

Interviewing Potential Faculty Mentors for UBRP

Preparation:

- Do some **self-reflection**: What area(s) of biology are you most interested in? What kind of research is most interesting to you (bench work, computational research, field work, etc.)? Do you think you would be interested in working with a smaller lab, or a bigger one, or is it important to you that the lab has other undergraduates or not?
- **Review lots of information on the faculty in whom you are interested**, including reading carefully through their UArizona and/or laboratory website as well as at least two of their most recent publications. You should be able to articulate the “big picture” of what the lab does, as well as identify current initiatives in their lab and what model organism or field sites the group uses.
- Think about **what aspect of the research being conducted is highly interesting** to you and how it fits in with your scientific, major, or career interests.

Initial e-mail contact:

- Remember, you only have one chance to make a good first impression! First, **use the proper salutation**: “*Dear Dr. (last name)*”. DO NOT start your e-mail with just “Hello!” or “Dear (first name).”
- Include **information on yourself**, including the fact that you have been accepted into UBRP, your major, class standing, your future career goals and how your research interests plays into your academic and career goals, etc.)
- **Be specific in describing why you are writing**. Talk about why this person’s lab is of particular interest to you and describe a specific project or research initiative that you have found interesting. Keep in mind that your faculty mentor will be paying 50% of your salary this summer (thousands of dollars!) and consequently they are heavily invested in finding the right student. Consider what you can share with them to help them determine if you are the right fit for them: your academic background, interest in their research, any prior research experience, commitment to stay in the lab for a least a year, general politeness and gratitude for the opportunity to learn, etc.
- Finally, ask faculty if they might be willing to **interview** you (preferably in person) for consideration to join their lab, and if so, their availability to meet. End your e-mail with a proper valediction, such as “Sincerely, (your first and last name)”.
- **DO NOT send the same generic message** to all of your faculty mentors of interest... this is a good way to show you have not done enough background research. At best, your message will be ignored; at worst, you will offend the mentors you are writing by wasting their time (or convince them that you are a person who does not pay attention to detail or does not think preparation is important).

Interviewing:

- **Be ready to provide information about yourself** (your major, what classes you have taken, what techniques you know, why you are interested in this lab and gaining research experience, etc.), as well as to talk about the research currently being conducted by the faculty and their group (the overarching goals of the lab, any specific projects you are particularly interested, recent publications, etc.). While not required, if you have a current resume, it may be helpful to bring a hard copy and ask if they would like to have it, or offer to send them an electronic copy.
- **Have questions ready** to ask the mentor. Examples include:
 - *The research:* What project(s) do you have in mind for undergraduates joining your lab? What kinds of techniques do you use in your group? What necessary training will I need? Will I be keeping a lab notebook? What schedule would I be expected to have? Could you give me a tour of your lab? How can I best prepare for joining your group?
 - *People:* Besides the faculty mentor/ principal investigator, who are the key individuals in the lab? Are there other undergraduates in the lab? If you join the lab, who would you be spending significant time with?
 - *Staying connected with the lab:* Are there specific tools used for lab communication (Slack, Trello, e-mail, etc.)? What standing lab meetings, individual meetings with the PI, journal clubs and/or other meetings I would be expected to participate in?
 - Add your own questions, too!
- **As with any interview, make sure to dress appropriately, be on time, and pay attention to your eye contact and body language.** When the interview ends, be sure to thank the faculty mentor for their time and discuss exactly how you will follow up (for example: “I’m interviewing with several labs this week, but I hope to make a decision by next week and will e-mail you by next Wednesday”).

Following Up After the Interview:

- **Keep track of the statuses of all of your interviews**, including who you’ve met with, what you think, notes on any additional information you may need to ask or provide, etc. An Excel spreadsheet might be helpful for this.
- **Make sure you follow up with each faculty mentor you interview with.**
 - If they offer you a position and you choose not to join their lab, e-mail them to 1) thank them for taking time out of their busy schedule to meet with you, and 2) inform them that you will be joining a different lab, but that you greatly appreciated meeting with them and learning more about their research.
 - If you choose to accept a position, inform the mentor of your decision as quickly as possible and ask what your next steps are. (Should you meet to decide on a start date and discuss a project, sign up for training, etc.?)
- Work with your new mentor to complete the UBRP Commitment Form and e-mail it to Jennifer at cubeta@arizona.edu by the deadline.