How to Talk to a Professor About a Research Position

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Mandy Fehr & Brette Kristoff
Territory Acknowledgement

As we gather here today, we acknowledge we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the traditional Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

The Undergraduate Research Initiative is committed to reconciliation in our research, scholarly, and artistic work. This means always learning and relearning, supporting work that is led by Indigenous peoples and communities, and committing to work that is beneficial and accessible to Indigenous communities.
Session Outline

What is a Research Position / Student Assistantship?
1. What is Research
2. What are Research Jobs?
3. What do Student Assistants do?
4. How do I find a job as a Student Assistant?

Finding a Supervisor
1. Research
2. Prepare
3. Email
4. Meeting / Next Steps
What is a Research Position?
Defining Research

Research is defined as the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings.

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/researchers/preparing_a_grant_application/dest_definition_of_research
Signature Areas of Research

Agriculture
Food and Bioproducts for a Sustainable Future

Energy and Mineral Resources for a Sustainable Future
Developing Clean Energy Solutions and Working for Equal Access for All

Indigenous Peoples
Engagement and Scholarship

Synchrotron Sciences
Innovation in Health, Environment and Advanced Technologies

One Health
Solutions at the Animal-Human-Environment Interface

Water
Health, Equity, Access, Security and Sustainability of our Planet’s Freshwater Resources

Communities and Sustainability
Exploring the Interrelatedness of Human Communities and Natural Ecologies

Health and Wellness
Combining the Arts, Social and Hard Sciences to Make Canadians Healthier

Quantum Innovation
Creating Big Changes from Tiny Particles
Research Opportunities at the University

- Undergraduate Student
- Student Assistant (During Undergrad Degree)
- Honours Thesis
- Master’s Student

- PhD Student
- Professors (Associate, Assistant, Full Professor)
- Research Chairs
Why Consider Research Now?

- It can help you to understand the university.
- Research skills are applicable and beneficial for any career.
- Research skills are different than memorizing information.
- Can help you decide if you like research / it’s something you want to continue.
- Meet other students and professors on campus.

“I think entering into a research or scholarly project is a great idea for undergraduate students. Not only is it incredibly rewarding, but it is also a great way to learn more about a subject matter that you are interested in.”

-Jeremy Irvine 4th Year Agronomy Student

Working as a Student Assistant

- Variety of entry-level jobs for students on campus
- Research positions – working under the supervision of a professor on one of their projects or a project related to their expertise (depending on funding).
- Positions can be casual, part time, or full-time work.
- Positions are for non-union employees. Payment ranges from $14 – 16.96 /hour plus benefits.
Where to Find a Research Position

**Sometimes they are advertised!**

- USask Student Employment and Career Centre?
  [https://careerlink.usask.ca/home.htm](https://careerlink.usask.ca/home.htm)

- USask Careers website (click Staff and Faculty link)?
  [https://careers.usask.ca/](https://careers.usask.ca/)

- Your department/college announcements/website?

**Sometimes they are not….**

- Often students get research positions because of networking!
- The funding opportunities are advertised, but it is up to the student to find a faculty member to apply with.
Finding a Supervisor
Finding a Supervisor / Position

1. Do your Research
2. Prepare
3. Email
4. Meeting & Follow-ups
What are your goals / interests?

Write on a card!
Do your Research

What are your interests / what kind of position are you looking for?

Are there funding opportunities that you know of that you qualify for?

Who do you already know? Are there professors that you think you would like to work with and / or that you think would be a good mentor for you? Are there professors that you can go to for advice?

Look-up different professors in your department or in the research area that you are interested in. Pay attention to their research interests and if they include any information about supervising students. Some professors will have their own webpage for their lab.

If you have a chance, talk to other students that have worked as a student assistant about their experiences.
Let’s see if we can find a supervisor!
Prepare!

1. Update your resume / c.v. Pick a format that is best for your level of experience and the position you are applying for.

2. On your card, write out why you want to work with a particular professor or in their lab.
   - How does their specific research relate to your specific interests?
   - Are there skills that you want to build or practice?

3. On your card, write out what type of position you are looking for.
   - Is it a supervisor to apply for an NSERC USRA with?
   - Full time work as a student assistant
   - Part time or casual work as a student assistant
   - Volunteer experience?
   - Graduate Studies (such as an MA or PhD)
Start early – as this can take time!

Your approach should depend on how well you know the professor.

Think about your network and who might be able to help you to make connections.

Draft a professional e-mail.

Send!

Allow time for a response (at least 48 hours).

You may have to send a polite follow-up.
Practice!
What do you think of this email? What would you change?

Hello!

I’m a 3rd year Biology student looking for a summer research position. I’m wondering if you know of any research positions within the Department. I am wanting to apply for NSERC.

Sincerely,
Anita
Dear Professor,

How are you? I am a student in your BIO 210 class. I love science and have a passion for research. I am preparing to apply for NSERC USRA funding, and I am wondering if you would be interested in being my supervisor.

I have attached a copy of my resume. Let me know if you need anything else.

Thanks in advance!

Anita Career
3rd Biology Student
University of Saskatchewan
306.123.4567
Dear Professor Gray,

How are you? I am a student in your BIO 317 Fundamentals of Animal Physiology class and was very interested to learn about the research you do at Gray Lab, your research on pesticides and the impact on insect behavior.

I am interested in applying for NSERC USRA for summer 2024 and continuing to build my research skills in this area of study. I was wondering if you are accepting new student assistants in your lab and if you might be interested in meeting with to discuss potentially being my research supervisor.

Would you have time in the next few weeks to meet before the NSERC deadline at the end of January?

Attached is a copy of my updated resume for you to review.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Anita Career
3rd Biology Student
University of Saskatchewan
306.123.4567
Email Template

Subject Line:
Dear/Hello [Insert Professors Name],

Intro/Context: Who are you and why are you emailing?

The why: Why are you emailing this specific professor? Why are you interested in working with this professor? What skills/experiences would you bring and / or want to develop.

The ask: Be direct about what you are interested in (for example a supervisor for an NSERC USRA), but ask for a meeting as a next step.

Thanks in advance/Thank you for your time.

Salutation/Signature: Sincerely/All the best, [Your Name]

Subject Line:
Hello Dr. Nye,

I am a student … [the who]

I am interested in developing my skills as a researcher… [the why]

Would you be available to meet to briefly discuss my potential candidacy as a research assistant.. [the ask]

Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,
[Your Name/Signature]
2nd year Biology Student
University of Saskatchewan
306.123.4567
Using your USask Email

- Always use your NSID@usask.ca
  - This shows you are legit! And not a scammer!!
- You can set up an alias or forwarding email (see next slide)
- Consider adding an email signature:

  Anita Career
  3rd year Sociology Student
  University of Saskatchewan
  306-123-4567
I acknowledge that the University of Saskatchewan is situated on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. I affirm my commitment and responsibility as a settler to amplify indigenous ways of knowing and access to engineering in my work.

Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action
Next Steps
Email professor!

- Not taking new students
  - Can ask to suggest other profs
    - Look for other professors

- No reply (at least 2 business days)
  - Send a polite follow-up

- They are interested in meeting!
  - Prepare! practice, professional
  - Meet! Be honest, confident, and direct.

- They don't offer you a position
- They offer you a position!

Depending on award.
Make a Decision

- Think about if the position is a good fit for you. Balance that with knowing that sometimes you need to start somewhere to get your foot in the door.
- How can we tell the difference between red-flags and being nervous about something new / different?
Next Steps

- Keep applying for jobs!
- Respectful persistence is important. Networking is about the long game.
- If you aren’t successful, this year – try again next year.
- Ask for feedback.
Additional Links and Resources

How to Talk to a Professor
How to Approach Supervisor.pdf (usask.ca)
How to Approach a Professor (for a research position) (youtube.com)

SURE Resources
Undergraduate Research Initiative - USask - YouTube

NSERC USRA Process for 2024
NSERC USRAs - Office of the Vice President Research - Research | University of Saskatchewan (usask.ca)
CAREER SERVICES
As a student or alumni, Career Services is here to help with every step in your career journey!

YOUR CAREER PATH STARTS HERE

USASK.CA/CAREERSERVICES

University of Saskatchewan
Undergraduate Research Initiative

Questions? Send an email!

Mandy Fehr
Coordinator, Undergraduate Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Work

Undergraduate.research@usask.ca

See the Undergraduate Research Initiative webpage for more resources