

ViLoN Lab Research Assistant (RA) vs. Undergraduate Student Researcher (USR)

There are two different roles for undergraduate students within the ViLoN Lab, a Research Assistant (RA) and an Undergraduate Student Researcher (USR).

Note: the distinction I (Trent) am making between USR and RA is unique to the ViLoN Lab. If other labs have this distinction, it is often not specified or spelled out on public facing documentation.

Differences:

1. Commitment Level

There is a greater level of commitment both from the mentor and mentee for the position of USR.

If you are a USR, it is likely that you want to work in tech, the biomedical industry, or that you plan to go onto graduate school.

This means that USRs will have a more hands-on role in the construction of experiments in the ViLoN Lab, and could be responsible for presenting research at conferences, or participating in the writing of scientific manuscripts. As a USR, you are essentially being treated as an early-year graduate student.

2. Professional Development

A part of that greater commitment in the role of a USR is mentor advising around professional development. As a USR, Dr. Wirth will work with you in meetings to explore and plan for career goals. (See the `usr_goal_tracking_template.md` file on our GitHub)

3. Duration of time in the ViLoN Lab

It is generally expected that USRs work within the ViLoN Lab between 2-4 years, where as RAs can be with the lab for as short as a semester.

4. RAs are assistants for the *entire* lab

The primary purpose of an RA in the ViLoN Lab is to assist in human subjects data collection, interfacing with research participants.

This might include assisting the Lab PI (Dr. Wirth), ViLoN USRs, or teaming up with more experienced RA's.

5. Lab Meeting Attendance

While attending lab meetings is optional for RAs, attendance is a core component of being a USR.

Similarities

5. "RA" Credit

Like signing up as a TA, you can get RA credit at UC. If you are interested in this, please let me know.

6. Accepted on a limited capacity

Being an Undergraduate Research focused lab, the productivity of the ViLoN Lab is relatively slow. This means that the capacity for both RA and USR positions within the ViLoN Lab is limited.

7. "Walk Away" policy

As outlined in both contracts, RAs and USRs can leave the ViLoN Lab whenever they like (see "Duration and Termination" clauses of the mentor-mentee contract(s))

8. Presence on Website

Both USRs and RAs will be displayed on the ViLoN Lab Website with a name and a picture in two different sections - USRs coming before RAs.

Lab alumni are listed in the lab in text, with a section for USRs and RAs.