

Interested in Undergraduate Research?

Research is at the heart of the discipline of sociology; gaining hands-on experience conducting sociological research is a wonderful way to make the field come alive. As an undergraduate, there are many opportunities available to you to practice your research skills. The Department of Sociology encourages undergraduates to get involved in research, and provide a number of research experience opportunities through our Undergraduate Research Project (<https://www.umass.edu/sociology/URP>).

Before you begin the process of looking for a research opportunity, start by doing a quick **self-assessment**: Reflect on your own interests, experience, skills, and goals (e.g., What courses have interested you? What do you want to do after graduation? What research skills do you currently have, and which do you want to work on?). Consider whether you would rather do research for academic credit, or if you need to be paid through work study. Assess what your goals are for your research experience.

Once you have a sense of what you are hoping to get out of your research experience, decide which option you would like to pursue:

Option A – Social Research Analysis Certificate

Students who obtain the Social Research Analysis Certificate gain a deeper understanding of the process of research and master basic skills in gathering and analyzing data. Completion of the certificate can help prepare students wishing to pursue entry-level research positions or master's degrees in fields such as sociology, survey research, public health, program evaluation, market research, public policy, and public administration. To find out more about the certificate, visit:

<https://www.umass.edu/sociology/undergraduate/current/certificates/social-research-analysis>

Option B – Conducting your own research

If you have an idea for a research project that you would like to pursue, one option is to conduct your own research in the form of an Independent Study, a Senior Honors Thesis, or a Senior Departmental Thesis (non-Honors). This can be a great option for students who are interested in going on to graduate school, as it demonstrates the ability (and interest!) to do independent research.

1. Independent Study – If you are interested in doing some independent research, but aren't yet ready to write an entire thesis, one option is to create an independent study on a topic of interest to you. You will need to find a faculty member to sponsor your independent study, and you can meet with any member of the Sociology advising staff to enroll you in the independent study credits. For more information, visit:

http://www.umass.edu/sociology/sites/default/files/SOC_Independent_Study_Contract_2017.pdf

2. Senior Honors Thesis – If you have a 3.4 GPA or better, you qualify to apply for Departmental Honors in Sociology! For more information about the program, visit:

<https://www.umass.edu/sociology/undergraduate/current/honors> The final component of the Departmental Honors program is completing a Senior Honors Thesis. The thesis can take the form of an independent, faculty-sponsored senior research project, or a service project (both options require a written thesis paper). For more information, or to apply to the program, talk to Professor Barbara Tomaskovic-Devey.

3. Senior Thesis – Even if you aren't pursuing Honors, you still have the option to write a Senior Thesis in Sociology. You will need to find a faculty member to sponsor your research, and you can meet with any member of the Sociology advising staff to enroll in the associated credits.

Option C – Working with faculty on their research

Another option is to work with faculty on their research projects. This option requires doing some legwork to identify synergies. Consider: a) What faculty have you built relationships with? b) What kinds of research have they done? c) Does their work align with your interests? Try to find some examples of their scholarship (e.g. articles that they have published, etc.) to see if it is of interest for you.

Once you have identified a faculty member or two that you are interested in working with, you can reach out to them and see whether they are looking for an undergraduate research assistant. Be sure to let them know what your research skills and interests are, why you are interested in working with them, and when you are available to work.

Once you have identified a faculty member to work with, you can register for a Research Assistantship by meeting with any member of the Sociology advising staff. For more information, visit:

https://www.umass.edu/sociology/sites/default/files/SOC_Undergraduate_TA-RA_Contract_2017.pdf

Option D - Office of Undergraduate Research & Studies (OURS) in the LLC

It is entirely possible that faculty are not available to participate in undergraduate research when you are ready! If that is the case, the Office of Undergraduate Research & Studies maintains a list of active faculty research projects that are looking for undergraduate research assistants. You can apply directly through OURS for a research opportunity. There may not always be research opportunities available within the Sociology department, but you may be able to find a research project that speaks to another of your interests. Visit: <http://www.umass.edu/ours/>