

## Guidelines for contacting faculty about research

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For a list of neuroscience faculty doing research, go to the Brain Institute Research page:

<http://www2.tulane.edu/brain/faculty-research-profiles.cfm>

Students also should look for research opportunities in science and engineering departments at Tulane as well as research laboratories at Tulane and LSU medical schools and local hospitals. Remember that research experiences are not limited to uptown neuroscience labs!

Regarding contacting researchers, the bottom line is that faculty members have different opinions and have their own expectations of students. The general consensus is that faculty ....

1. Want to be contacted individually, so they know that you are really interested in their research and working with them!
2. Expect students to keep their appointments, show up on time for work, ask questions to show your interest in the research, take initiative, be responsible, etc., etc.
3. Prefer to be contacted via email with enough information about the student so they can follow up with a personal meeting. Most faculty members do NOT want a student just to stop by their office to ask if they can work in their lab. Some researchers appreciate getting a student's resume. If you have had prior research experience, be sure to let the researcher know!
4. Requirements vary. Some faculty members prefer freshmen or sophomores who can work in their lab for a long time; others prefer more advanced students with a sufficient knowledge base to do the work. Some faculty members prefer that a student volunteer for a semester before getting credit; others do not want volunteers, because there is no incentive to show up and take the work seriously. Most researchers want students to work in the lab for at least two semesters (or a semester and a summer).

If you want to work in a lab, you cannot give up the first time someone tells you that they do not have room in their lab for you. Keep trying. Contact another faculty member and ask to work with her/him.

It is ok to contact more than one faculty member at a time (they often are considering more than one student at a time!). But be honest with the faculty member if they offer you the position and you are considering another lab.

Before you agree to work in a lab, find out what the time demands are. Are you expected to work every day? Weekends? School holidays? The same hours during midterm exam weeks as during a "not so test-heavy week"? Make sure you have discussed the number of hours/week that you will work. Also discuss who your direct supervisor will be. You might be reporting to a graduate student, technician, post doc or other undergraduate student. Understand how the lab operates.

### *Words from some SSE faculty members:*

I like to meet the prospective student in person, so they should make an appointment. In the cover letter they should indicate their major department, experience (if any), goals in doing the research, and relevant class experience. I sometimes set up a student to work with one of my graduate students, so having this information helps me decide where a good fit might be.

A short email is best for me.

I like to get an initial email with a resume. I really pay attention if they say that they have had research experience in the email. Even if they have had a job that shows that they can be dependable is a plus. The most annoying thing to me is having to teach kids how to show up on time. I don't like them to just drop by the office for obvious reasons. I wish I had a more systematic way of doing this, but if I get the email when we need someone, I will respond positively and ask them to meet with me. If we don't need anyone, I send them to the departmental website.

I like email, CV attached, some indication of interest in what the lab is doing and how they might fit in. This is useful for me because what I do is forward the email to lab members to see if anyone is interested in taking on a student.

Coming by the office is another approach but I'm usually busy, but they can set up an appt. Coming by the lab is also a good way to meet people in the lab, to learn about what's going on, and establish some relationship. Generally students are too shy to do this, but it often works better to by-pass me and go straight to the people at the bench.

If students don't hear back from me they should do a follow up email. Usually I have to immediately respond to emails or else they get buried and often forgotten. Not getting a response is usually not a negative, it just means there's lots going on.

I prefer that undergrads contact me by email with the following info: Name, grade, major, resume. I usually ask if they have read through the requirements on my lab website and their transcript. If they have a preference for one of the research projects, I would like to know.

I want to be contacted by email. There's incredible variation among the faculty. Some have applications, and do interviews. When I get email inquiries, I usually tell the students that I will forward their message to my grad team leaders, (and I do), insofar as they know what our needs are. They usually then interview the students. If the grads recommend a position, I meet with the students to discuss their long term career goals and complete the independent studies form. That meeting is pretty important in determining my long term relationship with the student. They may not realize how important this meeting is.

The grads know that I'm inclined toward

- a. Students who have NOT sent a blanket email to every person in the dept,
- b. Who know what our field is
- c. Are at least B+ students.

They also need to understand that the experience is tiered by training....they may start by doing more simple tasks, then move up to more advanced work. The students who don't show up on time, have no room in their schedule, or think they are too important to do basic tasks are not invited back.

Our heuristic for hours in the lab is about 40hrs for the semester per credit hour...which amounts to 8-10 hrs per week in the lab for a 3cr independent study. Our logic is that a 3 credit course has meets for 2.5 -3 hrs per week, with the expectation that it has 4-7 hours outside class for reading, paper-writing, studying etc.

It depends on whether they are work study (in which case they need to contact the departmental staff person first) or want independent study (then they should contact me via email). I do not take folks only who want to volunteer. If there is no motivating factor (work study, independent study, honors thesis) it just does not work out well.