

I Want to do Research at Oberlin – What do I do!?

Timeline:

When you want to start working in the lab	Approximately when you should send out the first contact (Note – earlier is always better!*)
Fall Semester	Before Spring Break
Winter Term	This is one of the highest demand research times – think about it during the summer before, and optimally contact them soon after the start of the fall semester
Spring Semester	Before Fall Break
Summer	Early December (professors have to make decisions during January about applying for funding summer students)

*The sooner you contact someone, the more likely they will be able to reserve a position for you. Also, some professors want you to have one of their classes before you can start working in their lab, so take this into account when planning.

Suggestions for Contacting Labs:

1. First, you need to decide which professor's research topics interest you – go to the biology (or other majors) webpage and read professor's research descriptions. Also, wander around the biology department and look at poster and other student's current research topics posted on the bulletin board.
2. Selecting people to contact:
 - a. Select 3-5 professors whose research grabs your attention or seems at least partly related to topics that interest you. If you are extremely interested in one particular professor, contact them first and wait for a response – but keep in mind that there are a limited number of professors, so try to keep an open mind!
 - b. If you have a biology professor who you are close to (had a class or lab with, your advisor, the biology faculty liaison [currently Michael Moore]), then arrange a meeting. Ask them the current lab situations – is someone going on sabbatical soon? Is their lab already full? Who has big labs? Will spaces be opening up soon, if the current lab members are all seniors?
3. Email the people you are interested in. Include in your email:
 - a. Your biology background (AP classes, all Oberlin science classes [make sure to explicitly mention labs too], any previous research experience [where, with whom, doing what]) – send a resume if it includes relevant experiences
 - b. Why this professor's work interests you – show that you have taken the time to read about them (looking them up on research database and reading an abstract or two of theirs is a big plus!)
 - c. When you want to start working with them
 - d. Request a face-to-face meeting with them – send times that you are available over the course of the upcoming week
 - e. Make sure to say thanks!

4. What happens next
 - a. If you hear back:
 - i. and they are willing to meet with you – Yay! See step 5.
 - ii. and they say no positions are open – thank them for their consideration, and ask when a position would be open and what you could do to make yourself a better candidate in the future. Be proactive – keep in contact, talk to the students currently in their lab, consider signing up for one of their classes. Keep in mind that in the future the professor might have a spot and is very likely to remember your earlier expressed interest. Consider contacting more professors.
 - b. If you don't hear back, sign up for office hours posted on their door.
5. Before your meeting with your prospective research advisor, do more background reading on their current projects and recent publications – you want to have a semi-reasonable understanding of their work before meeting with them.
6. During the meeting, re-express your interest and desire to work with them. Ask about the most current projects going on in their lab, and what project you would probably be working on. If they offer, you should almost definitely accept, unless their research suddenly really offends you. If you are currently considering two offers, tell the professor you would like to think about it a little more, and let them know your final decision as soon as possible (within a few days).

Good luck!