the respective webpages on our website for information specific to the opportunity you are interested in:
 - [UROP Recognition and Funding](#)
 - [Project Pitch Challenge](#)
 - [UC Irvine Undergraduate Research Symposium](#)



How to connect with UROP:



Open Office Hours

- Monday – Friday
 - 10:00AM-12:00PM
 - 1:00PM-3:00PM
- Closed on holidays



Appointments Available

- Staff advisor appointments
- Peer advisor appointments

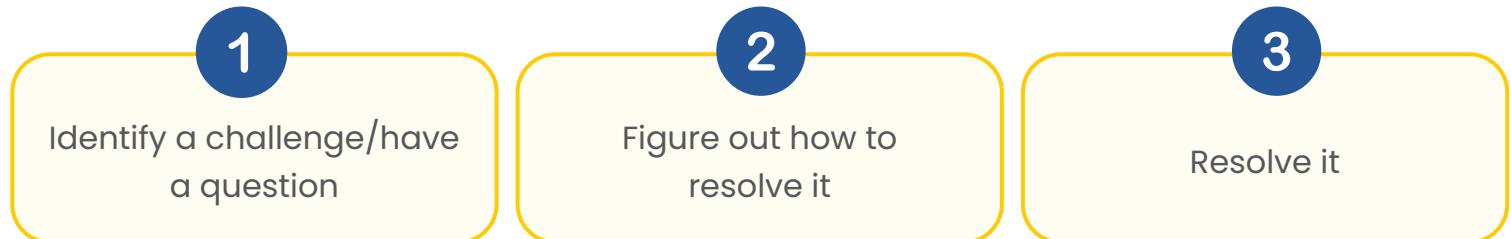


Campus Outreach

- Tabling on Ring Road
- Class announcements
- Information sessions and workshops

What is Research?

Before we jump into how to find a potential research opportunity at UCI, it's important to understand what research is. Here at UROP, we like to define research as a **three-step process**:



You already do this every day! Whether you're deciding what movie to watch, what to eat for dinner, or what to wear, you're doing research.

At UCI, you're engaging in **academic research**, meaning you use scholarly sources and academic methods to find your answers.

Creative Activities

UROP also supports creative activities! Developing art installations, composing music, writing poetry, designing digital media, or creating performances involve the same fundamental steps.

We've seen incredible creative activities in UCI's Claire Trevor School of the Arts, where exhibitions, dances, music, and plays shed light on research topics through artistic expression. [Read more here to see spotlights of creative activities.](#) 

The Research Experience

Participating in research and creative activities is an **experience** – not just a resume filler. It's where you learn about new possibilities, discover interests, and develop important transferable skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and academic writing.

You'll never know if research is for you until you try!

Why do you want to get involved in research?

Many students say they want research experience to apply for graduate level programs, but that doesn't tell us *why*. Research can help you uncover what path is right for you by giving you experience in your field of interest. This is crucial if you're considering graduate programs (e.g. Ph.D. programs), as they are often research-intensive!

Research can help you develop the following career readiness competencies:

Career & Self-Development

Communication

Critical Thinking

Equity & Inclusion

Leadership

Professionalism

Teamwork

Technology

Learn more about these competencies at: [UCI Division of Career Pathways](#)



Reflection Exercise:

Use the space below to reflect on what you hope to get out of a research experience and why it's important to you.

Remember: There's no right or wrong answer. The goal is to help you clarify your motivations and expectations for your research journey. Your reasons for doing research may evolve as you gain experience. It's okay for your goals to change!

Which of the career readiness competencies do I hope to strengthen through research? How?

Consider which skills you want to develop...

Why do you want to get involved in research? (Continued)

Beyond career readiness, what specific skills or knowledge do I want to gain?

Think about technical skills, subject knowledge, or personal growth...

How will research contribute to my academic goals?

Consider how research fits into your academic journey...

In what ways might research experience benefit my future career plans?

Think about your career aspirations...

What aspects of research excite me the most?

What draws you to research?

What challenges do I anticipate in research, and how might overcoming them benefit me?

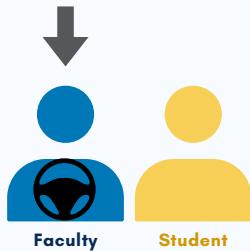
Consider potential obstacles and growth opportunities...

What Does Research Look Like at UCI?

At UCI, on-campus research primarily follows two models:

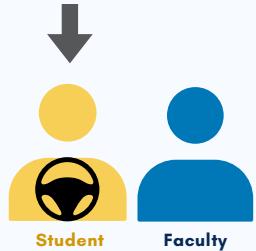
Joining a UCI Faculty Lab

- Work with other undergraduate students, possibly graduate students, and faculty
- The research question is typically **developed by the faculty member**
- You contribute to answering this established research question/challenge
- Great for gaining foundational research skills



Independent Research

- You typically work to answer a question/challenge **YOU developed**
- You still have a UCI faculty mentor guiding you
- Independent research doesn't mean you work alone. You could work with other undergrads, too
- Requires more self-direction and initiative



Important Note About Independent Research

In general, if a UCI undergraduate student wants to engage in an independent project, some faculty mentors may prefer that they begin in a faculty lab first, especially if they have no research experience. This allows them to gain foundational research skills, understand research methods, and learn how to work in a research environment. This can be especially common in STEM-related fields.

However, this isn't always the case. Some faculty mentors might be open to supporting independent projects from students without prior lab experience, depending on the project, the discipline, and the student's preparation.

Research Model Reflection

Considering the two primary research models at UCI (joining a faculty lab and independent research), which model do you think would be the best fit for you at this stage in your academic journey, and why?

Reflect on your preferred research model here...

Types of Research Compensation

In addition to research benefits, **we want students to be compensated for their research contributions.** There are two ways to receive compensation for being involved in research. It's important to go into the conversation knowing that your preferred compensation is not guaranteed.

1st Priority



Academic Credit

Typically involves enrolling in a 190's course (e.g., Biology majors might enroll in Bio Sci 199)

IMPORTANT: UROP **does not** advise on academic credit. Speak to your academic advisor for more information.

2nd Priority



Paid Positions

Sometimes paid opportunities are available if your faculty mentor has available funding and/or through work study positions for qualified financial aid students. Speak to your faculty mentor determine if funding is available.

3rd Priority



Volunteer

While we prioritize compensated research experiences, some positions may be available on a volunteer basis that provide valuable research experience and learning opportunities, such as networking and relationship building.

Academic Credit Organization Tool

If you are interested in academic credit for research, use this space to get organized:

Your academic department:

e.g., *Biology, Computer Science, Psychology*

Contact email for academic credit inquiries:

e.g., *biosci199@uci.edu*

Specific course number (if known):

e.g., *Bio Sci 199, Psych 199*

Any additional notes or requirements you've found:

Note any specific requirements, prerequisites, or important details.

What is the Time Commitment?

Every faculty mentor has different expectations, and research schedules can vary widely. You might encounter:

- Strict schedules vs flexible arrangements
- Hybrid models vs fully remote opportunities vs in-person only requirements
- Different expectations for weekly time commitments and minimum durations

It's crucial to discuss scheduling expectations clearly with your potential faculty mentor before committing to a research position.

On Average	
*8-12 hrs Per week during the school year *varies by faculty mentor	*10-30 hrs Per week in the summer *varies by faculty mentor

Most faculty mentors expect a minimum commitment of one school year (3 quarters)

Key Discussion Points

When exploring research opportunities, be sure to ask about:

- Expected weekly time commitment
- Scheduling flexibility
- Work format (in-person vs. remote)
- Minimum duration of commitment

Planning Your Research Journey

Take some time to reflect on the following questions:

What quarter do I want to begin research?

Consider your current course load and other commitments...

Considering my current commitments, how many hours per week can I realistically dedicate to research?

Be honest about your capacity and map out your schedule on google calendar to get an accurate idea of your availability...

What is the minimum duration of research experience that would be required to meet my goals?

Think about your academic and career objectives...

How does research fit into my overall academic and career plans?

Consider how research aligns with your future goals...

How long before I graduate, and how does that align with my research goals?

Plan your timeline strategically...

By reflecting on these questions, you'll be better prepared to discuss your research involvement with potential faculty mentors and find an opportunity that aligns with your goals and schedule. Remember, you can start whenever you're ready!

Get Involved with Research

Step 1: Find a Research Topic

Think about what you want to learn more about and explore the wide range of research UCI faculty are conducting.

Begin by considering what topics interest you from your classes or general academic experiences. If you're undeclared or undecided about your major, that's okay! Research can be a great way to explore different fields. While it's important to have some sense of your research interests, don't be too narrow or focused in your approach. Stay flexible and open to exploring related areas or interdisciplinary opportunities. It's also possible that UCI faculty may not be conducting research in your exact area of interest, so being open to adjacent fields or different approaches to similar questions can lead to valuable research experiences. Faculty often appreciate students who bring curiosity and adaptability to their research teams.

Reflect on these guiding questions:

- What subjects or topics are you interested in, either in or out of the classroom?
- What global or local issues are you passionate about?
- What kinds of problems do you enjoy solving?

If you have chosen a major: Consider why you selected it and what aspects of it excite you most.

Remember: You're not limited to doing research within your major. In addition, interdisciplinary research is common and encouraged. Faculty at UCI might not conduct research in your specific area of interest, but likely have more than enough experience in a related area to mentor you. Keep an open mind, you might discover exciting related areas you hadn't considered before.

Reflection Exercise

What research topics or areas interest you? List 2–3 you'd like to explore further. These can be broad areas or specific questions you're curious about.

Topic #1

Start writing your thoughts here...

Topic #2

Start writing your thoughts here...

Topic #3

Start writing your thoughts here...

Pro Tip:

If you're having trouble identifying research interests, try browsing recent [UCI news](#). Which stories catch your attention? This can be a great way to discover potential research areas that align with your curiosity and the current state of various fields. You can also explore the [UCI Undergraduate Research Symposium](#) program to see what UCI undergraduate students are working on. The Symposium showcases a wide variety of ongoing projects, research topics, and mentors at UCI, giving you concrete examples of undergraduate research opportunities and helping you identify potential areas of interest and faculty mentors you might want to connect with.



Step 2: Finding Potential Faculty Mentors

To find potential faculty mentors, use a variety of resources to cast a wide net and discover researchers whose work aligns with your interests:



Faculty from Classes

Faculty you already know



UCI Faculty Profile System

Search by topic or discipline



Google Scholar

Find recent publications



UCI School/Department Websites

Browse faculty directories



The UCI Faculty Profile System is a great starting point. Type in a discipline or research topic to get a list of relevant faculty mentors. However, keep in mind that this information may not always be up-to-date or completely accurate.

Research Strategy: Do Your Homework

When researching faculty mentors, it's crucial to be thorough and strategic. Look closely at their research interests and see how they align with what you want to do. Go deeper by reading their recent publications to understand their current research direction. Review their lab websites, examine ongoing projects, and analyze how their work has evolved over time.

Key Points to Remember:

- A 100% match isn't necessary – related interests can lead to exciting opportunities
- Faculty are experts in their field and will guide you – you don't need to be the expert
- You should be able to articulate why you want to work with a particular professor
- Your passion, curiosity, and motivation are key factors

Faculty Research Reflection

List 3–5 faculty mentors whose research interests you.

We offer a [Faculty Organization Template](#) to help you keep track of the faculty mentors you've reached out to.



Faculty mentor #1

Name & Department:

Why their research interests you:

Faculty mentor #2

Name & Department:

Why their research interests you:

Faculty mentor #3

Name & Department:

Why their research interests you:

Faculty mentor #4

Name & Department:

Why their research interests you:

Faculty mentor #5

Name & Department:

Why their research interests you:

Step 3: Applying to Research Opportunities

It's crucial to understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when reaching out to faculty. Every faculty mentor has different preferences for how they like to be contacted and how they engage with potential research assistants. This is why doing your homework on each faculty mentor is so important.



Your Primary Goal

Start a conversation about shared research interests, **not** to immediately ask for a research opportunity.

Common Approaches

There are several common approaches to reach out to faculty about research opportunities. Remember to tailor your method to what you've learned about each specific professor:



Email

A common method for initial contact.

 [Email Guide](#)

 [Writing Center](#)



Faculty Office Hours

Get to know potential faculty mentors outside of class. They are happy to talk with students who share their research interests!



Online Forms

Some faculty mentors and programs use online application forms to support undergraduate students interested in getting involved in research. Check their websites for specific application processes, if available.

Professional Communication Guidelines

- Be professional and respectful of their time
- Show genuine interest in their specific research areas
- Be prepared to discuss why you're interested in their work
- Remember: your goal is to start a conversation, not immediately secure a position
- If no response, we suggest two follow-up emails, each after about a week
- Don't be discouraged! Building connections takes time

Email Draft Exercise

Choose one faculty mentor from your list. Using our [email guide](#), draft a brief email requesting an appointment to discuss their research interests. What key points will you include? 

Draft your email here...

Preparing for Faculty Conversations

When a UCI faculty member agrees to talk with you about their research, follow these steps to make the most of your meeting:

Before the Meeting

- **Research the Professor:** Review their department profile or lab website
- **Understand Their Research:** Read recent publications on Google Scholar
- **Reflect on Your Motivations:** Prepare to explain your specific interest
- **Prepare Genuine Questions:** Focus on what you truly want to know

Questions to Avoid: Don't ask overly broad or generic questions like "What is your research about?" or "Can you tell me about your work?" These show lack of preparation.

During the Meeting

- Be on time and introduce yourself professionally
- Have your questions ready and be prepared to discuss previous conversations
- Be polite, professional, and authentic
- Present your authentic personality, interests, and experiences rather than trying to be someone you think the interviewer wants to see. Don't put on a fake persona or pretend to have different values or interests
- Relax and enjoy the conversation

After the Meeting

- Send a thank-you email within 24 hours
- Reflect on what you learned
- Follow up on any suggestions or resources mentioned

Managing Multiple Opportunities

- It's appropriate to **contact multiple faculty members at the same time**
- Be transparent about your intentions
- If you receive an offer you're no longer interested in, **politely decline** rather than simply not responding
- Don't bite off more than you can chew. Only commit to what you can realistically handle
- You know yourself best. Be honest about your capacity

Need Further Assistance?

If you need additional guidance or support throughout your research application process, don't hesitate to [visit or contact us](#) for personalized assistance. 

We're here to help you succeed in your research journey!