Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Program Application Helpful Strategies

Research Experience for Undergraduate Programs are all encompassing, paid summer internships in scientific research. They offer great experiences for undergraduates to live in a new city, develop the analytical skills and laboratory experience to pursue graduate work in the sciences and even pay students for doing so. Though there are over 600 of these programs, they are all competitive, with many applicants striving to earn a spot each summer. The following are some tips to maximize your odds of being accepted to one of these incredible programs.

1. **Check All of the Program Requirements.** Many applicants’ chances of getting into a summer program are over before they even begin the application. Failing to read all of the eligibility requirements of a program wastes both your time and theirs. Be sure to check for requirements such as, current year in college, being an underrepresented minority, socioeconomic status, current undergraduate major, or limitations on students who wish to go to medical school.

2. **Apply Early.** Many applications open as early as October for the following summer and applications can close as early as December. While you might think it’s too early to think about what you’re doing this summer, many institutions establish their interns far in advance. Winter break offers a good balance to make sure you have ample time to complete the applications, meet the appropriate deadlines and not interfere with school work.

3. **Follow Directions and Proofread!** While it may seem like common sense, many applicants get denied from summer programs from simple errors. Furthermore, sometimes programs require students to email application materials in addition to the online application and such instructions can be easily missed if an applicant is in rush to complete the application.

4. **Illustrate Knowledge of the Specific Program and be Unique.** Hundreds of applicants are applying for these positions; all of the other applicants share your “passion for science” and can reference some vague scientific exposure. The most important part of your application is your Personal Statement. This is the only part
of your application that will seem different than most applicants so why not stand out? Be sure to address the following topics and you'll distinguish yourself from the crowd. What are your plans for your graduate education and future career and how will research incorporate into that? What about this program specifically interests you and why that program over all the other summer experiences? Be sure to mention at least 1 aspect of that program (besides doing research) that excites you and convinced you to apply in your personal statement.

5. Discuss these Programs with your References. All REU programs require letters of recommendation and letters of rec are another good way to set you a part from the crowd. However, be sure to discuss what exactly these types of programs are with your letter writer. Having them write a general letter to all the summer programs you apply to is fine, but be sure to talk about what these programs are looking for in their applicants so they can have a better idea of what qualities to focus on. Commonly 2 letters of rec are required for each program, one of which must be from someone in the sciences.

6. Apply to Multiple Programs. These programs are competitive! So it’s best not to apply to one or two programs thinking you’ll be accepted. Rejections are a natural part of the process and remember it only takes 1 acceptance to have an amazing summer. Essay prompts for summer REU programs are usually the same, so while you may need to adjust each essay for each school, the bulk of the application will be done after you apply to your first program. Just remember to talk to your references before you apply to see what they feel comfortable with, but again they can send the same letter to every school.

Be sure to check out all of the REU programs being offered this summer at:
http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.jsp

Further questions can be emailed to lurop@luc.edu