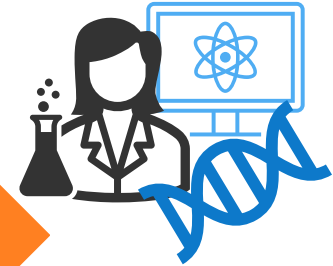


How to find and join a lab



Step 1

Find a lab that excites you!

Joining a lab is a significant time commitment; find a lab with at least 2-3 projects you would want to learn more about before contacting anyone

How to find a lab:

- Think about the classes you've enjoyed the most. What topics grabbed you? If you met with a professor even a couple of times and felt a connection to their work, this is a great place to start
- If you haven't made a connection or can't decide on a topic, that's ok! **VISIT THE DEPARTMENT'S WEBSITE** (e.g. mcdb.ucsb.edu) and look through the list of professors; often you can filter this list by topic, like neuroscience
- Pick 2-5 labs you would be interested in pursuing (not everyone will be in need of a research assistant, so look for backups!)

Then...

Step 2

Learn more about the lab

Most labs have a lab website, although not all are up to date

What to look for:

- Research descriptions – read about current work being done by the lab
- Recent publications – skim through (no need to read in detail) to learn about the kinds of questions being asked and the methods used to ask them. Think about the kinds of skills you would want to learn
- Lab members – get a feel for how many grad students, postdocs, and other members there are. **MOST OFTEN YOU WILL BE WORKING UNDER A GRADUATE STUDENT** or postdoc mentor; read through the description of each person's work if available

Step 3

Contact the PI or a grad student

Graduate students are usually easier to get in touch with than PIs; because you will likely work with a graduate student, this is a good place to start.

Keep your email brief; highlight your enthusiasm for their project as well as your timeline to graduation and availability. Remember that training an undergrad is also a time investment – demonstrating your excitement and level of commitment is key

*Keep in mind that some academics take longer than others to respond to email; some may not respond at all (this is due to the volume of emails they receive, not necessarily lack of interest). *Its ok to follow up after 3-4 days if you don't hear back from someone.*

If you can, talk to someone in person rather than via email.

Step 4

Make the most of your lab experience!

Don't be discouraged if you aren't accepted into labs right away; opportunities come and go, so be persistent and proactive.

The earlier you start the better; however, you can still have a great research experience if you join a lab as a junior or senior

Ask your professor about funding opportunities and opportunities to present your research (like the undergraduate research colloquium)

Participate in lab meetings and don't be afraid to lead your own work!

Lab training isn't just about learning new techniques; its about learning how to be a scientist! Read the literature, form your own hypotheses, and think about developing your own projects When in doubt, ask your mentor for help