Finding an Undergraduate or Postgraduate Coursework 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 schools’ 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 https://science.anu.edu.au/current-students/undergraduate-postgraduate-coursework-research/college-research-links.
- 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.

**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. If you choose to email, don’t take it personally if the potential supervisor doesn’t respond immediately!
If you email:

- If you have one, use your ANU email address. By policy, ANU academic and professional staff can only communicate with ANU students through an 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 websites 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 convenor may know you by.
- Consider attaching a transcript to show what a great student you are.
- For more suggestions and examples, How to Email a Research Professor or Emailing Professors.

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.)

The 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.

You can find more information at https://science.anu.edu.au/current-students/undergraduate-postgraduate-coursework-research.