# Should I consider a Career in Research?

Research careers exist across many disciplines and industries, from universities and healthcare to government and private organizations. This handout will help you explore pathways, reflect on your interests, and identify ways to gain applicable experience as an undergraduate.

## What Does a Research Career Look Like?

Research careers differ depending on the organization and its goals, but all involve generating and applying evidence to answer questions or solve problems.

| Academic | Industry | Government/Public |
|---|---|---|
| **Goal:** Advance knowledge through original research, publications, and teaching | **Goal:** Develop products, technologies, and practical solutions | **Goal:** Generate evidence to inform programs, policy, and public decisions |
| **Common Research:** Basic, applied, and experimental research | **Common Research:** Applied, experimental, product development, and market research | **Common Research:** Applied, policy, environmental, health, social, and program evaluation research |
| **Examples:** Principal Investigator, Postdoctoral Fellow, Professor | **Examples:** Clinical Research Scientist, R&D Specialist, User Experience Researcher | **Examples:** Social Research Officer, Epidemiologist, Evaluator |

## Myths vs. Reality

☒**Myth:** Research only happens at universities.
☑**Reality:** Research careers exist in healthcare, government, business, engineering consulting, non-profit organizations, and many other sectors.

☒**Myth:** You need a PhD to work in research.
☑**Reality:** Although some advanced research positions do require a PhD, many organizations hire graduates with college, bachelor's, or master's credentials for research assistant, lab, policy, and data-focused roles.

☒**Myth:** Research is only for scientists.
☑**Reality:** Every discipline conducts research, including business, arts, education, humanities, engineering, and social sciences.

## Skills to Reflect On

**Ask yourself:** Would I enjoy developing and using the following skills throughout my career?

- ✓ **Critical thinking and problem solving:** Evaluating evidence, identifying patterns, and developing solutions to complex questions
- ✓ **Research design and data analysis:** Planning studies, collecting information, and interpreting quantitative or qualitative data
- ✓ **Written and verbal communication:** Preparing reports, publications, presentations, and communicating findings to a variety of audiences
- ✓ **Project and time management**: Managing multiple priorities, meeting deadlines, organizing research activities, and tracking project progress
- ✓ **Collaboration and ethical decision-making:** Working with interdisciplinary teams while maintaining research integrity, confidentiality, and responsible research practices

## Ways to Explore Research as an Undergraduate Student

### First and Second Year

- ✓ Attend research seminars or guest lectures to discover topics that interest you.
- ✓ Build research, writing, and data analysis skills through coursework, workshops, or student organizations while exploring tools commonly used in your discipline.
- ✓ Speak with professors about their research during office hours and see if an I-CUREUS opportunity is possible.
- ✓ Contact faculty members and coordinators associated with research labs and centres on campus to inquire about student volunteer opportunities.

### Third and Fourth Year

- ✓ Apply for paid research assistant or summer research positions with your faculty.
- ✓ Speak to your program advisor about completing an honours thesis.
- ✓ Present your work at undergraduate conferences to receive feedback from others.
- ✓ Explore graduate programs and funding opportunities if you're considering a research-based master's or PhD.

## Educational Pathways

| Education | Typical Opportunities |
|---|---|
| Bachelor's Degree | Entry-level research roles, such as Research Assistant, Lab Technician, Clinical Research Coordinator, Policy Assistant, or Data Analyst. Responsibilities often focus on supporting research projects under the guidance of senior researchers. |
| Research Master's (Thesis-Stream) | Develop advanced research skills by designing and completing an independent research project under faculty supervision. Graduates pursue specialized research positions or continue into doctoral studies. |
| PhD | Conduct original research that contributes to an existing or new body of knowledge. Graduates often pursue careers in academia, government, healthcare, industry, or leadership. |
| Postdoctoral Fellowship | Following a PhD, researchers may complete advanced training to deepen expertise, build publications, secure research funding, and prepare for independent research careers. |

## Continue Your Research Journey at Carleton University

Interested in graduate studies? Explore Carleton's thesis-based master's and PhD programs, as well as accelerated graduate pathways. To learn more about faculty research, funding opportunities, and admission requirements, check out the customizable Graduate Viewbook.

## Going Forward

- ✓ Identify research topics that genuinely interest you.
- ✓ Meet with professors to discuss undergraduate research opportunities.
- ✓ Explore graduate programs and faculty conducting research in your area of interest.
- ✓ Review the Government of Canada's Job Bank webpage to explore educational requirements, salaries, and employment outlooks for different research roles.
- ✓ Meet with a Career Consultant to discuss further education and application packages.