



Finding an Undergraduate or Postgraduate Coursework Research Supervisor

When should I start looking for a research supervisor?

It is never too early to start learning about the research being done in your area of interest! If you are an:

- *undergraduate student* you should typically approach potential supervisors the semester prior to beginning a project.
- *Honours student* you should talk to the school's Honours Convenor as soon as you begin to consider Honours to find out the details for your program.
- *postgraduate coursework student* you can begin looking for supervisors after starting course work in the program. You should consult the Masters Convenor and potential supervisors about the suitability of your courses and your research interests as you proceed towards the thesis course.

Steps to Finding a Research Supervisor

Step 1. Take a moment to think about your interests, preferences, and goals. It is fine if you don't have answers to these questions, but take some time to reflect.

- What topics, classes, seminars or professors have caught your interest?
- Why do you want to do research?
- What are your short and long-term goals and how does doing research fit in with those goals?
- Do you prefer to work independently or in a group?
- Do you think you'd prefer working in a small research group, or in a large one?

Step 2. Explore current research at ANU. You need to know what topics or projects might interest you!

- Read through school's websites: check the priority research areas and look for research opportunities on the potential projects page. To help you get started, see College research links at by googling "ANU science coursework research."
- Network with course convenors, honours convenors, master convenors, students, tutors, demonstrators, and friends. Ask for advice on who is doing work in your area of interest and experiences other people have had that you might learn from.
- While finding a project can help you find a potential supervisor, it is important to find a supervisor that you think you can work with as well as a specific project that you might be interested in.

Step 3. Prepare to contact potential supervisors.

- Look at research groups' websites. Is it a big research group or a small one?
- Read several papers from the research group. To find the most recent papers, do an online search, as well as looking at the information and papers on the ANU website, since the ANU sites may not be current.
- Prepare a list of questions you have about the group and the research.
- If possible, talk to other students to learn more about the supervisor's expectations for students and style of supervision. Would this style work for you?

Step 4. Contact a few (2-3) potential supervisors. If you choose to approach a potential supervisor after a class meeting or seminar, you should still do your background preparation before a meeting. If you choose to email, don't take it personally if the potential supervisor doesn't respond immediately!

If you email:

- Use your ANU email address; by policy, ANU staff can only communicate with ANU students through your ANU email address.
- Use an informative, brief subject line.
- Use formal language (no emoticons, abbreviations, etc.)
- Address a potential supervisor as Dr. (appropriate for anyone with a PhD) or Prof.
- Be direct. Introduce yourself and your reason for emailing. State if you are interested in a course project, an honours project, or a masters project. If you are interested in a specific project or topic mentioned on the website list of potential projects, explain why.
- If relevant, mention a paper you read and why it was interesting to you or a question you have.
- Ask to schedule a meeting and suggest several times that suit you.
- Sign the email using your legal name, as well as any name a staff member may know you by.
- Attach a CV and an informal transcript.
- For links to tips and examples, google "ANU finding a supervisor" and look at step 4.

Step 5. Meet with potential supervisors. You may want to ask about the researcher's:

- Research interests
- Plans for the project you are interested in
- Preferred supervisory style (How often do they like to meet? Exactly how independent do they expect a student to be?). Does this match with your preferences?
- Expectations for a student
- Experience working with undergraduate, Honours or postgraduate coursework students
- Meetings with their research students (lab meeting or research group meeting) and if you could attend one. (Going to a research group meeting can show you what the group's culture is like.)

A potential supervisor may ask you about your:

- Academic interests. (This is another opportunity to show that you read the researcher's website, as well as a few papers.)
- Preparation (how you did in relevant courses, any research experience, technical skills)
- Education and career goals

Step 6. After the meeting:

- Send a brief, formal email thanking the potential supervisor for the meeting.
- Once you decide on a project with a supervisor, if you have discussed projects with other supervisors, as a courtesy, please let the other potential supervisor know that you are working with another researcher.

Note: If your potential supervisor is an inexperienced supervisor or is not an academic ANU staff member who will be present for the duration of your degree, you will need to have an experienced ANU academic staff member as a co-supervisor. You can talk to your school's convenor to learn more about the relevant procedures.

Google "ANU Science coursework research" for more information and resources.