All About Summer Research Experience

Anna Waisman & Katherine Newman

Psychology Undergraduate Mentorship Program (P.U.M.P.) @ York University

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Meet your presenters!

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Katherine Newman (PhD 4 student in Brain, Behaviour and Cognitive Sciences @ York University)
What's the point of getting summer research experience?
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- Gain exposure and appreciation for academic research
- Research experience is a must for most graduate programs (clinical AND experimental)
- Get a preview of graduate school that will hopefully add clarity to your decision about pursuing a research-based graduate program
- Helps narrow down your research interests
- Learn a variety of important skills
- Build connections with individuals at different levels of academia
  - Peers with similar goals and aspirations
  - Graduate students
  - Professors (who can provide reference letters)
- Can lead to other future research positions (e.g. more long-term, paid, etc.)
- Contributes to your personal growth!
What does being a summer RA look like?
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TIME COMMITMENT:
ON AVERAGE, A MINIMUM OF 8-10 HOURS/WEEK

COMPENSATION:
VOLUNTEER, PAID, OR COURSE CREDIT
What does being a summer RA look like?

**Responsibilities**

- Recruit and/or interview participants
- Collect data (includes testing participants)
- Data entry
- Transcribe interviews
- Analyze data
- Assist in creation of experimental stimuli and paradigms
- Test experimental paradigms
- Conduct a literature review
- Attend lab meetings

**Skills**

- Develop "people" skills working with different populations
- Learn to use different software platforms (*e.g.* Microsoft Office, E Prime, Qualtrics)
- Refine organizational skills
- Learn coding and statistical analysis skills (*e.g.* R, SPSS, MATLAB)
- Gain exposure to neuroimaging
- Improve your public speaking skills
Finding summer research opportunities
Identifying your interests

- Which topics in my introductory psychology class did I find most interesting?
- Which psychology classes have I enjoyed the most so far?
- What would I like to learn more about?
- What about psychology captivates me?
- What sorts of skills and experiences would I like to acquire?
- Were there any research studies I participated in that I found particularly interesting?
Finding summer research opportunities

- Identify some full-time faculty members you'd like to work with...
  - Start with your professors and TAs!
  - Search the institution's department webpage for a list of faculty members and their research interests (most common way students find these experiences)
  - Sign up for psychology undergrad email lists
  - Check official postings on social media (Facebook groups, Twitter, LinkedIn)
  - Consider faculty members at other universities outside of your home institution
Familiarize yourself with the research

• Familiarize yourself with the faculty member's current research interests by:
  • Checking their lab website (often also has info on how to apply)
  • Reading lab members' profiles to get a sense of ongoing projects, since these might be ones you would assist with if were to join the lab
  • Reading some of the professor's recent publications
How to find research articles you're interested in

- Visit the faculty member's profile page and lab website
- ResearchGate
- Google Scholar
- PubMed
- Database (e.g., PsychINFO, Medline)
- York University Libraries: https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/
- Can ask the prof and grad students for recommendations
Finding summer research opportunities

- **Individual Research Project (IRP)**
  - Course credit
  - Typically for students in third year or above

- **Research at York (RAY)**
  - Minimum rate of $16.25 per hour
  - To be eligible, students must be:
    - Enrolled in a minimum of 9 credits for summer if full-time, 6 credits for summer if part-time, OR 6 credits in previous winter term AND will be returning to undergraduate studies in the Fall/Winter
Summer Research Fellowship

**NSERC-USRA (Undergraduate Student Research Award)**

- $6000 plus organization contribution over consecutive 16-week period
- To be eligible, students must:
  - Be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada,
  - Be registered in a bachelor's degree program,
  - Have obtained, over previous years of study, cumulative average of at least "B"
- Selection process is based on:
  1. GPA
  2. research aptitude
  3. expected quality of the training to be received

Summer Research Programs in Toronto

- Sunnybrook Research Institute Student Research Program *(program is not running this year but students can still apply to scientists directly)*: [https://sunnybrook.ca/research/content/?page=sri-ed-summ-uni](https://sunnybrook.ca/research/content/?page=sri-ed-summ-uni)
- Rotman Research Institute (RRI) Summer Student Program at Baycrest: [https://www.baycrest.org/Baycrest/Research-Innovation/People/Students-Trainees/Summer-Student-Programs](https://www.baycrest.org/Baycrest/Research-Innovation/People/Students-Trainees/Summer-Student-Programs)
- Holland Bloorview: [https://hollandbloorview.ca/research-education/bloorview-research-institute/train-us/ward-family-summer-student-research](https://hollandbloorview.ca/research-education/bloorview-research-institute/train-us/ward-family-summer-student-research)
- Women's College Research Institute: [https://www.womensresearch.ca/trainees/undergraduate-summer-program/](https://www.womensresearch.ca/trainees/undergraduate-summer-program/)
Applying and Approaching
What should I consider before applying?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compatible research interests</td>
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<td>Goals (what you hope to gain from the experience)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of research you're looking for (clinical vs non-clinical)</td>
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<td>Prerequisite Requirements</td>
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<td>• grades</td>
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<td>Time and other personal commitments</td>
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<td>Compensation</td>
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Making contact

- Introduce yourself (i.e., name, program, year of study)
- Introduce your goals and interests
  - programs you might be interested in applying to
  - area of psychology you’re interested in (neuropsychology, developmental psychology, social and personality, etc.)
- Why are you looking to work with this particular professor
  - What you found interesting about their research
  - Where you learned about this work (read an article by them, took a class with them, etc.)
  - Make sure to briefly reference an article by them that you found interesting (show that you actually read their work)
- What are you asking for (be a research assistant, summer student, etc.)
- Attach your CV and transcript (unofficial transcript is usually okay)
Dear Dr. ______,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Jane Doe and I am in the 2nd year of my undergraduate degree in the honours psychology program at York University.

I am fascinated by your research on the role of autobiographical memory in social decision making. For example, I really enjoyed reading your study, which examined whether vivid imagination increased individuals' willingness to be more cooperative. Overall, I am eager to learn more about these processes and think your work aligns well with my interests.

As such, I am wondering if there are any opportunities in your lab for a research assistant or volunteer over the summer or during the year? I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this with you and meet in person (or over Zoom) if necessary. I've attached my CV and unofficial transcript for your reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
• The CVs of many professors are available online. This is a great place to start to see what the format is like (and to daydream about what you will put on yours)

• Websites like www.cvmkr.com are helpful to create CVs and keep a record of your work/volunteer history

• If you really want to "wow" a potential advisor or employer, you can use templates available online (for free or cost, e.g., www.creativemarket.com)

• Warning: If your CV is required for an application (grad school, grant, etc.), be sure to make sure that it conforms to the guidelines that accompany your application
CV

• What can you put on your CV when you're just starting out?
  • Basic info (e.g., name, contact info)
  • Education (start with postsecondary, most recent first)
  • Work experience (e.g., part-time job, summer employment opportunities)
  • Volunteer experience (especially roles that can showcase your abilities, e.g., responsible, organized, committed)
    • E.g., SPCA dog walker, fundraiser for Walk for MS
  • Awards (does not have to be academic)
  • Publications, poster presentations, talks (if you have them)
  • Showcase your skill set
    • Directly: Coding skills, experience working with participants
    • Indirectly: Photoshop, speaking multiple languages
  • Interests that will help them get to know you a little (e.g., camping, traveling, writing, seeing live music)
  • References (2-3)
You've made it to the interview!

- Reiterate your interest and goals
  - Try to prepare some general ideas with the help of ongoing projects described on the lab website

- Be familiar with their work
  - Read some of their papers and major interests found on the lab website
  - Prepare to ask a few relevant questions about their work

- Know your time availability
  - Commitments of 10 hours/week are often expected

- Clarify important info
  - Expected time commitment (how many months, hours/week)
  - Who you'll be working with
  - What you will be required to do

- Have a good attitude!
  - Show enthusiasm
  - Go in with an open mind
  - Be honest
Make the most of your experience!
Make the most of your experience!

• Don't be afraid to try new things
  • Be open to new opportunities even if they seem intimidating or you're unsure if you'll like it (you might be surprised)!

• Be an active member in the lab
  • Show initiative
  • Attend lab meetings regularly
  • Participate in the discussion
  • Attend lab socials, conferences, symposiums

• Take the opportunity to connect with people and don't be afraid to ask questions (that's how you'll learn)!

• Try to enjoy it and have fun!
Useful Resources *(posted on P.U.M.P. website)*

- York's webpage on Psychology research for undergrads: [https://psyc.info.yorku.ca/research/research-opportunities/](https://psyc.info.yorku.ca/research/research-opportunities/)
- York's research tips for Psychology students: [https://psyc.info.yorku.ca/files/2020/12/PSYC_Research_Tips_For_Students.pdf?x56987](https://psyc.info.yorku.ca/files/2020/12/PSYC_Research_Tips_For_Students.pdf?x56987)
- Facebook Group for Undergrad Psychology at UofT: [https://www.facebook.com/STGPsychUofT](https://www.facebook.com/STGPsychUofT)
- RAY at York: [https://futurestudents.yorku.ca/opportunities-beyond-the-classroom/research-at-york-ray](https://futurestudents.yorku.ca/opportunities-beyond-the-classroom/research-at-york-ray)
- UofT’s list of undergraduate research opportunities: [https://glse.utoronto.ca/undergraduate-research-opportunities](https://glse.utoronto.ca/undergraduate-research-opportunities)
- CV Resources: [www.cvmkr.com](http://www.cvmkr.com)  
  [www.creativemarket.com](http://www.creativemarket.com)
Questions