Getting Quality Research Experience

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Importance of Research Experience

- Large component of graduate school is research
  - Shows you have the foundational research skills needed for graduate school
  - Research informs clinical work
- Sets you apart from other applicants
- Gives you hands-on experience
  - Learn from other researchers (e.g., graduate students, project coordinators, PIs, clinicians, etc.)
  - Learn what aspects you do or don’t like about research

What do faculty members value about research experience?
Examples of Key Research Experiences

- Database management
  - Scoring, entering data
- Study recruitment
- Testing or working directly with participants
- IRB management
- Data analysis
- Presentation of results at conference
- Publications
Progression of Research Experience

- Undergraduate
  - Data entry
  - Participant recruitment
  - Running of participants
  - Data analysis
  - Honors thesis
    - What is this?
    - How important is an honors thesis?

- Post-baccalaureate
  - Research assistant
  - Research coordinator/ Project Coordinator
How to Find Research Opportunities

- Psychology Department listservs/website
- Faculty/lab websites
- Ask professors, graduate students, or TAs if they know of any openings/opportunities
- Ask a guest lecturer whose research interests you
- Inform your advisor that you want “hands on” research experience
- Check your Undergraduate Research Board’s openings
  - Fliers may be posted in department around the time of course registration
- Ask others how they got involved in research!
What Do Faculty Seek in a Research Assistant?

- Interest in area of research and/or clinical work
- Organizational skills
  - Often managing and organizing many tasks, knowing status of different projects, etc.
- Ability to learn quickly
- Work effectively in groups
- Awareness of research ethics and professionalism
- Statistics knowledge
  - Ability to work with programs such as Excel, SPSS, R
Pursuing Research Opportunities

- **How to write an email of inquiry**
  - Use professional language throughout your email
    - Avoid “Hey” or other informal language
    - Use proper salutation (e.g., ”Dear Dr. _____”)
  - If appropriate, mention where you heard of the opening for a research assistant
    - Was it from a flier? A TA? Professor?
  - Indicate you are familiar with the research and why interested in it
  - Include a copy of your CV or resume
  - If they invite you to interview, clarify any confusion/unknowns
    - How long will they need a research assistant?
    - Is the position for credit? Volunteer?
    - Time commitment

How do faculty like to be approached?
Making the Most of the RA Position

- Volunteer for different responsibilities
  - The more responsibility the more opportunity to learn!
  - No task is too small or menial (data entry example)

- Stand Out
  - How can a RA stand out to faculty?
    - What are the differences between YOU and others?
    - How are YOU seen and remembered by professors?

- Build relationships with faculty and grad students
  - How reliable are YOU?
  - How dependable are YOU?

How do faculty build relationships with RAs?
Participating in Independent Research

- Examples of independent research
  - Honors thesis
  - Independent research project

- Find an advisor

- Identify a research question of interest

- Determine whether you will have the time to commit

What do faculty think about independent research?
Participating in Independent Research

- But my school doesn’t offer the research I am interested in…
  - What to do?

- Research Resources
  - University programs that will help you gain research experience
    - McNair Program
      - Federal TRIP program funded at 151 US universities to prepare undergrad for PhD programs
    - SROP—summer research opportunities
      - At Big Ten Academic Alliance Universities
    - MURF—minority undergraduate research fellowships
  - How do I find these?
    - Check your university website
    - Google!
    - Make phone calls
    - Ask your advisor
Post-Baccalaureate Research Opportunities

• Pros
  • Opportunity to solidify your research interests
  • Gain additional research experience and knowledge
  • Gain valuable connections via networking
  • “Time on” instead of “time off”
    ▪ These are your twenties!

• Cons
  • Will be out of the “school experience” for 1+ years

What do faculty think of post-baccalaureate research?
Post-Baccalaureate Research Opportunities

- Use your connections!
- Inform your undergraduate research mentor (or another connection you have) that you are interested in a post-bac opportunity
  - Might have a post-bac position for you or know someone who does.
- “Cold email” professors
  - Check NIH RePORTER to see who has funding and what projects may be of interest to you: [http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm](http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm)
- Check human resources websites and other job finding websites
  - Universities, hospitals, etc.
Other Post-Baccalaureate Options

- Entering a terminal Masters program
- Other clinically relevant activities

Bottom line: There is no “right” path to graduate school, but gaining **valuable research experience** is an important part of all paths.
Questions?

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