

Summer Research

A summer research fellowship is one of the best ways to acquire lab experience, either to find out how well it suits you or to have something impressive to put on your resume. If you are interested in summer research, you should follow these steps:

1. Read descriptions of faculty research. Do not restrict yourself to UNBC – there are tons of great labs in Vancouver, Edmonton, Victoria and even further away that will gladly take summer students, especially if you can get your own funding (see below).
2. Talk to the people in whose research you are interested. The more you know about their work before you talk to them, the more impressed they will be and therefore the more likely they will be accept you into their lab. For people outside of UNBC, email them first to arrange a time for a phone interview.
3. Find out about summer research fellowships. NSERC* supports summer research, as does MSFHR*. The NSERC application deadline is early in the winter term, so you need to be on the ball to have a lab lined up and get an application in on time. The MSFHR deadline is in the spring. The office of graduate studies has information about fellowships. Ask around about other research fellowships.
4. Research fellowships are competitive. This does not mean you need stellar grades to get them (although that helps), but if you do not have stellar grades you absolutely need something else to convince the review committees of your potential to be successful in research. Volunteering in a lab is a great way to do this.
5. In speaking to potential supervisors, as well as when writing fellowship applications, demonstrate your enthusiasm and scientific acumen by reading background papers and having scientific interests in general. If you come by my office to chat about some cool new paper in Nature, I will be way more impressed than if you get an A in one of my courses.
6. Be creative. You will work closely with your supervisor to plan your research program (no one expects you to come up with a plan by yourself), but if you can suggest new ways to do things or new questions to ask – even if they turn out to be wildly impractical – everyone will be greatly impressed.

* NSERC: National Science and Engineering Research Council; MSFHR: Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research

7. Be independent. Everyone is busy, so if you can demonstrate that you know how to find things out in the literature, follow complicated directions, and find other people to ask for advice, you will be way ahead of the game.