

Getting Started in Undergraduate Research

Get ready, Get set, Go!

What is Undergraduate Research?

At CSUDH, we use the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) definition to define undergraduate research:

An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline.

While undergraduate research does not always require a white lab coat, test tubes and safety goggles, it can be conducted in any discipline. Student projects in creative activities such as art, dance, theatre, film or music composition, are also considered to be undergraduate research. Research is the process that involves asking questions and using methods to advance our knowledge and understanding of the field. Through research, student's academic curriculum is enhanced by critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and independent study under the guidance of a faculty mentor.

Why Should I Get Involved?

Undergraduate research allows you the opportunity to gain hands-on experience with experts in your field of study, mentorship, and build strong faculty relationships and academic networks. Classwork will become more meaningful as you learn how to apply what you've learned to real-world problems and issues. Undergraduate research will help prepare you for graduate school and equip you with transferable skills for any career. This experience allows you to test the waters and help decide if graduate school is for you or prompts the realizations about the kind of work you enjoy most and what career path you wish to pursue.

How and When Should I Get Started?

The first step is to identify your research interest. Then, take a proactive outreach approach to contact potential mentors in your area of interest. Talk with current or past professors you have taken courses with and enjoyed. Inquire about the kind of research happening in your field through the department or meet with an academic advisor. Talk to fellow students about different projects they are working on. Attend the [CSUDH Annual Student Research Day \(SRD\)](#) to be an eyewitness of what other students are working on and the faculty they are working with.

Most students often start their research journey their junior or senior year, after they've laid a foundation in their major. However, you may have the option to explore research as early as your freshman year. Some faculty may want you to have taken a certain course before joining. As you reach out to faculty, you will learn about any prerequisites they may have. Keep in mind that prior research experience is not expected from undergraduates. Students usually start with entry-level tasks at their skill level and build from there. However, you are expected to show up ready to learn, try your best and ask questions when you don't understand something.

Are there Funded Research Opportunities?

Funded research gives students the advantage of working in their field of study while getting paid. Financial support can enable students to cut back on work hours and allow more time dedicated to research. Although funding is not available for all students, there are opportunities out there. Consult with your department or academic advisor about opportunities as they may be aware of faculty with research grants that offers hourly student research assistant positions. There are also federally funded programs such as [Cal-Bridge](#), [LS-AMP](#), [Mellon Mays](#), [McNair](#), and [RISE](#) that provide financial support and encourage underrepresented students to apply. These programs are usually limited for those who are not US citizens or permanent residents. If you are not eligible for these kinds of support, there still are options available to you and our office is committed to providing access to research opportunities. [If you are undocumented and in STEM, please see this list of summer research opportunities that are available to you.](#)