

Informational Page: Month 1 - Undergraduate Research (Part 1)

Importance of research as a pre-med student

Research is the backbone of evidence-based medicine. Research can teach you an immense number of translational skills, such as complex problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, tenacity, communication, adaptability, and how to overcome failure - all of which are great aspects to talk about in a personal statement or interview or just to grow as an individual.

Is it required that I join research?

Long story short, you do NOT need to join research to apply to medical school. While it may be in your best interest to try it at some point, there is nothing wrong with quitting if you do not enjoy it. It is more valuable to pursue the opportunities you are passionate about, rather than sticking with something only because you believe it will “look good” on an application. Madeline recommends trying research if you are able to, and after 2-3 months decide if it is something you are truly interested in. If you realize you do not enjoy it, quit and invest your time and energy in an activity you enjoy and can passionately talk about. It is crucial that if you are investing a lot of time into research, to be able to understand and talk about why you are passionate about it.

What kind of research can I get involved in?

As an undergraduate student, you can get involved in a variety of research labs including public health, biology, chemistry, engineering, plant sciences, humanities, or any other topic of your choosing. It is important to pursue research you are interested in to fuel your motivation, especially because research can be extremely demanding.

When choosing a lab, a great way to get started is to ask course teaching assistants and professors about their research. If you already have an idea of a research topic, take a look at the faculty in a specific department at your college or neighboring colleges. This is also a great way to get an idea of the areas of research you can get involved in. Most colleges have department websites including professor bios that explain the research they are involved in.

How do I get involved in research?

The key to successfully reaching out to a principal investigator (PI) is to be enthusiastic and professional. If you have the opportunity, express your interest in the PI's research one-on-one. An email to the PI should be kept concise with a maximum of 1-2 paragraphs.

A typical research email will include the following:

- Introducing yourself and your background
- How you were introduced to the PI's research
- Why you are interested in the PI's research
- Key characteristics as to why you would be successful in the PI's lab
- Referencing any previous research experience if applicable
- Thanking the PI for their consideration while reinforcing your desire to join the lab