How to Think about Undertaking Research at BUSM

[ Guidelines for BUSM I ]

Enrichment Office
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Direct any questions about this document to Ana Gregory.
What is this document? Who is it for?

• This document provides guidelines for first-year medical students interested in pursuing research during medical school.

• It is a supplement to workshops, web resources, and communications from Enrichment Office and Student Affairs Office

• It is not meant to take the place of in-person mentoring from Core Advisors, Student Affairs deans, faculty research mentors
Points to Consider

1. Assess your motivation/priorities
2. Assess personal ability to make commitment to a mentor/project over long term/4 years
3. Set realistic expectations
4. Review points in curriculum where research is feasible
5. Find a project and mentor
6. Communicate with BUMC faculty mentors
7. Explore summer programs
Assess Your Motivation/Priorities

- Learn new methodology and analyses (clinical vs. basic)
- Learn from a mentor/follow mentor’s work
- Assess area of interest in a field
- Pursue an area of specialty-specific interest
- Present a research abstract, publish a paper
- Prepare for a research year off
Is research necessary for obtaining a residency of your choice?

• Not necessarily. It depends. Most specialties do not require research in medical school
• It is not recommended to choose a research project/direction solely for the sake of residency
• It is best to pursue something you are truly interested in. It is OK to change direction as your interests evolve. E.g., you did research in ENT but decide to pursue a Peds or Ob/Gyn residency
• Review specialty-specific requirements with your mentors before committing to research for this purpose
Assess Personal Ability to Make Commitment to Mentor/Project over Long Term (4 yrs)

- Benefits of long term commitment include:
  - Work on an independent project under the guidance of a faculty mentor/research team
  - Acquire in-depth understanding of field, relevance, language
  - Become proficient at relevant methods, data analysis, interpretation, hypothesis development
  - Effectively discuss and communicate your research project (abstracts, posters)
  - Acquire time management skills
  - This is a more serious time commitment. Use advising system for guidance on process.
Set Realistic Expectations

- **Be thoughtful:** Academic demands may exceed original expectations and not leave time for research.
- **Be flexible:** Your passions might not align well with a project but the mentorship/exposure to a discipline may be more important.
- **Clarify timeframe:** Build research schedule around other priorities (work-life balance, exams, holidays, summer).
  
  *Research process often requires more time than you expect*.
- **Be organized:** Research during school year is feasible with systematic (time) planning, but you must create priority list.
- **Use advising system/mentors for help.**
### 4. Review Points in Curriculum Where Research is Feasible

#### Year I
- **August to July**
  - MSSRP
  - Part-time research at BUSM

#### Year II
- **August to May**
  - Part-time research at BUSM
  - Board review USMLE

#### Year III
- **June to May**
  - Selective
  - Any one block (4 weeks)
  - Year off for full-time research at BUSM/other institution

#### Year IV
- **June to May**
  - Research electives
  - Any blocks and up to 12 weeks
5  Find a Project/Mentor: Make Connections & Observations

- Observe professors in class, seminars
- Talk to upperclassmen, friends, peer advisors
- Attend medical school lunch/evening talks
- Conduct literature review of specialty-specific topics
- Undertake clinical observation/shadowing
- Talk to your advising dean
- Review e-mail postings/digests/newsletters
- View student MSSRP symposium abstracts

**Bottom line**: Keep eyes and ears open for opportunities that might interest you throughout the school year!
Find a Project/Mentor: Resources

• **BU Profiles**: Locate researchers by subject matter keyword, last name, institution, etc.

• **B.U. Clinical and Translational Science Institute**

• **Research at BUSM: A Guide for Medical Students**

• **BUSM departments conducting research (student focus):**
  - **Medical Student Research (Surgery Dept)**
  - **Clinical Addiction Research & Education** (CARE) Unit

• **MSSRP poster presentations** by students

• **Resources** for finding a research experience
Communicate with BUMC Faculty Mentors

- Be prepared, act professional
- Use good e-mail etiquette: formal greeting and closure
- Indicate a clear subject line
- Write a clear, succinct “ask” of the mentor
- Use bullets for your skills/interests
- Do your homework (read the scope of their publications)
- If no response, consider re-sending in 10 working days or contacting administrator for appointment
- Keep track of correspondence and follow up if necessary
Explore Summer Programs

- **Medical Student Summer Research Program**
- **Directory of Medical Student Opportunities:** The databases include research and enrichment opportunities outside of BUMC.