Research Opportunities in Psychology Department

The UTM Psychology department offers research opportunities for students with diverse research interests and qualifications.

In general, more advanced research opportunities require prior experience. It is helpful to think of research opportunities as building on each other as you develop more proficiency with research (e.g., see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Course-based and paid research opportunities in the UTM Psychology department.
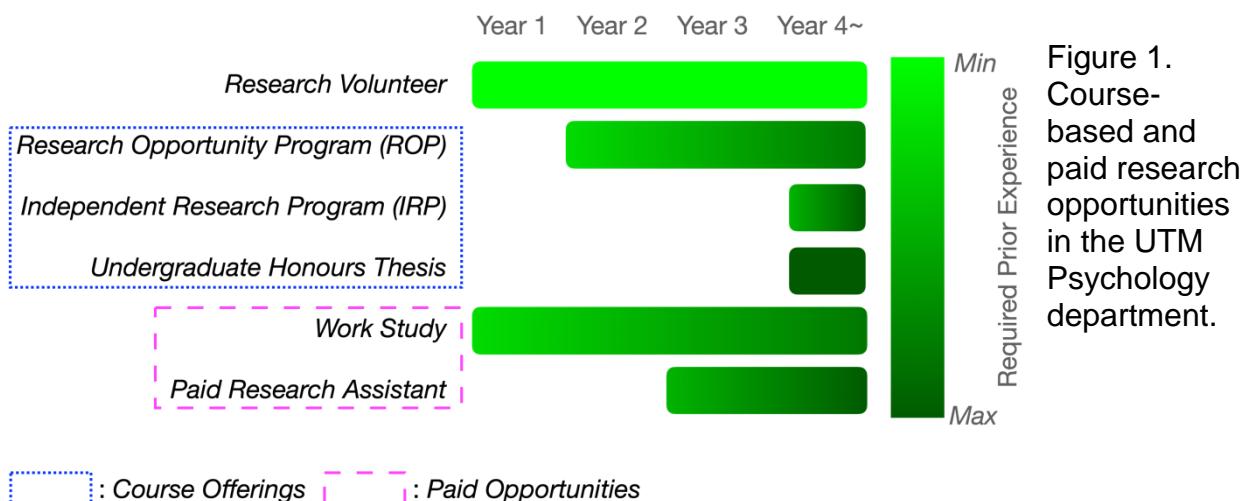
Therefore, if you are interested/expected to obtain advanced research opportunities (i.e., IRP, Thesis), it is essential to plan ahead so that you can gain the research skills and experience needed for these more advanced


Figure 2. An example timeline for identifying and obtaining course-based research opportunities in the UTM Psychology Department.
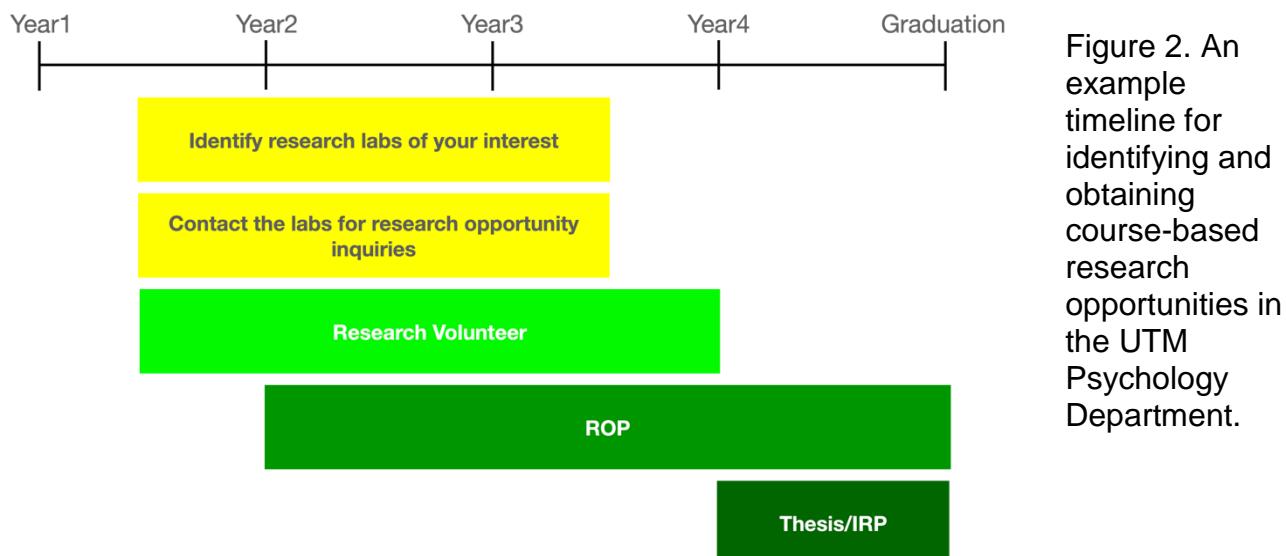
opportunities in time (See example timeline in Figure 2). **Failure to do so will significantly limit the research opportunities available to you later in your academic career.**

Descriptions of Research Opportunities

Entry-level Opportunity

1) Research Volunteer

This is a good way to get started in research. Many of the labs in the UTM Psychology department offer introductory research opportunities to those who are interested and qualify. The qualification criteria vary from lab to lab (please see below for more information specific to each lab). Typically, volunteers might be involved in the following activities:

1) Participating in lab/project meetings
2) Piloting experiments
3) Preparing an Experiment for data collection
4) Collecting Data
5) Entering Data Entry and/or pre-processing Data
6) Conducting literature reviews on research topics

The experience as a research volunteer is often required or highly-regarded for more advanced research opportunities (e.g., ROP, IRP, Thesis).

Credit-based Opportunities

1) Research Opportunity Program (ROP)

This position is similar to a volunteer research position, but it is usually more project-based since the faculty list specific projects they need research help with. The ROP is a University-run program in which qualified students earn course credit by obtaining intermediate-level research experiences in research labs on specific lab projects. Students are typically expected to commit 8-10 hours per week. The qualification varies across opportunities and is described in program specifications for each program. Typically, ROP students might be involved in the same activities as research volunteers, but some ROP opportunities might require prior experiences as a research volunteer.

General information for the application process can be found [here](#).

2) Independent Research Project for Credit (PSY40X)

This position usually allows for more independence than a research volunteer and an ROP in that the students either lead their own project or one chosen by a faculty member. Thus, it often requires prior research experiences as a research volunteer or an ROP student. The IRP is a 4th-year course (offered as a semester-long and year-long course) in which qualified students conduct an independent research project under a faculty supervisor affiliated with the UTM Psychology department. If interested, a student is required to obtain prior consent from the faculty supervisor. Since the qualification criteria vary considerably depending on the nature of the project, **it is highly recommended to contact a potential supervisor well in advance (at least one semester in advance) so that you can meet all qualifications in time.** Students are expected to gain intermediate to advanced research experiences, which may include but not limited to the same activities as the research volunteer and ROP positions and:

1) Designing a study
2) Analyzing Data
3) Writing an APA-styled report
4) Presenting the results of the project

General information for the application process can be found [here](#).

3) Undergraduate Honours Thesis (PSY40X)

Conducting an honour's thesis is the most advanced form of research experience since students will be a leader of a research project. The Honours Thesis program is a year-long course in which highly qualified undergraduate students conduct an independent research project under a faculty supervisor affiliated with the UTM Psychology department. The course includes weekly meetings to discuss: (a) general topics important to conducting research; (b) student research proposals; and (c) the outcomes of research projects. At the end of the course, students are expected to 1) write an APA-styled thesis and 2) present the results of the project to the department on an annual thesis day. Admission to this program is highly

competitive (approximately XX students accepted a year), and general requirements can be found [here](). In addition to the general requirements, lab-specific qualifications apply (please see below for lab-specific qualifications). Therefore, **it is highly recommended to contact a potential supervisor well in advance (at least one semester in advance) so that you can meet all qualifications in time.** Students are expected to gain advanced research experiences, which may include but not limited to the same activities as the previous three positions, but also

1) Writing and presenting an honours thesis for evaluation at the end of the year

More general information can be found [here]().

Paid Opportunities

1) Work-Study
Work-Study is a University-run program that offers qualified students paid opportunities to obtain hands-on research experiences. Many research labs in the UTM Psychology department participate in this program to offer various opportunities throughout the year. The qualification varies across opportunities and is described in program specifications for each opportunity. The research experiences also vary across opportunities and may include but are not limited to the same activities as the unpaid positions.

General information for the application process can be found [here]().

2) Paid Research Assistant
On some occasions, a paid research assistantship may be available for highly-qualified students. The qualification for this position is specific to each lab, but it almost always requires extensive prior research experience in a specific field of research. The research experiences also vary across opportunities and may include but are not limited to the same activities as the unpaid positions.

For more information, please contact the lab of your interest.

How to contact professors about research opportunities

When contacting professors about research opportunities, it is *not recommended* to send the same generic emails to multiple professors. Instead, it is very important to write a personalized email that clearly articulates 1) **who you are**, 2) **why you are interested in the specific research opportunity**, 3) **what makes you a great candidate for the opportunity,** and 4) **what you intend to gain from the research opportunity**. Doing this effectively requires some time and preparation. Below are some steps and tips for writing an effective email to a professor.

Step 1) Know what you are interested in

As you may know, Psychology is a vast research field: It investigates a diverse range of questions about the human mind utilizing multitudes of research methodologies. So, it is essential to have a good idea about what subfield/topic/methodology of Psychology you are interested in. You can do so by taking Psychology classes, visiting professors' office hours, reading research articles, attending the events and workshops organized by [the Psychology Association of Undergraduate Studies at Erindale (P.A.U.S.E)](), and contacting the undergraduate research coordinator of the Psychology Department (keisuke.fukuda@utoronto.ca).

Step 2) Know the professors and their labs

Once you have a good idea about what subfield/topic/methodology of Psychology you are particularly interested in, then it is time for you to know about the professors at the UTM Psychology department. The first step is to visit the departmental webpage, and you can read about what kind of research each professor is conducting. Many of the professors list a link to their lab websites, which contain lots of useful information such as current research projects, different kinds of research opportunities, etc. Such information will give you more insight as to what it will be like to be a part of the research lab.

Step 3) Familiarize yourself with their research

If you find a professor and a lab of your interest, then it's time for you to read research articles published by the lab. Most of the time, you can find their published work on their website. If not, you can always use other resources (e.g., google, University Library) to find them. If reading all of the articles is daunting (that is quite okay!), try to read a couple of them that seem particularly interesting to you. When reading them, try to understand 1) **what the research question was**, 2) **how the researchers addressed the question**, and 3) **what was found**. If this exercise keeps you motivated, you are ready to start crafting an email to the professor! If not, you might want to go back to Step1 and 2. Remember, there is no need to be disappointed! **Knowing what is not right for you is as important, if not more, as knowing what is right for you.**

Step 4) Craft the email

In the email, you should explicitly state 1) **who you are (academic year and the program you are in)**, 2) **why you are interested in the specific research opportunity**, 3) **what makes you a great candidate for the opportunity**, and 4) **what you intend to gain from the research opportunity**. In doing so, refer to specific information that you gathered in Steps 1-3. This will demonstrate that you have done your "Homework" and help to personalize your email.

More practical advice about what to do and what not to do when crafting your email can be found online. Here are some good examples:

https://senr.osu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-research/dos-and-donts

https://stemdiversity.wisc.edu/448-2/

https://research.berkeley.edu/how-cold-email-professor

Optional Tips: Attach resumes and transcripts

Although optional, resumes and transcripts are good means to demonstrate your credential as a strong candidate. If you have experiences relevant to

the research opportunity, it is a good idea to attach your resume and transcript and refer to the relevant information in the body of your email.