Summer Research Opportunities

Advice for MS1 Students

There are many outstanding opportunities for medical students to participate in research experiences ranging from biomedical to public health research through UAB and other agencies and institutions. The summer break between the first and second years is a great time to participate in these opportunities and many are designed for students who have completed their first year of medical school and provide a fellowship or stipend. In addition, these experiences afford students the chance to explore career opportunities available to physicians as well as providing an effective mechanism to begin to examine an area of interest for the Scholarly Activity. Research done during the summer can be incorporated into your scholarly activity project and we encourage you to do so. Once you have decided that you want to pursue research during the summer break between the MS1 and MS2 years, here are some suggestions on how to find a faculty mentor and a research project.

Start Planning Early: During the fall, begin to think about what areas of research are of interest to you and start to identify potential faculty mentors. Also explore the list of short term research opportunities and fellowships (UAB and external) on the Medical Student Research & Scholarly Activity web site: http://medicine.uab.edu/education/57300/. Most external fellowships have deadlines in January and February. However, some, such as AOA, have December deadlines. By the end of February, you should have finalized your plans. If you wait until spring to begin to decide what to do, your opportunities will be limited and you may have missed the opportunity to receive funding. So, start planning early and be proactive in seeking advice. We want you to have an interesting and productive experience.

Identifying Potential Faculty Mentors: Once you have narrowed your area(s) of research interest, you can begin to seek advice in identifying potential faculty with whom you may be interested in working. The following individuals can provide assistance:

- Dr. Robin Lorenz: Director, UAB NIH Short Term T35 Training Grant (rlorenz@uab.edu)
- Dr. Tim Garvey, Director, UAB Diabetes Research and Training Center NIH Funded Summer Research Fellowships (garveyt@uab.edu)
- Dr. Anapum Agarwal, Director, O’Brien Kidney Center NIH Funded Summer Research Fellowships (agarwal@uab.edu)
- Dr. Peter Smith: Director, Scholarly Activity (prsmith@uab.edu)
- Dr. John Waterbor: Director, NIH CaRES (Cancer) Training Grant (h2obor@uab.edu)

In addition, you can ask your module directors and lecturers, contact Department Chairs, Division Directors, and Center Directors for their suggestions, and seek the advice of more senior students or other MS1 students who have done research at UAB. You may find looking at the Medical Student Research Day abstracts from previous years http://medicine.uab.edu/education/57307/ helpful. Don’t forget to search PubMed for publications from the suggested faculty to confirm that their research is of interest to you.

Contacting Potential Faculty Mentors: Once you have identified faculty with whom you are interested in working, contact them directly via e-mail or phone. Tell them about your interest in their research and ask if they would be willing to have a medical student work with them for 8-10 weeks during June and July. If they express interest, ask to meet with them to discuss potential research projects. If they are unable to accept a student, ask if there are additional faculty whom they can recommend. Remember faculty members are very busy so you will need to be proactive. If you do not get a response to your first attempt, be persistent and e-mail or phone the faculty member again. However, if you do not get a response after several attempts, go ahead and contact other faculty who you are interested in working with.
Funding for Summer Research: Medical students can receive stipends (fellowships) for participating in summer research. Look at the Medical Student Research web pages for short term research and fellowship opportunities that are awarded through UAB and external (non UAB) sources: http://medicine.uab.edu/education/57300/.

Stipends for summer research can be awarded through UAB and external sources, as research done between the MS1 and MS2 years is not a requirement for your MD degree. This is in contrast to research performed during the scholarly activity as that is a requirement for your degree. Remember that although fellowships are prestigious, they are also competitive, so it is good idea for you to have an alternative plan for funding. As you meet with faculty members, discuss funding opportunities that are available.

Meeting with Faculty: When you meet with a faculty member to discuss possible research projects, explore whether he/she would be a good mentor for you. Do you feel at ease with this individual? How much time will he or she be able to devote to you? Will he or she be accessible during the summer? Will other individuals be available (e.g., graduate students, postdocs, or fellows) who can assist you when needed? Has the faculty member mentored other medical students? It is also important that you will have a well-defined project to ensure a productive summer. Talk with the faculty member about what your role will be in the process of developing the project. If you are planning on continuing the research as your scholarly project, you will want to have the opportunity for the project to evolve along a line that interests you. Seek advice from other students who may have worked with this faculty member in previous years.

Remember that you will want to work with a faculty member who is responsive, available, and, most importantly, is committed to serving as your mentor. Additional information the roles of the mentor and how to enhance the mentor-mentee relationship can be found on the Medical Student Research and Scholarly Activity web pages: http://medicine.uab.edu/education/57572/ and http://medicine.uab.edu/education/57581/

Your Research Project: Once you have found a mentor and a project, schedule additional meetings to plan the actual research that you will conduct over the 8-10 week summer period. If you will be applying for summer funding through the NIH T35 short term training grant, O’Brien Kidney Center or the Diabetes Research and Training Center, you and your mentor will need to develop a brief research proposal which is submitted with your application. This also applies to some external fellowships. As you develop the research proposal, we encourage you think about your summer research as providing the basis for your scholarly project.

We hope that you will take the opportunity to explore the exciting opportunities that are available for you to participate in research during medical school. For further information or assistance, please contact the Office of Scholarly Activity, VH 227:

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