

Writing a Personal Statement for a Research Internship

A summer research internship can be highly competitive. The personal statement is your chance to differentiate yourself from the other applicants. You are trying to sell yourself by convincing the application evaluators that you are motivated and qualified for the position. An REU is a little different from a job because the purpose of the program is to provide research experience to undergraduates, so you also need to detail how you will benefit personally and professionally from the experience just as much as the value you will add to their program.

To assist you, I've attached an advice sheet from Carroll College about writing a personal statement for an REU. You also might want to read this blog post from astro-bites:

<http://astrobites.org/2013/01/05/so-you-want-to-apply-for-an-reu-heres-how/>

Assignment

1. Using the attached set of links to various summer internships, find three that appeal to you. List each one and write 1-2 sentences for each about why it interests you. They do not necessarily need to be astronomy, but they do need to be STEM-related.
2. Write a one page (~500 word) personal statement as if you are applying to one of the above internship opportunities. Include in your essay: 1) why you are interested in this program, 2) your career goals, 3) your interest in the subject area, 4) your relevant coursework, 5) your programming experience, and 6) your research experience.
3. Archive your personal statement and use it as the framework for any future applications and cover letters you have to complete. Remember that REU application season starts in December and ends by February!

DUE: Friday November 21 by 5 p.m.

To accompany the lecture I have compiled a (partial) list of resources for finding summer research opportunities (see next page). Note that REU applications usually open in **December** and are due by **February 1** (with notification by **April 15**). Other programs vary with deadlines. As always, you can email Michael or me or come to our office hours if you have any questions about the application process. Also, your mentors are a great resource for advice.

Nationwide REU/Summer Internship Opportunities:

NSF-REU opportunities in Astronomy:

http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/list_result.jsp?unitid=5045

NSF-REU opportunities in Physics:

http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/list_result.jsp?unitid=69

Other NSF-REU opportunities:

http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.jsp

NASA Internships (available all year, including the summer):

<http://goo.gl/VJIJpB>

American Astronomical Society (AAS) list of summer opportunities:

<http://aas.org/jobs/summer-opportunities>

Alternatives at UW:

Continue working with your Pre-MAP mentors or another astronomy professor/post-doc/grad student. Find people here:

<http://www.astro.washington.edu/people.php>

University of Washington Space Grant Undergraduate Research Program:

http://www.waspacegrant.org/for_students/student_internships/wsgc_internships/SURP_for_students.html

Complete listing of summer research programs at UW in all fields:

<http://www.washington.edu/research/urp/students/find/summeratUW.html>

Take the summer observing course ASTR 481 (prerequisite: ASTR 480)

<http://www.astro.washington.edu/users/laws/classpages/a481/>

Writing a Personal Statement for an REU

The purpose of the personal statement is to communicate what you are interested in doing at the REU and why you want to attend a particular program. Remember, this is a very important part of your application, don't leave it until the last minute. You are trying to stand out of sometimes hundreds of applications. REU programs are looking for students that add value and interest to the research project.

To help you get started consider **answering these questions** in your statement:

- **Who are you?** What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admission committee to be interested in you? Sometimes they are looking for personal interests – something that provides a little window into who you are as a person. Have there been any hardships that you have overcome? (Are you an underrepresented group? Attending a liberal arts college with limited research opportunities, first in your family to attend college, low income, rural, minority? Any of these classifications may help in your essay.)
- **Why are you interested in the subject area** - What projects are you interested in? (Describe any personal, professional, or educational experiences that have contributed to your interest in the subject.)
- **What are your career goals?** (This might also include your background, challenges, aspirations.)
- **What is your academic preparation?** (Include relevant coursework, lab work, projects, etc. - you might describe an exciting or interesting experience you had in that subject area – a course, a project, etc – that peaked your interest.)
- **What skills do you possess? Do you have any previous research experience?** – Describe previous research experience - this can include the following: undergraduate research, summer or part-time employment – describe your role, did you perform research independently or as part of a team? What did you learn from your experience?
- **Why do you want to apply to this particular REU site?** Why should the program be interested in you and why are you interested in us? What is interesting about the research? If they are researching Bees than you want to show interest in Bees. (For example, you should look at the REU web site to get an idea of what other students have done in the past, and then mention in your essay what mentors and topics are of primary and secondary interest to you.)

Some REU programs will provide questions to guide your personal statement. Use these questions to develop an initial one-page personal statement. Proofread many times! Spelling and grammar count – do not rely on spellcheck. Have faculty look over your statement and provide feedback. Remember, the researchers in the labs are excited about their research and want to know that you are excited about their research as well!

(Carroll College Career Services – Internship)