

## First-Year Summer Research Project

OK, so you have the germ of a really good idea...counting crayfish in the Connecticut River...studying traffic patterns in Mexico City...retracing the steps of the freedom marchers from Selma to Montgomery...now what? How do you turn this good idea into something concrete? Who do you turn to with questions about your proposal? Or, questions about the size of your budget? Or, about what happens when things don't go as you planned? Well, what you need is a faculty advisor.

For some of you, finding an advisor is as simple as asking a professor in a class that you've taken. For others, you will have to do a little research before your research, so the time to get started is NOW! So, here are some things to think about:

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### **Professor Pfister's 5-Point Guide to Getting Started with Your FYSRP Faculty Advisor**

**1. If you don't have a specific advisor in mind, you can start your search by yourself by looking at departmental web pages and course listings.** Try typing, "Mark Twain" or "population growth" in the search field for the Dartmouth web page and you will come up with everything from book listings, to course exercises, to research papers. Just work your way back to a name or department. Once there, you are ready to pull out a couple of prospects and arrange some meetings.

**2. Faculty members expect students to initiate contact and that they are most receptive if you make an effort share their interests.** Drop your potential advisor a quick email and offer to meet during office hours or some other convenient time. Try not to lay out the entirety of the idea in your email, but rather, ask if they would be interested in sharing a few thoughts on your topic of interest. Once there, lay out some of your ideas and ask, "Do you know of anyone who might be able to serve as an advisor for me?" If all goes well, the answer is, "Yes!"

**3. You do not have to have a brilliant insight or a fully-formed idea before seeking out an advisor.** In fact, you are seeking an advisor to help you with the very task of turning your germ of an idea into a reality. That doesn't mean you can approach someone in the Psychology department with, "I want to do something with the brain." Rather, you might say, "I am interested in studying how the waitstaff in good restaurants remember what people order."

**4. Don't get discouraged if someone says they cannot advise you.** Professors, like you, have multiple commitments and sometimes cannot work with every student that approaches them for help. One way for you to encourage a professor to advise you is to make it clear what the program is about and what commitment they would have in advising you. Surprisingly, not all faculty members know of the FYSRP, so take a copy of the application with you. The faculty advisor section reads, in part, "As an advisor we ask that you assist in the design of the project, establishment of criteria for a final report, and supervise the project with regular contact (by phone or e-mail for off-campus

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projects) throughout the summer.” So, your advisor does not have to be in town over the summer, or even contribute anything financial. Their obligation is to stay in touch and provide advice. And as always, you can have them contact the First-Year Office if they have any questions.

If you do get turned down and have exhausted all of the options you can think of, you are always free to check in with any of the First-Year Deans and we would be more than happy to help you brainstorm some alternative advisors.

**5. Remember, most importantly, this is YOUR project.** Advisors do just that...they advise, not make final decisions. So, you are responsible for the intellectual effort, the proposal, the approval to use human participants, the actual work, and the final write-up of your project. Working with faculty is intended to be a collaborative effort and you are expected to contribute your fair share to the effort.



Working with your faculty advisor on your First-Year Summer Research Project will be one of the many opportunities you will have to create a relationship with your professors outside of the classroom. These relationships are more than just intellectual; they are the keys to feeling connected to Dartmouth and a way to increase your satisfaction with your experience here. I hope that you will take time with your advisor to talk about courses, majors, internships, careers, and what it is like to teach at Dartmouth. Make this the best of your first-year experiences.