

Finding an Undergraduate Research Position

Many PLB undergraduate research opportunities are often shared via email. Students can also contact faculty about volunteer research opportunities. Faculty typically want students to commit to a minimum of 10 hours a week and prefer students who will make a long-term commitment to the lab. Volunteer positions sometimes lead to paid positions.

Review the faculty directory at <https://plantbiology.natsci.msu.edu/>. Click on the professor's name for their Contact page and scroll down to the "Research" section. Some professors have a separate lab webpage listed where they go into more detail about their research. Some faculty even list open positions on their individual websites. If you are looking for a volunteer position, find several faculty members whose research interests you. You can also check research pages for faculty in other departments, such as Microbiology; Horticulture; Plant, Soil, and Microbial Sciences; Pharmacology & Toxicology; Integrative Biology, and Biosystems Engineering.

After reviewing the faculty research pages, send out inquiry emails to the faculty members of interest. *You need to be professional! Make sure that you proofread your email for spelling and grammatical errors.*

1. Include a greeting: Dear Dr. _____,
2. Introduce yourself and let them know you are looking for undergraduate research opportunities or applying for a position in the lab.
3. It's important to tailor each email to the specific lab.
 - a. Talk about why you are interested in the professor's research. In addition to reviewing the faculty member's research pages, read one or more of their journal articles (check Publications tab on the Contact page). Look for articles where the professor is listed as the first or last author. The last author in science articles is usually the Principal Investigator (PI) – the head of the research lab.
4. Talk about what you can contribute to the lab. What are your strengths?
5. Thank the professor for their consideration.
6. Use a signature at the bottom of your email, including your name, major, email, and phone.
7. Attach a resume or CV*if it is requested.
 - a. Be sure to visit Career Services to get your resume polished before you send it. Sign up for an appointment: <http://careernetwork.msu.edu/> (Contact, Appointments)

*CV stands for curriculum vitae. They are used in academics and are longer than a resume. They include additional headings such as research interests, publications, presentations, and courses taught. A resume will be fine for applying for lab positions.

It takes persistence to find a position! Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back. Many students are looking for research positions, and faculty members don't always have time to respond to all inquiries.

Example email:

Example 1:

Hello Dr. X,

My name is [your name] and I am a [your year] in the Plant Biology major program. I am looking to get into research and have specific interests in [A, B, and C] and noticed your research overlaps with these. I wanted to reach out to you to see if you had any openings for help in your work (research or lab) and would love to set up a time to meet with you to discuss it further. I have experience with [A, B, and C] and feel like I could be an asset in this project because of my background. I really appreciate your time and please let me know if there are any other questions I can answer.

Thank you for your consideration. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.