How to Find a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Program that is Right for You

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. However, there are over 600 of these programs and the process of filtering through these many internships can at times seem overwhelming. When looking for an REU program that’s right for you be sure to ask the following questions.

1. **What kind of research do I want to conduct?** While knowing exactly what project you would like to work on is certainly not necessary, a scientific field of interest is. Many REU programs are tailored for either Biology, Chemistry or Physics, while some may cover all three areas. Furthermore, most applications will require applicants to choose from a list of topics in biology, chemistry or physics that they would be interested in doing research in. Furthermore, some applications even require students to pick a number of individuals who currently work at the institution with whom they’d be interested in working and write a short paragraph explaining why they would like to do so.

2. **Where do I want to conduct my research?** REU programs usually require students to live at the institution they are conducting research at and provide travel, room and board for students who participate. These programs therefore offer great opportunities for students to live in another city, state or even country. However, if staying close to home is important you still have many options in the Chicago area and REUs are present in every state so you should be able to apply to programs close to home if you chose to do so. Keep in mind however, that the more desirable the location, the more applicants that will be applying.

3. **What are the eligibility requirements for an REU?** All REU programs require that interns be either citizens or permanent residents of the US to participate. Additionally no one that has not started college or has already received a bachelor’s degree is eligible. However, since every program is directed by a different institution, additional requirements may be present such as being an
underrepresented minority or being socioeconomically disadvantaged. Be sure to double check each program’s requirements before applying.

4. **How competitive is each REU program?** It is important to realize that thousands of students apply to REU programs every year and many of them are very well qualified for the position. If your only concern is doing summer research, then applying to less competitive programs will maximize your chances. Generally cities that are thought of as less desirable by students receive less applicants, as are programs that require applicants to mail in application materials rather than being fully electronic.

Furthermore, look for programs that are brand new by looking at their start date in the abstract of award for each REU site you are interested in after finding them in the REU database available [here](http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.jsp). Newer sites generally get less overall applicants because they are not as well known by students and this can vastly improve your chances of acceptance.

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