Biomedical Engineering
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

Tips for Finding a Research Project & Mentor

Things You Should Know

Finding a research position can be challenging. If you are truly interested in research as an undergraduate, be persistent in your efforts.

Most labs want a significant time commitment from you: at least 10 hours per week, for a duration of usually a year or more. They invest a lot of time in training you as a researcher in their lab. Be realistic about the amount of time you can dedicate to research. You should expect to volunteer as a research assistant before labs will consider funding a student's research or helping them apply to external funding sources. Volunteering is usually a lower time commitment and can be a good way to assess if the lab and the research are a good fit.

Explore Your Research Options

- Think about professors and graduate teaching assistants from whom you've taken classes. What's their research? Does that field interest you?

- View CU Boulder faculty profiles in CU Experts: experts.colorado.edu. You may search by faculty name or search by a topic that interests you.

  CU Denver (Anschutz med school) faculty profiles can be explored as well: profiles.ucdenver.edu/search.

- Check out department and lab websites and read faculty biographies. Many faculty maintain lab websites with detailed research interests and even instructions for undergraduates regarding research opportunities in their labs.

- Attend departmental lectures or symposia given by CU faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars.

- Don't limit your efforts to find a research position to labs only within your department. Explore opportunities outside your major as well.

Potentially Confusing Terms

PI = principal investigator. This is the person, most often a professor, who heads up the research lab. They may or may not conduct actual bench research but spend their time advising personnel who work in their lab, writing up and publishing their findings, and securing grants to fund their research.

Postdoc = postdoctoral scholar. Someone who has completed their PhD and is conducting advanced training and research with guidance from the principal investigator of the lab.

CV = curriculum vitae. Like a resume, but often more extensive and used instead of resumes in most academic settings.

Making Contact

Come up with a list of at least four to five labs whose research interests you to contact and reach out! Most faculty prefer being contacted by email.

Email Guidelines

- Personalize the email! Don't send one email to all faculty whose research interests you, copying or blind-copying all parties; send one per professor, addressing the faculty member by professional title (Dear Professor/Dr.)
- Keep your email brief: no more than two or three paragraphs
- Tell them why you find their research interesting and why you're interested in research
- Introduce yourself: provide your class year, major, GPA if it's good, relevant coursework, previous research experience, academic and/or career goals
- Mention that you are willing to volunteer, include the number of hours you can commit to research per week, and when you'd be available to start (this semester, the summer, next year, *etc.*)
- Finally, provide your phone number and email contact information, and ask them if they can sit down in person to discuss any opportunities they may have
- You may attach your resume/CV; however, be sure to include important details in your email

Wait about a week before sending a follow-up email message. If they still don't respond, move on to the next person on your list.

Meeting/Interview Guidelines

- Be professional: be on time, dressed respectably, and prepared for the meeting
- Come prepared: ask questions to learn more about ongoing project(s) in the lab, the time commitment required, and the day-to-day work and research environment. Treat this meeting as you would a job interview
- Bring a copy of your resume/CV if you have one