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University of North Alabama Undergraduate Research

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Welcome to the University of North Alabama!

We are excited you will be joining us in the fall. Your freshman year is not too early to starting thinking about enhancing your skills in problem-solving, collaboration, creative thinking, brainstorming, critical thinking, inquiry, and independent work. You will increase your ability in all of these areas as you progress through your course work, but your skills will increase tenfold by participating in undergraduate research projects mentored by UNA faculty members.

Take a minute to look through this newsletter and see how students are involved in research and why they think it is valuable. UNA strives to involve students in research at all points in their career, so contact a faculty member in your major or area of interest and ask how you can get involved in their research or disciplinary exploration. Let me know if you have questions, need ideas, or want leads or directions.

Again, welcome to UNA.
ROAR LIONS!

-Lisa Keys-Mathews, Ph.D., GISP
Director, Quality Enhancement Plan
Professor of Geography

Interactive tees make it easy to ‘Snap. View. Hire.’

This Spring Dr. Beth Garfrerick’s “QR Code Kids” (members of the Public Relations Campaigns class) made interactive class tees. Class member Kelsey Hyche came up with the idea, which allows viewers to use Snapchat or a QR reader to read each individualized QR code printed on the back of the tees. The code takes the viewer to each student’s individual LinkedIn sites, and as the instructions say on the front of the shirts: Snap. View. Hire.

Dr. Garfrerick’s shirt links to the Department of Communications website (Snap. View. Join.)

The class used ThinkSpace (located in the basement of Collier Library) to print the QR codes and tee shirt designs.
Undergraduate research is the specific reading, data and information collection, analysis, and presentation skills (written or oral) required to successfully participate in problem-solving within any given discipline and career. (Whew! That’s pretty heady stuff!)

Research is a valuable tool you’ll use throughout your college career. But you won’t be alone as you figure it all out—there are lots of faculty, staff, and experienced upper classmen who are willing to help you at every step of the way. We asked some of these folks what advice they would give to incoming freshmen. Here’s what they had to say!

**It is so easy** to be intimidated by the thought of researching, especially as a freshman or sophomore, but don’t be! Don’t be afraid to jump in and really dissect a topic that interests you, don’t be afraid to ask difficult questions, and don’t be afraid to work hard.

- **Chellie Hogan**

**Students need to participate** heavily with their professor/advisor inside and outside of the classroom before undergraduate research is even considered. This develops a bond that allows research to be enjoyable instead of "one more thing."

- **Chuck Chiriaco**

**How to get started in research?**

Oh, that is so easy—just come and talk to me! Really, it’s usually just that simple. Most students have no clue about what is involved in research, or how to go about getting started, therefore you are normal. Your professors were once in similar shoes, thinking the same thing. Knowing this, a lot of us have various levels of research experiences for our students. In my department our students jokingly refer to themselves as research "minions" on their first project.

When developing a research team, I need an experienced researcher to head it all up, but then I usually have many other students working on just a small segment of a project, often for the first time, themselves evolving into experienced researchers. It could be that they’ll be excitedly camping out on the Appalachian Trail one night to query hikers, wearily climbing Mt. Katahdin in Maine to do the same, boringly showing a participant to the computer to do a questionnaire, or even scandalously finding 20 curse words with the exact number of letters, syllables, and frequency of use to do a study on taboo. We have so many ideas, more ideas than students to do them.

We don’t expect you to know about anything about how to do research at first. After all, we professors are teachers too. We so want to teach you about research, to immerse you in the experience, because we love research and want to share that. And it all starts with a conversation with me or another professor. Just saying something like, "I want to get involved in research but I don’t know how to get started" is all you need to say to me to get started. I’ll probably get a weird starry-eyed look of excitement when I talk to you about research. Forgive me, I’m talking about my passion. Just **do not ask me about the tombstone study** or you might find yourself eerily making photos of tombstones in Texas or North Dakota...maybe we should include Canada…I’ll have to think about that.

- **Larry Bates, Professor of Psychology, Ph.D.**
help upperclassmen with their research—it may turn into a project you can follow-up on after the upper classman graduates. Also, show an interest and be enthusiastic!

-Jill Goode Englett, M.S., R.D., L.D.N., R.N., B.S.N.
Instructor, Department of Human Environmental Sciences

The two major things that really helped me get involved were: 1) getting to know my professors. If professors don't know you then how can you do research with them? 2) getting involved in social clubs (i.e. psychology club). By getting to know other students, they are more likely to let you work with them.

-Mark Pettit

Students should do their best in their foundational courses such as 101 and 111 biology. I have student researchers who have completed their core courses, done well in them, and have learned some basic laboratory skills in the labs that accompany their courses. My best advice: do your best. It all matters as you proceed through life.

-Tina Hubler, Ph.D., M.Ed., B.S.
Associate Professor, Biology

Interact and communicate with professors. I know the psychology and sociology departments are both very open and welcoming to students with research ideas. I would also say that no research question is silly. That's the point of research—to answer questions that no one else has answered!

-Erin Cooper

Trust your professor's guidance. My ideas for my research project were scattered, and I struggled on how to even begin. I sought counsel of a professor early, and relied on her guidance on when to take what steps and when. Because of her guidance, I have successfully presented at Research Day and a state conference and I have not even officially begun my research. I have only presented my preliminary study and design. I am thankful for professors like Dr. Lorie Johnson here at UNA who are passionate about us, which allows us to be passionate and make progress to see our passions come to life.

-Emily Ownby

Get involved with research now! It definitely sets you apart from other students in the application process for graduate school. My best advice regarding the application process is to get started early. Schedule enough time to prepare for the GRE, build up an impressive vitae/résumé, and research potential schools of interest.

-Mary Ware

And another opportunity . . .

Take advantage of UNA Research Days!

Research Days is an annual event that provides students with the opportunity to present their research either in poster format or orally, and then to interact in a professional environment where they are encouraged to discuss their research, both formally and informally.

In the Spring the Quality Enhancement Plan Office-sponsored event had 72 presentations (oral, illustrated paper, and posters) in addition to 17 Three-Minute Thesis presentations! The presentations were well-attended by university faculty, staff, administrators, and students, as well as members of the community.

In addition to gaining presentation experience and exposure, students had the opportunity to win cash prizes.

For more information about Research Days, or undergraduate research in general, contact Dr. Keys-Mathews in the QEP Office—by email at qep@una.edu or by telephone at (256) 765-4640.
Announcing UNA’s first interdisciplinary, undergraduate, peer-reviewed journal!

Become a part of this exciting new project from QEP!

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• Undergraduate Students to submit their research for publication
• Undergraduate and Graduate Students to serve as reviewers
• Faculty and Staff to serve as reviewers
• Graphic artists to work on layout and design

Full details will be announced soon!
For more information, write us at qep@una.edu.