



3 hours to the
Research Project of your Dreams

What is Project Lever?

Alex is a college sophomore who wants to do research but doesn't know where to start.

*Where does she find a mentor?
What are previously completed student projects?
What fellowships and grants are available to her?*

Project Lever helps students connect with faculty.

Follow these three steps to find your best faculty members!

1.

List 10 faculty members

Find at least ten faculty members working in your field. Learn as much as you can about them. Write it down!

2.

Prepare your pitch

Think what courses you took; what research you might have done before. Prepare your resume!

3.

Send these emails!

Send detailed, personal pitch to 10 faculty members. 5 will not respond, 3 will say no, but 2 will email back. Yay!

1. List 10 Faculty Members

“Always start with your interests”, says Victoria Munro, undergraduate research coordinator at the University of Minnesota. Even if they are broad, it is okay for now. Do you know if you are interested in genomics? Public health? Quantum physics? Game on.

Look, you don’t have to know the exact area of research. You don’t really have to know anything – you are just starting out! Just read through their biographies on Project Lever, and see what makes you excited. Let’s try to pick at least three departments (and it can be anything!) to narrow down your search.

“Don’t worry – you don’t have to know the exact area of research.”

Start by searching faculty biographies on the first department. Look through the faculty biographies; check out the courses that they taught; see if they advised any students before. If you find someone interesting, write their name down.

Don’t feel like you have to lock down your exact match and stick with them forever after. You’re just shopping for faculty members! Let’s make a list of at least 10 people. You want to feel like you have some options.

Bennett McIntosh, a senior at Princeton University, knew he wanted to do genomics. He started by listing ten faculty members at various life sciences departments at Princeton. When he sent out his emails, five faculty members did not get back to him at all; three faculty said they didn’t take freshmen, but guess what – the other two welcomed him into his lab! Moral of the story: create some options for yourself. Thank me later.

Action Steps:

1. Look through faculty members at three departments (50 minutes)
2. Write down 10 names of faculty members (10 minutes)

2. Prepare your pitch

Now that you have your list of faculty members, you must be excited to email them right away!!

Guess what, that's what everybody is doing. Faculty members get 5-10 unqualified pitches per day, and that's why they have to ignore or say no! However, you are NOT going to be ignored, my friend! Let us prepare. You will craft a personalized message that will get you noticed.

Don't tell me you aren't interesting; you got into this college, after all. What are some of the things that you did earlier that can be helpful to this faculty member? Examples include:

- You took their class (or a class in the field);
- You did some research in high school;
- You speak the language of the country where they do research.

“Let's actually craft the message about you that will make you interesting to the faculty member.”

Don't worry if you don't have much experience. In his freshman year, Alex Graves at Notre Dame applied to a Research Experience for Undergraduates program in his hometown. He worked with a professor for 10 weeks, doing cancer care research. After completing that program, Alex became a much more attractive candidate to faculty members at Notre Dame, and successfully landed a project the following fall.



Action Steps:

1. Write down three projects that are relevant to them (30 minutes)
2. Put them in the form of resume (30 minutes)

3. Send the Emails

Ready to unleash your inner research hero??

I mean, let's finally email these faculty members. In order to figure out how to do that best, I spoke with Prof. Yan Luo, who does Computer Science at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and Prof. Thomas Little, who does research in Electrical Engineering at Boston University.

"Don't be hesitant to ask," Professor Luo started. Professors don't knock on the student's door; it's the job of the student to make themselves known. Professors typically want students of all years to approach them for research opportunities, not necessarily students that they are already familiar with. Professor Luo, for example, has a number of funded projects with PhD, master, and undergrad students. You'd be surprised at the number of options that are available if you go searching.

"We, as faculty, work to help students become better academics and people," confirmed Dean Little, Associate Dean at Boston University. Learning to approach faculty members is a hugely useful skill that transfers into the students' future career. The process of learning starts not in the research lab, but at the moment of outreach. Bottom-line: professors want to help. Just ask.

"Just Ask. You'd be surprised at the number of options that are available."

When you email faculty members, remember that you want to craft your message to target them as closely as possible. Especially if you don't have tons of research experience for your resume, beef up your cover letter. Tell them you read their papers; you came to their classes; you know what's going up in their labs. Imagination, after all, is more important than knowledge. Go and imagine your way to success!

Action Steps:

1. Craft the email mentioning why you are perfect (50 minutes)
2. Hit Send!! (1 minute x 10 times)

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Svetlana Dotsenko
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GET UPDATES FROM SVETLANA DOTSENKO



Founder of ProjectLever, online platform that helps students start research projects faster. Svetlana is passionate about public health, health innovation, and research, having worked with Partners in Health, World Health Organization, Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA, and Harvard University in the past. She has been playing the piano since she was 4 years old. Russian-born, Bostonian for now, Berliner in in heart.

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Everyone Has a Cool Research Project. How Do I Get One?

(0) Comments | Posted October 13, 2015 | 2:05 PM

Co-written with Alicia Czarnecki.

Last time, we talked about amazing projects completed by undergraduate students. You probably know these #ResearchStars on your campus, too - they publish papers; start nonprofits; spend their summers in Spain doing research, and get interviewed by Huffington Post. Sounds great, good for...

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Starting the Year? Here Is Why You Need to Find a Mentor TODAY

(0) Comments | Posted September 15, 2015 | 6:44 PM

Co-authored with Jessica Barzilay and Alicia Czarnecki.

When Ridwan Alam just started working in a lab as a freshman at Wayne State University in Michigan, he did primarily mechanical work, but by the sophomore year, his research became more sophisticated and demanding....

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"Think How You Are Adding Value": David Williams Interview

(0) Comments | Posted May 1, 2015 | 6:11 AM

"Back when I started blogging in 2005, what most people knew about bloggers was that they usually got paid when they had discovered what they were doing," said David B. Williams.

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