Guidelines for the Economics Undergraduate Research Assistant (EURA)

Department of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

1. The Economics Undergraduate Research Assistantship is an opportunity for you to work closely with a faculty member on his or her research project.

2. You will be enrolled in a one-semester, three-credit, letter-graded Independent Study course (ECON 496R) with the sponsoring faculty member and will receive a stipend of $600 if this is your first research assistantship with the Economics department. (Stipends for additional research assistantship semesters are subject to departmental approval.)

3. Eight (8) hours per week for the 13-week semester is the expected workload, a total of 104 hours. If you are unable to complete the usual number of hours in a given week, you will be expected to make up the hours in a subsequent week or weeks.

4. You will participate in a poster session at the end of the semester to present your contribution to the research project.

5. Ideally, the research project will overlap with some of your own research interests. However, unlike some other research assistantships or independent study courses, the focus in this assistantship is on the faculty sponsor’s research. You will learn about the research process and acquire research skills that may be useful in other contexts, such as your own senior thesis or in other employment.

6. Your faculty sponsor will welcome your ideas, thoughts, and suggestions about the research project. One of the benefits of having a research assistant is having another person who is very engaged with the project and familiar with the details of the work. Don’t hesitate to ask about things that seem surprising to you or to call the faculty sponsor’s attention to any errors or problems you observe. If you think there might be a better way to do something, suggest it. If interesting questions or hypotheses for future research occur to you, it’s great to mention them to your faculty sponsor.

7. However, do not deviate from the tasks you are asked to do without checking in first with the faculty sponsor. If they ask you to create spreadsheets or graphs in Excel, do not create them using different software. If they ask you to email the results of your work, don’t send them via Google Docs unless your sponsor indicates that this is acceptable.

8. Make sure that the versions of software on the computer(s) you will be using to do your work match those on your faculty sponsor’s computer, or save files in the version used by your sponsor (e.g., Excel .xls files vs. Excel .xlsx files).

9. Be accurate in describing what specific skills you do or don’t have. If you need additional skills in Excel or STATA, the department may be able to help you acquire them. If you find yourself spending a large amount of hours on a specific task (for example, one involving use of Excel), check in with the faculty sponsor to see if there is a shortcut or another way of accomplishing the task.
10. You will be expected to keep a weekly time log listing what activities you did that week and how many hours they took. This can be helpful when a faculty sponsor prepares a grant proposal and needs to estimate how many hours of research assistance to include in the budget for the grant.

11. You and the faculty sponsor will have meetings at which you discuss tasks to be done, results of work you have completed, and/or new tasks to be undertaken. Be sure to record carefully when those meetings are to take place, and contact your sponsor in advance if you will not be able to make a scheduled meeting.

12. Take notes during each meeting concerning any new tasks you are asked to undertake. It’s often hard to remember even a short time later the details of what was discussed and agreed upon.

13. The faculty sponsor is likely to request that you send the results of your work prior to each meeting, as the meeting will be more productive if they have had a chance to look at what you have done and think about it (and about next steps) before you meet. It is important that you respect these deadlines.

14. If you are not going to be able to produce the work by the date it was expected, get in touch with your faculty sponsor as soon as possible. They may have arranged blocks of time in their schedule to work with the results you provide, or may have deadlines that depend on your work. Effective communication skills are important for research collaborators and assistants.

15. Unexpected complications often come up in the course of doing research, and research plans and tasks often need to be adjusted. Don’t hesitate to let your faculty sponsor know if this happens.

16. It is essential that you backup all of work that on safe storage. (Ask your faculty sponsor if they have a preferred medium.)

17. Your grade for the Independent Study course will depend partly on your professionalism in meeting deadlines, communicating clearly, and backing up your work, as well as on the quality of your work and your participation at the poster session.

18. Enjoy your research assistantship! Speak with your faculty sponsor, the director of the EURA program, or one of the undergraduate advisors if there are ways you think the program could be improved.