

Undergraduate Research in Communication

Why should you conduct research as an undergraduate student?¹

- Build your resume – research in the discipline is a great way to demonstrate that your knowledge goes beyond what is learned in the classroom.
- Research provides valuable exposure to the discipline and can help you determine whether a specific area of interest is meant for you.
- Get a jump start on graduate school – starting graduate school with research experience gives you the unique opportunity to build a scholarly body of work that demonstrates depth of knowledge in the field.
- Learn how to publicly advocate for the discipline and convey your expertise – most research involves presenting your work and gives you valuable practice explaining your research to other scholars or potential employers.

How to get started

- “Look for questions, not subjects”² – research is often a multi-disciplinary process so don’t hesitate to explore all the facets of communication (e.g. Applied Communication, Health Communication, Organizational Communication, Political Communication, Public Relations, etc.).
- Talk with your advisor – many advisors have been in your position and have experience mentoring scholars in your discipline so don’t hesitate to ask for help and guidance.
- Read, Read, Read – scholarly articles rarely answer all the questions explored in research. Reading the research of others is a great way to find questions left unanswered in the discipline.

How to devote time to research³

- Take an independent study course – a course where you and an advisor lay out a research project to be completed for credit.
- Take a capstone or research methods course – these courses often culminate in research projects.
- Complete an honors thesis – some schools offer honors thesis programs that give structure and deadlines to your research project.
- Volunteer or find a job supporting a professor’s research – some institutions even offer summer research positions.

Submit your work for publication and presentation

- Many journals and conferences have opportunities specifically for undergraduate research – ask your professor about any organizations or journals you should look into.
- Research any unique requirements set by journals or conferences – preparing your research for submission will be a lot easier if you know these requirements at the outset!
- Publishing in a journal or presenting at a national or regional conference demonstrates the quality of your research.

How to approach professors

- Connect and build relationships with your professors - showing up to a professor’s office unannounced or asking for a research position right away is unlikely to prove successful.
- “Reach out with confidence”² – students are an integral part of the scholarly community so don’t hesitate to email a professor directly to express your interest in their work.
- Present well, but don’t go overboard – inquiring about research opportunities is different than a job interview. Dress nicely, bring your resume if you have one, and bring samples of any completed research. Be prepared for a conversation about your interest in the field rather than an interview about work experience.

1 — <https://www.ucdavis.edu/majors/blog/exploring-options/reasons-why-undergraduates-should-do-research>

2 — <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00871-x>

3 — <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2014/01/research-undergraduate>



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