

Getting Quality Research Experience



GRADUATE STUDENT FACILITATORS:
SHANNON BLAKEY, M.S.
KATERINA DUDLEY, M.A.

FACULTY FACILITATOR:
DR. KAREN GIL

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Importance of Research Experience



- **Large component of graduate school is research**
 - Shows you have the foundational research skills needed for graduate school
 - Research informs clinical work
- **Sets you apart from other applicants**
- **Gives you hands-on experience**
 - Learn from other researchers (e.g., graduate students, project coordinators, PIs, clinicians, etc.)
 - Learn what aspects you do or don't like about research

What do faculty members value about research experience?

Examples of Key Research Experiences



- Database management
 - Scoring, entering data
- Study recruitment
- Testing or working directly with participants
- IRB management
- Data analysis
- Presentation of results at conference
- Publications

Progression of Research Experience



- **Undergraduate**

- Data entry
- Participant recruitment
- Running of participants
- Data analysis
- Honors thesis
 - ✦ What is this?
 - ✦ How important is an honors thesis?

- **Post-baccalaureate**

- Research assistant
- Research coordinator/ Project Coordinator

How to Find Research Opportunities



- Psychology Department listservs/website
- Faculty/lab websites
- Ask professors, graduate students, or TAs if they know of any openings/opportunities
- Ask a guest lecturer whose research interests you
- Inform your advisor that you want “hands on” research experience
- Check your Undergraduate Research Board’s openings
 - Fliers may be posted in department around the time of course registration
- Ask others how they got involved in research!

What Do Faculty Seek in a Research Assistant?



- Interest in area of research and/or clinical work
- Organizational skills
 - Often managing and organizing many tasks, knowing status of different projects, etc.
- Ability to learn quickly
- Work effectively in groups
- Awareness of research ethics and professionalism
- Statistics knowledge
 - Ability to work with programs such as Excel, SPSS, R

Pursuing Research Opportunities



- How to write an email of inquiry
 - Use professional language throughout your email
 - ✦ Avoid “Hey” or other informal language
 - ✦ Use proper salutation (e.g., “Dear Dr. _____”)
 - If appropriate, mention where you heard of the opening for a research assistant
 - ✦ Was it from a flier? A TA? Professor?
 - Indicate you are familiar with the research and why interested in it
 - Include a copy of your CV or resume
 - If they invite you to interview, clarify any confusion/unknowns
 - ✦ How long will they need a research assistant?
 - ✦ Is the position for credit? Volunteer?
 - ✦ Time commitment

How do faculty like to be approached?

Making the Most of the RA Position



- **Volunteer for different responsibilities**
 - The more responsibility the more opportunity to learn!
 - No task is too small or menial (data entry example)
- **Stand Out**
 - How can a RA stand out to faculty?
 - ✦ What are the differences between YOU and others?
 - ✦ How are YOU seen and remembered by professors?
- **Build relationships with faculty and grad students**
 - How reliable are YOU?
 - How dependable are YOU?

How do faculty build relationships with RAs?

Participating in Independent Research



- Examples of independent research
 - Honors thesis
 - Independent research project
- Find an advisor
- Identify a research question of interest
- Determine whether you will have the time to commit

What do faculty think about independent research?

Participating in Independent Research



- But my school doesn't offer the research I am interested in...
 - What to do?
- Research Resources
 - University programs that will help you gain research experience
 - ✦ [McNair Program](#)
 - Federal TRIP program funded at 151 US universities to prepare undergrad for PhD programs
 - ✦ [SROP](#)—summer research opportunities
 - At Big Ten Academic Alliance Universities
 - ✦ MURF—minority undergraduate research fellowships
 - How do I find these?
 - ✦ Check your university website
 - ✦ Google!
 - ✦ Make phone calls
 - ✦ Ask your advisor

Post-Baccalaureate Research Opportunities



- **Pros**

- Opportunity to solidify your research interests
- Gain additional research experience and knowledge
- Gain valuable connections via networking
- “Time on” instead of “time off”
 - ✦ These are your twenties!

- **Cons**

- Will be out of the “school experience” for 1+ years

What do faculty think of post-baccalaureate research?

Post-Baccalaureate Research Opportunities



- Use your connections!
- Inform your undergraduate research mentor (or another connection you have) that you are interested in a post-bac opportunity
 - Might have a post-bac position for you or know someone who does.
- “Cold email” professors
 - Check NIH RePORTER to see who has funding and what projects may be of interest to you:
<http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm>
- Check human resources websites and other job finding websites
 - Universities, hospitals, etc.

Other Post-Baccalaureate Options



- Entering a terminal Masters program
- Other clinically relevant activities
- Bottom line: There is no “right” path to graduate school, but gaining **valuable research experience** is an important part of all paths.

Questions?



- Faculty
 - Dr. Karen Gil: kgil@email.unc.edu
- Graduate Students
 - Shannon Blakey, M.S.: sblakey@email.unc.edu
 - Katerina Dudley, M.A.: kmdudley@email.unc.edu