

Opportunities for Economics Research

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Outline

1. Benefits of research experience
2. Types of opportunities
3. Faculty demand for research help
4. Preparing yourself for opportunities
5. Q & A

Who benefits from undergraduate research experience?

People who want to:

- ▶ do a Ph.D. (especially in economics)
- ▶ explore whether they want to do a Ph.D.
- ▶ do independent research
- ▶ pursue a masters degree in economics
- ▶ work in an economic analyst position

How would a research experience fit with your goals?

- ▶ What type of experience?
- ▶ Do you need to set up a progression of experiences?

Research opportunities at SU for econ undergrads

Workshops, seminars, information, training

- ▶ ESA workshops
- ▶ Research seminars
 - ▶ Trade, Development, & Political Economy, Mon. @3:45pm; "Trade Day" this Friday
 - ▶ Applied Microeconomics seminars, Wednesdays at 11am in Eggers 112
 - ▶ Center for Policy Research, Thursdays @3:30pm
- ▶ SOURCE FAQ
- ▶ SOURCE Explore Program
- ▶ CFSA-SOURCE Emerging Research Fellows Program

More opportunities at SU: Economics department faculty

Supervision of independent projects

- ▶ Skepticism of non-paid, non-credit arrangements
- ▶ Distinction program in economics
- ▶ Honors capstone
- ▶ Independent study course

Research assistant (RA) positions

- ▶ Helping a professor with their research project(s)
- ▶ Typically funded through SOURCE or other grants that faculty members apply for

More opportunities at SU: Research assistant (RA) positions

Some centers/institutes on campus hire RAs, such as

- ▶ Maxwell X Lab
- ▶ Lender Center for Social Justice
- ▶ Autonomous Systems Policy Institute
- ▶ Dynamic Sustainability Lab

Research opportunities outside SU

Research assistant positions (“Pre Docs”)

- ▶ Professors at other universities hire people just out of undergraduate studies ([#EconTwitter](#) and [@econ_ra](#); [NBER list](#))
- ▶ Federal Reserve Banks
- ▶ Think tanks & NGOs (e.g. Peterson Institute, World Bank)
- ▶ Economics consulting firms

List of training programs curated by the AEA & CSMGEP

What is actually involved in a research experience?

Lots of variation

1. Theorizing and formulating hypotheses
2. Literature review and other summaries, writing
3. Finding, cleaning, exploring and summarizing data
 - ▶ Can be mostly manual
 - ▶ or highly technical
 - ▶ or both
4. Statistical analysis
5. Documentation!!!

Finding opportunities at SU



1. [My mailing list](#)
2. [ESA](#)
3. Handshake
4. Generate opportunities through relationships with professors

QR code: my mailing list

Costs v. benefits

Will the benefits of bringing an RA onto this project outweigh the costs?

- ▶ Benefits: more work will get done
- ▶ Costs: salary and time (for training, providing guidance, coordinating and managing)

More important: uncertainty about both benefits and costs (your professors are not risk neutral!)

- ▶ What's my best guess at the investment I will have to make versus the payoff?
- ▶ How bad will it be if it's bad?

Asymmetric information

You know more about yourself than the professor does

Various ways to communicate (send signals) about yourself

- ▶ Listing skills / experience / characteristics on resume
 - ▶ It's good to summarize on resume, but talk is cheap!
 - ▶ Need to send costly and/or verifiable signals
 - All the things I suggest on the following slides actually *make you better able to contribute* as well
- ▶ Narrative in cover letter
- ▶ Hard evidence of skills / experience / characteristics
- ▶ Recommendation from someone credible

Resume

Summary of skills and experiences

- ▶ List relevant learning, e.g. workshops, jobs, classes
 - ▶ ECN B.S. strictly preferred to B.A.
- ▶ List your relevant skills, e.g. software, languages

What's most likely to be relevant?

- ▶ Read job posting carefully
- ▶ Things that demonstrate that you are reliable and careful
- ▶ Things that demonstrate the items on the next few slides

Cover Letter

1. Read their papers, show interest in what they do
2. Relate what they care about to your goals
3. Describe *why* you're interested in the opportunity
4. Tell more about your relevant learning, e.g. SOURCE workshops, jobs, classes
 - ▶ Especially *why* you did it
 - ▶ See recommendations on next few slides
5. Tell how you **will** prioritize their work and be reliable

Hard evidence (1)

1. Classes with good grades

- ▶ **ECN 310** “Economic Research in Practice”
- ▶ Statistics
 - ECN 521/522 as early as possible
 - Could take MAT 221/222 earlier; MAT 521/525
- ▶ Data Science, e.g.
 - IST 256: Introduction to Application Programming (Python)
 - IST 387: Introduction to Applied Data Science (R)
 - IST 414: Data Driven Inquiry
 - IST 421: Information Visualization
- ▶ Coding, e.g. CIS 252: Introduction to Computer Science
- ▶ Math: 295/296; 397; 331; 375; 412; 531
- ▶ WRT 205: Critical Research and Writing

Hard evidence (2)

1. Classes with good grades
2. Certification in statistical software
 - ▶ [Excel](#) is good first step, free to Maxwell students
 - ▶ Stata and R are most widely used among economics faculty
 - [Tutorials and resources](#) on ESA's website
 - R on Coursera
 - LinkedIn Learning is free for SU
 - Could also look on Udemy, Udacity, EdX
 - DataCamp, Pluralsight
 - ▶ Any proof of coding / stats skill (Python, SPSS, etc.) is valuable

Hard evidence (3-4)

1. Classes with good grades
2. Certification (Excel, Stata, R, etc.)
3. Something you've done on your own
 - ▶ Do free course or on-line training (no certificate) but do a short project using the skills, e.g. a [Shiny App](#)
 - ▶ [Github repo](#) with small project
 - ▶ Frank DiTralia's [Econ 224 course materials](#)
 - ▶ <https://empirical-methods.com/>
 - ▶ Knowledge of LaTeX impresses, but lower impact than statistical software
4. Something you produced in a class or for a job

Recommenders

1. Build relationships with faculty
 - ▶ Get advice similar to what I've told you, but specialized to your interests
 - ▶ This can generate opportunities personal to you that otherwise wouldn't have existed
 - ▶ We have to expend social capital to recommend you
2. First year students: consider ECN 310 "Economic Research in Practice"
3. Work experiences (high school, internships, campus job, community work)

Questions?