

## **The McCormick Undergraduate Research Society**

Peer Education Committee

# MURS Peer Advising Program: Guidelines and Protocol

### Peer Advisers

McCormick undergraduates who have completed at least two quarters of independent research are eligible to become peer advisers. Advisers should be both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their own research. Their purpose is to discuss their project with other undergraduates and guide them in understanding the realities of research and available opportunities.

### Mentees

Mentees may be any McCormick undergraduate who is interested in finding a research position. They may be unclear about the process of locating and approaching professors who have openings for undergraduates in their laboratories.

### Assigning Mentees to Advisers

In applying to the MURS Peer Advising program, mentees are to provide a brief description of their academic interests. Advisers will have access to these descriptions and will choose mentees whose interests correspond closely to their own area of expertise. These matches will not always be perfect, and mentees will often find it difficult to specify a research area. In these cases, any adviser (in the mentee's department) may select the mentee. As the mentee develops interest in a specific area, the adviser may refer them to someone else for more pertinent advice. If necessary or helpful, the mentee may consult multiple advisers.

### Initial Contact

Peer advisers are required to contact their mentee as soon as the matching process is completed. In the meantime, the mentee will be notified to watch for the Peer Adviser's email. If no contact is established, it is the mentee's responsibility to contact MURS for more information. The adviser should invite the mentee to an in-person meeting; this is generally the best way to establish a relationship and learn more about the mentee's specific questions, concerns, and interests.

### Continuation of the Adviser-Mentee Relationship

The advantage of peer advising (as opposed to faculty advising) is that contact can be very casual and spontaneous. Advisers are friendly people, and both parties should feel comfortable being open with each other while maintaining a level of respect and professionalism. It is expected that the mentee has done some preliminary research with regards to the process of finding a research position. Mentees should also have reasonable expectations; advisers cannot guarantee anything specific (such as research positions). Faculty members have the final word on whether or not an undergraduate will be permitted to work in a lab.

Advisers should feel free to talk about their own projects with mentees. This is often a good way to start a long discussion and exchange a lot of valuable information. Advisers can describe the long-term goals of the lab as well as specific experimental setups and designs. Advisers should discuss their project in terms that are as "accessible" as possible to the mentee. Research can be intimidating to

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those who have never participated in it, and MURS does not seek to exacerbate this effect. Though it is understood that all projects have various technical prerequisites, advisers should present research as something that any undergraduate can feasibly take part in.

After learning more about the mentee's specific interests, advisers should discuss which classes and labs the mentee should look into. After deciding on several labs that appeal to the mentee, the adviser should then discuss how to approach professors. This can include helping the mentee write a resume and pointing them to specific publications that may aid their understanding of the different labs. Professors are often impressed by a student who has taken the time to at least scan through several of their publications.

Lastly, the adviser should direct the mentee to other resources offered by MURS. This may include pointing out aspects of the website (such as features, job postings, etc.) as well as relevant events being organized by MURS. The adviser may also ask the mentee to let us know if they become interested in joining MURS later on; this is an essential component of continuing the peer advising program in the future.

### Lab Tours and/or Shadowing

It is highly recommended that advisers give mentees a tour of their lab and possibly allow the mentee to shadow them for some period of time. This is the best way to give the mentee a realistic conception of what research is like and what the lab aims to accomplish. Undergraduates have very few – if any – opportunities to see what is accomplished in research labs, so this experience should appeal to them and clarify many of their questions. However, it is very important that you first obtain permission from your principal investigator.

### Length of Advising

It is expected that advisers will meet with mentees in-person at least once (as described above). Beyond this, follow-up questions may be discussed via email or further meetings. Advising is generally expected to last for one quarter during which the mentee will hopefully obtain a research position. Advisers should check in during the following quarter to see if the mentee has been successful in receiving a research position. The final email to the mentee should: (1) wish them the best for their academic career, and (2) make it clear that the mentee can always contact the adviser in the future should more questions arise.

### Disclaimer

Advisers cannot guarantee anything to mentees in terms of research positions (particularly in their own labs). If an adviser chooses to give the mentee a tour of their lab, they must make it clear that this is not an invitation to join.