

## **FAQs for Psychology Research Lab Volunteers**

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Aug. 17, 2021

### **I'm a first/second-year psychology undergraduate, can I volunteer?**

Yes, it is possible, but typically student volunteers are in their 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year (i.e., after they have completed the Introduction to Psychology courses as well as the Research Methods and Data Analysis courses).

### **When can I volunteer?**

There are volunteer opportunities available throughout the year (i.e., Fall, Winter, and Summer terms). Typically, the volunteer positions start at the beginning of the term and so it is a good idea to reach out to faculty members before the term begins.

### **Can I volunteer in a research lab that is outside of my concentration?**

Yes, students are permitted to volunteer in all psychology labs at Carleton, regardless of their declared concentration area (i.e., cognitive, developmental, organizational, forensics, social/personality, health). However, some faculty members might be looking for volunteers with content knowledge about the research area.

### **Do you recommend that I send one email (addressed to all faculty members) to express my interest?**

No, this strategy is likely to not be successful. Instead, create a list of the research labs you want to work in, rank order them, and send out tailored emails one at a time moving down your list (allowing time between each email to wait for a response).

### **What do I say in the email?**

It is recommended that students create a tailored email to send to the person they want to work with.

There are a few key points to include in the email:

- 1) Let the researcher know that you are looking for a volunteer opportunity and what specifically interests you about their research. You can learn about their work on their research page.
- 2) Highlight your standing in the program (e.g., major, year in program), why you might be a good fit for the lab (e.g., took a course on the topic, have prior volunteer experience) and your strengths (e.g., high GPA, good at programming). In the very least, highlight that you are interested, eager, and open to learn.

3) Ask about available research opportunities in the lab.

Keep your email brief ~5 sentences and consider attaching a copy of your transcript and any other relevant materials.

### **What if I receive a response of “no”, “not at this time”, or no response at all?**

Most researchers will get back to you with a prompt response. If you receive a “no”, this might just be because the researcher’s lab is full. If this happens to you, email another faculty member you are interested in working with. If you find you have been waiting too long for a response, consider moving to the next person on your list (i.e., you don’t want to be delayed for several weeks). Alternatively, you might want to send a polite follow-up email several weeks later. It is possible that if you receive no response at all, that the faculty member is on sabbatical, on leave, or is temporarily away from the office.

### **What happens if I don’t find an available faculty member?**

Given that lab opportunities are variable and limited, it is possible that a student might not find an opportunity on their first round of attempts. It is suggested that students try again the following semester or year.

### **When and how do I receive my co-curricular credit for volunteering in a research lab?**

Co-curricular credits (CCR) for volunteering are submitted once a year in April for volunteer work conducted within the year before (i.e., May-March). An email will be sent in early April to participating faculty members asking for the names and emails of research volunteers. The volunteers will then be emailed later in April by the coordinator with instructions on adding the position into the Co-Curriculum Credit system.

Although students are permitted to volunteer in more than one lab in a year, across more than one term, only one credit will be granted.

### **Do you have any tips for improving my chances of finding a volunteer position?**

*Be persistent.* Do not give up on the idea of volunteering in a research lab if you receive a “no” or “not at this time” response. Instead, try emailing other faculty members. It is also possible that you might have to try again next term or the following year.

*Be flexible.* If you are having difficulty finding a volunteer opportunity in your preferred research area, consider volunteering in a lab outside of it. The experience you gain from one lab might help you to get other volunteer opportunities in the future.

*Be proactive.* Consider reaching out to a professor for a volunteer opportunity after taking one of their courses. It helps if you are an active member of the class (e.g., asking questions, going to office hours) with a strong standing in the course (i.e., above average grade).