

# Getting Started in Undergraduate Research: Finding a Mentor

## *What is a Mentor?*

A mentor is someone who guides and supports you through your research journey and helps you navigate your academic and career pathway. Mentors provide advice, resources, and expose you to new opportunities to help achieve your goals. They could be a professor or anyone with expertise in your field of interest. A mentor also gives guidance on how to publish your work, how to apply for funding, and the possibility of securing a strong letter of recommendation for graduate school.

Finding a research mentor as an undergraduate student can be a valuable experience that can enhance your academic and career prospects. Here are some tips to help you find a research mentor:

## *Steps to Finding A Research Mentor*

**Identify Your Interests:** Before you start looking for a mentor, have a clear understanding of your academic and research interests. Knowing your interests will help you target potential mentors who share those interests. What areas of study excite you the most? What specific questions or topics do you want to explore?

**Attend Departmental Events:** Attend departmental seminars, workshops, and research presentations. These events are great opportunities to learn about the research being conducted by faculty members and to make initial connections.

**Utilize Your Professors:** Talk to your professors and express your research interest. They can provide valuable insights, recommend potential mentors, and may even have ongoing research projects that need assistance.

**Review Faculty Profiles:** Explore the websites and profiles of professors in your department. Look for researchers whose work aligns with your interests. Pay attention to their recent publications and ongoing projects.

**Contact the Office of Undergraduate Research:** Visit the CSUDH Office of Undergraduate Research to inquire about potential mentors, research opportunities, workshops, and additional resources.

**Online Research:** Explore your university's website and faculty profiles to learn more about their research interests. Look for faculty members whose work aligns with your interests.

**Networking:** Attend academic conferences, workshops, and events related to your field of interest. These gatherings can provide opportunities to meet potential mentors and discuss your interests.

## Preparing to Meet a Mentor

**Email Introductions:** Once you've identified potential mentors, send them a polite and concise email expressing your interest. In your email, briefly introduce yourself, explain why you're interested in their work, and inquire about the possibility of working with them. You can also request a meeting to discuss potential opportunities for involvement.

**Prepare a Resume/CV:** Create a strong resume or curriculum vitae (CV) that highlights your academic achievements, relevant coursework, and any skills that may be valuable in a research setting.

**Show Enthusiasm and Commitment:** During meetings or conversations with potential mentors, convey your enthusiasm for their work and your willingness to commit time and effort to the research project.

**Be Persistent but Respectful:** If you don't receive a response to your initial email or inquiry, don't be discouraged. Professors are often busy. Follow up politely if you don't hear back within a reasonable time frame.

## Questions to ask Potential Mentors



### Ask for Advice and Guidance:

- How can I prepare myself before starting research?
- Are there any articles/readings recommended to prepare for this research?
- Is there anything specific you are looking for in a mentee?
- In your experience, what makes a student successful who is new to research?

### Ask about Scheduling and Flexibility:

- How many hours a week do students in your lab/team typically work? Will my hours be flexible? How often do you meet with your mentees?
- What are your communication and/or learning preferences?
- Do students work during the breaks (spring, summer, winter)?
- Can I stay involved until the completion of this research project?

### Ask about Logistics and Expectations:

- What kind of tools, equipment, or techniques do you use in your research?
- What are some concepts I can expect to learn?
- Is there any training I need to complete before starting?
- Are there any mandatory meetings I must attend?
- What role will I be expected to play in your research? Will I have my own project? Or will I be contributing to a larger research project?
- What kinds of projects have other students worked on in the past?
- Is there a possibility for me to contribute to a publication and learn more about the process?

### What to do within 48 hours after your meeting...

Out of professional courtesy, follow up with a thank you email, which can also be used as an open line of communication. At this time, you may want to follow up on your discussion, request to visit their research lab and/or attend a team meeting, or maybe even inquire about the opportunity of joining their team!