

Summer Research: Exploring Careers, Strengthening Portfolios

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So you graduated high, stressed over the standardized tests, agonized about College applications, and finally arrived at Lake Forest College. You've chosen a major in the sciences and mapped out your curriculum accordingly. Now what? Well an education doesn't consist merely of classes and labs. Now it's time to consider internships and/or summer research fellowships. That's right, real scientific research!

Why should you participate in an internship or research fellowship? Not only will you gain invaluable experience in study design, laboratory techniques, and be exposed to the forefront of current scientific discoveries. You will also meet a variety of individuals in a number of different positions in the field of biological science, learn what they do, and establish a relationship with people who can write you wonderful recommendations for graduate school. And speaking of graduate school, applicants with prior research experience are looked upon very favorably. Also, an internship at an institution gives you a foot in the door if you decide to apply there for graduate school. And you can do all of this while getting paid more than you would at your summer job at the mall back home.



But what if you are unsure of where your specific interests lie? Internships and summer research fellowships are also a great way to explore the biological sciences; this is especially important for individuals at a small liberal arts school like LFC where the Biology Department is too small to support different divisions or of specialized degrees. Internships will also

foster thinking about your future and supply you with an exact understanding of a specific discipline. Don't knock it before you try it.

Why not do research at LFC? Research at LFC, whether during the academic year or over the summer, offers a number of great opportunities. You can get to know a professor on a deeper level, establish a project you might carry through several semesters and/or summers, and live on campus for little to nothing. But research at a different institution allows you to experience a different environment, such as a graduate lab at a large university like Northwestern or the University of Chicago or a professional research lab at an independent institution like the Chicago Botanic Garden. This can help develop a sense of where you fit in and where you plan to end up.



So how do you find/apply for an internship/fellowship? Decide what excites you; what particular aspects of the biological sciences or specific topics interest you? Go to your advisor; tell them you are considering pursuing a summer research fellowship and they will most likely point you in the right direction. Apply to at least three places and send a resume (even if they don't ask for one). Have your advisor look over your resume and letter of intent. These programs are looking for a specific kind of student as they would ultimately like to recruit them after graduation.

Remember, there is life after college. You either have to get a job or go to graduate school. Either way, you won't be the only applicant, so you need to stand out. The institutions to which you will apply are looking for individuals with motivation and experience, individuals that have pursued their interests and demonstrated their skills and knowledge. Internships and summer research fellowships provide you with research experience and allow you a glimpse into a field of study so that you can make more informed decisions about your future.

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