



How To Find A Mentor

If you are interested in participating in research and/or creative endeavors within your discipline, it will be important for you to identify a faculty member in which you will work with on the project. All student research is faculty mentored. The relationship you create with this faculty member may be one of the most important ones to your academic career. Therefore, it's important to treat the search for a mentor like that of a job search. This means doing some homework and preparing for the meeting like you would an interview. Below are some steps you can follow to begin this process.

The **Office of Student Research** can assist you in this process.

- Visit our website (<http://osr.appstate.edu/>) for a list of research and/or creative opportunities posted by faculty or attend one of our workshops that can assist in this process.
- Email us at osr@appstate.edu.
- Attend our [Annual Celebration of Research and Creative Endeavors](#) held each spring. At this event you can see first-hand the types of activities students around campus participate in with regards to student research and creative endeavors.

Steps in Finding a Faculty Mentor

1. Determine what it is you are interested in further investigating.
 - a. Begin by making a list of subjects or courses in which you found interesting. Even use your textbook or course materials to see more in depth ideas.
 - b. The topic does not have to be something in your major, it may be anything, but it should at least be interesting to you.
2. Find out the research interests of Faculty.
 - a. Search the Department websites.
 - i. Scan the website for descriptions of Faculty members research interests, projects, and publications/presentations.
 - ii. Explore the website to see if there are individual or group Labs managed by Faculty members. Labs in which faculty perform much of their research often form Lab Groups which may consist of either undergraduates and/or graduate students. For example in the Department of Physics and Astronomy there is the BiyOSef Lab,

AppalAIR, and Terrestrial Surfaces Processes Laboratory which each have their own website.

- b. If there is a class you really enjoy, ask the Faculty member who teaches the class what their research interests are - chances are you may find their research area interesting as many faculty teach courses in their area of interest.
- c. Have a discussion with your major Advisor or the Department Chair or Program Director and see if they can help find a faculty member who is doing research on something that interests you.
- d. Talk with some upperclassmen or graduate students to find out if they have worked with faculty.
- e. Take an Introduction course in your desired field of study. In many cases these courses discuss the many areas associated with your major.

Note: Be sure that your research interests match the faculty's research interest. Many faculty have a list of projects they are working on as well as future projects. In most cases, they have many ideas and need help on further developing their ideas.

3. Contact the Faculty member(s) you are interested in working.
 - a. Begin with an email to introduce yourself and ask for an appointment to meet with them regarding any research opportunities that may be available.
 - b. The email should be formal, as if you were writing a cover letter. You should consider addressing the following information:
 - i. Explain who you are including information such as: major, year in school, and any relevant completed or current coursework.
 - ii. Provide the purpose of the email, including when you would like to get started on working on a project with them.
 - iii. Discuss what you know about their research (e.g., a topic from a recent lecture, an abstract or presentation you attended, a description on their website, a highlight shown on the campus news)
 - iv. Explain how your interests align with their research. In other words, why are you interested in working with this faculty member?
 - v. What you are looking for (e.g., are you just starting out in this major, are you an Honors student, are you interested in just helping or doing your own research?)
4. Finish the email with a request to meet with them. Keep the message relatively short but to the point.
 - a. Depending on the timing of the email, faculty may take a little while to respond. If you do not hear back within 2 weeks, draft a second email.
 - b. Do not get frustrated if a faculty member cannot work with you at this time. Ask them if they have time in the following summer or semester. Occasionally they may even know of another faculty member in need of assistance and can direct you to someone else. Be patient.

- c. A good impression and an appreciative student can often lead to another faculty member or thought of when something else falls through. If you are not able to work with this faculty member, be sure to thank them for their time.
5. Meet face to face with the faculty member.
- a. Prepare for this meeting as if it were an interview. This is really important if you have never met this faculty member before.
 - b. Be open about your time commitment and anticipated graduation date.
 - c. You may want to discuss courses you have taken, reasons why you are interested in this area, what your career goals are, when you intend to graduate, are you available in the summer?
 - d. Be able to articulate what skills you may bring to the faculty member.
 - e. Be willing to understand that summer is often a really great time to work one on one with faculty and be sure to address this with them
 - f. Ask the Faculty member questions such as:
 - i. Have they worked with students before, undergraduate or graduate?
 - ii. How many students do they typically work with during the course of a semester or year?
 - iii. What are their expectations of students working with them on projects?
 - iv. What are some examples of things a student would be involved?
 - v. Do students have the opportunity to develop their own project?
 - vi. Is there opportunity to travel and present at conferences?
6. Send an email thanking the faculty member for their time.
- a. This is important as it shows that you understand faculty's time is valuable and that you are appreciative of their interests in you.

It is never too late or too early to get started with this process!