Frequently Asked Questions

UW medical students have many opportunities to enhance their education through participation in funded summer research programs sponsored by the UW SMPH, the National Institutes of Health, and other US medical institutions. This information is provided to give students an introduction to the process of finding and applying for research opportunities and to answer the most frequently asked questions about doing summer research. There are many more funded summer research experiences than clinical externships. We hope this information inspires you to consider a research experience and makes the process of finding the right program easier.

Why do summer research?

This is best answered in the responses given by medical students who have done summer research experiences in the past:

▶ “For the intellectual challenge; advancing scientific knowledge”
▶ “Opportunity to work closely with an outstanding faculty researcher who spent time teaching me how to do research”
▶ “I’m considering a career in academic medicine and wanted to see if I liked it”
▶ “Not considering a research career, but found that the skills help me better understand clinical problems”
▶ “Got to function as more than a technician; this was different from my undergraduate experience in a lab”
▶ “I was concerned because I didn’t have a lot of research experience. This increased both my confidence and professional skills”
▶ “Not only did research, but had opportunities to observe in clinic, attend rounds and spend some time in the OR”
▶ “Wanted to spend the summer in” (pick one): Madison, Milwaukee, Boston, Kenya, Denmark, Chicago…

Do you have to do summer research to get into a competitive residency?

A productive research experience which leads to presentations or publications of results will certainly be an asset to your application. Most residency directors say that you benefit from a strong, well-rounded record of accomplishments in your academic coursework and clinical clerkships, as well as interests beyond these areas. While research is not necessary for all residencies, it is an asset for the most competitive residency programs. In addition to summer research, you will also have opportunities to do research electives for credit in your third and fourth years of medical school.
What research programs are sponsored through the University of Wisconsin Medical School? What are the time commitments, stipend, and process for applying?

There are several UW-sponsored summer research programs: Shapiro, Cardiovascular Medicine, Department of Family Medicine, and the Department of Surgery. All programs except for Family Medicine use the same application process (through the Shapiro Program). Faculty mentors can come from any of the 45 departments, institutes, and centers within the medical school and from every basic science, clinical and public health discipline. The requirements and application procedures for each program are outlined below. Read these carefully as there are important variations between programs. Keep in mind that many research programs, even those in basic science areas, offer opportunities for clinical shadowing or patient contact as part of the experience.

Shapiro Summer Research Program (March 8, 2010 deadline)

The Shapiro Program is the largest of the UW programs, with more than 50 positions available in 2008. It is administered by the Dean’s office. The Shapiro Program matches funds with a faculty member’s department or research grant for the student’s stipend.

►8-12 weeks of mentored basic science, clinical, translational, health services, population/public health or global health research, with a UW faculty member, within or outside of the medical school. The program’s priority is to fund research projects for work with UW faculty members. If funds are available, project proposals for work with faculty members at other institutions will be considered.

►Students must find an investigator whose department, grant funds, or other sources will contribute 50% of the stipend; The Dean’s office will provide matching funds. Full funding will be considered for projects of merit where matching funds are not available.

►Stipend is based on NIH grad trainee rate of $20,772 per year (about $400 per week before taxes). Students are expected to work 40 hours per week. There are no benefits (health insurance, workers comp, vacation or sick leave). Students are paid monthly, usually beginning July 1. Earnings do not adversely affect financial aid awards. Start and end dates are flexible, however, projects may not start before the end of the semester and must end prior to the start of your second year. Time away for vacations or personal obligations must be approved by your research mentor and made up.

►Student are responsible for finding a mentor and project. Projects are usually related to the ongoing research of the faculty member, and may be a faculty member with whom the student has worked in the past. For advice on how to find a project and mentor refer to the specific section below. Students meet with their mentor to determine if there is mutual interest in pursuing an application to the program, and work jointly to submit the required materials.

►For students interested in working with faculty members in the Department of Surgery, please contact Barbara Sisolak at sisolak@surgery.wisc.edu. Barbara is the department liaison for student research and will assist you in finding a project and mentor.
All students have the opportunity to attend a research seminar series for student researchers organized by the Department of Surgery and are required to participate in a research roundtable during the summer.

Applications for the Shapiro program are due March 8, 2010. The application is posted on the medical school website at

http://www.med.wisc.edu/education/md/curriculum/year-1/student-research/211

Read the instructions carefully. You will need to submit the application form, a resume, faculty letter of support, and a two-page description of the proposed research, including specific learning objectives. Proposals are reviewed and ranked by a faculty committee and awards announced by early April.

Students who have questions about the program or need assistance finding projects and submitting applications should contact the program administrator, Lynne Cleeland, Room 4119 HSLC, lmcleela@wisc.edu, 265-6045.

Family Medicine Summer Student Research and Clinical Assistantship Program (Rolling Deadline)

This program is sponsored by the UW Department of Family Medicine. The SSRCA is designed to pair UW medical students and UW-DFM faculty who have mutual interests in research. The goals of the program are: (1) to provide medical students with an early exposure to family medicine, (2) to provide students with an early exposure to clinical research and medicine in a variety of settings, and (3) to stimulate and support research by Wisconsin family physicians and DFM faculty.

Student Summer Research Program (SSRP) provides funding for 8 weeks of research with family physician faculty members in Madison and around the state. Stipend is about $2500 for full time work in June and July. 10 positions are usually fully funded.

Students will be notified by email of available research projects by March 1 and can apply at any time. Student applicants will be asked to indicate which of the available projects they might find appealing. The names of student applicants and their preferences will be circulated among the faculty participants. Through an interview process, either in person or by phone, faculty and students will agree on matches for the summer.

Students participate in didactic sessions to learn research methodology, data analysis and presentation skills.

Contact: SSRCA Director, Dr. Jonathan Temte, jtemte@wingra.fammed.wisc.edu for information and application materials. Website information on the program is posted at http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/medstudent/summer/index.html.

Note: Additional research projects with family medicine faculty members have also been funded by the Shapiro program (when matching funds are available). Consult the list of
past summer research projects or view the list of DFM faculty research projects at [http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/research/projects/index.html](http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/research/projects/index.html). Student may contact faculty directly to inquire about summer opportunities.

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**Cardiovascular Summer Research Program (March 8, 2010 deadline)**

The UW Cardiovascular Research Center Summer Research Opportunities Program places UW medical students between years 1 and 2 into cardiovascular sciences laboratory settings. The UW Cardiovascular Research Center provided funding to 11 students in 2007, with matching funds provided by the Shapiro Program.

▶ 8-12 weeks of basic science and clinical cardiovascular research with UW investigators. A list of the projects and mentors for 2006 can be found at [http://www.cvrc.wisc.edu/summer-research.html](http://www.cvrc.wisc.edu/summer-research.html).

▶ See the website at [http://www.cvrc.wisc.edu/summer-research.html](http://www.cvrc.wisc.edu/summer-research.html) for past projects and for more information about the Center.

▶ Application procedures and stipends are the same as for the Shapiro Program.

▶ Students should contact Barbara Weitz, brweitz@facstaff.wisc.edu, 263-2266, to express their interest in the program and for guidance concerning projects.

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**UW Department of Surgery Summer Research Program**

The UW Department of Surgery (general and subspecialty divisions) funds basic science and clinical research projects with their faculty. Most of these projects will be funded through the Shapiro Program, with matching funds from the Department of Surgery, or fully funded through the Department of Surgery T35 training grant.

▶ Check the Student Research page for project lists or the Department website ([www.surgery.wisc.edu](http://www.surgery.wisc.edu)) for a list of research grants and faculty interests.

▶ Email Barbara Sisolak ([Sisolak@surgery.wisc.edu](mailto:Sisolak@surgery.wisc.edu)) with your areas of interest and a resume. Barb will facilitate contacts with appropriate faculty members. If you do contact faculty members independently, please inform Barb.

▶ SPECIAL NOTE: If you are interested in Orthopedics & Rehabilitation, the contact person is Leigh Larson, 263-0888, larsonl@orthorehab.wisc.edu. For the Department of Urology, the contact is Kathleen Smith Zaremba, sarembak@surgery.wisc.edu, 263-1363
National Institutes of Health Summer Research Program (Bethesda, MD and other locations)

For complete information about student research opportunities at any of the Institutes see the website at http://www.training.nih.gov/student/srfp/catalog/index.asp. 80-90 positions are funded each year from 300 applications. Deadline is March 1, 2010, but students should apply early on-line.

Other Programs

Many additional summer research programs are available to students through other medical institutions, foundations, and associations. These include research in pediatrics, aging, endocrinology, cardiovascular disease, dermatology, allergy and immunology, oncology, orthopedics, epilepsy, lupus, rheumatology, myasthenia gravis, addiction medicine, pediatric AIDS, mental health and other disciplines. For more information or contact Lynne Cleeland in Room 4119 HSLC for advising. Most programs post application information on their websites.

Note that most deadlines for research programs are in January and February.

International Research Projects

Funded opportunities are quite limited in this area. It is possible to find a faculty investigator at the UW with research projects abroad and to apply for funding for the project through the Shapiro program. Contact the Global Health Program office, Lori Diprete Brown, dipretebrown@wisc.edu for assistance.

UW Area Studies Programs also sometimes provide summer research support. Tinker Nave Research grants fund projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. Contact the Latin America, Iberian, and Caribbean Studies Program on campus for more information.

How do I find a project and UW faculty research mentor?

Here are some strategies that have worked for other students:

- Check the lists of projects submitted by faculty on the Student Research website: http://www.med.wisc.edu/education/md/curriculum/year-1/student-research/211
- Review the list of past student projects in the research program of your interest. These are either listed on the websites of the programs or included in the Directory of Summer Research Projects posted at http://www.med.wisc.edu/education/md/curriculum/year-1/student-research/211.

Contact the faculty mentor for the project to inquire about opportunities. It's a good idea to also contact the student who worked on the project for their opinion of the experience.
If you know your discipline of interest, check the UW department or center website and look for the section that lists faculty and their research areas. For example, the Department of Medicine website http://www.medicine.wisc.edu/mainweb/DOMPages.php?section=DOM&page=main has links to faculty profiles in each clinical division and research activities within the department.

Links to all of the Medical School departments, institutes, and centers can be found at http://www.med.wisc.edu/departments/main/42. Email or call faculty members whose interests match yours to inquire about possibilities for projects.

Ask past research mentors, preceptors, course instructors, guest lecturers, other faculty members, department chairs, academic affairs staff, and other students and for advice and the names of appropriate contacts!

Contact Lynne Cleeland in Room 4119 HSLC if you have questions about finding a project or mentor.

**When and how should I start planning my project?**

Start planning as early as possible. Use your semester break to review programs and begin to make inquiries. Contact faculty members in January to allow enough time for meeting, discussion, and writing of your proposal by mid-February.

Keep in mind that busy faculty members may not always respond to your first email. Be patient and persistent!

For the Shapiro, Cardiovascular Medicine, and Surgery programs, many students interview several faculty members before deciding on a project. You do not need to have an idea for a research projects before you meet with a potential mentor. The faculty mentor will most likely suggest a project and explain the role and duties a student could assume. They might suggest that you read publications or grants related to the project. You should ask the mentor if the project IRB approvals have been obtained or will be obtained prior to the start of the summer and who will be supervising and working with you on the project. Make sure you have a good understanding of the nature and scope of the project, what will be expected of you, what you can expect to learn, and what can be accomplished during the time you will be working.

You might want to provide the faculty member with a copy of your resume and any written materials related to work on past research projects.

After agreeing on a project, you and your faculty mentor should work together to develop a specific research proposal and to complete the application form. The application form and instructions for the Shapiro and CTRC programs are posted on the medical school website at http://www.med.wisc.edu/education/md/student_research/index.php. You will be asked to outline your learning objectives and to specify research activities that will help you meet those objectives. Individual advising on this is available by contacting Lynne Cleeland.

Your research mentor should give you considerable help with writing and editing the application and proposal, but it is the student’s responsibility to make sure it is complete and correctly submitted. Your mentor will need to review and sign the final proposal before it is submitted. Proposals must not exceed 2 pages in length. Refer to the application instructions for more details.
**May I apply to more than one program or submit more than one project?**

We recommend applying to more than one program only when your first program choice is limited and very competitive.

We ask that students applying to one of the UW research programs limit their submission to one specific project. The rate of acceptance for research proposals for UW programs is very high. We make every effort to fund proposals of high quality that will enhance the research skills of our students.

Students who apply to additional research or clinical programs should make their faculty mentor aware of their other pursuits or pending applications.

Once the awards for UW summer research programs are made in mid-March, we will ask students for an acceptance decision by early April. By that time most summer programs have notified students of their acceptance status.

**Can I combine summer research with a clinical externship or international experience?**

Most summer research programs require a commitment of at least 8 weeks to complete a meaningful project; 10-12 weeks is strongly recommended. Clinical externships are generally 4-8 weeks in length, making it quite difficult to accomplish both experiences in the course of a summer. Students usually have 12-13 weeks of summer break, and quite often find it possible to combine a research experience with a short-term clinical shadowing experience, international mission trip, or a vacation of several weeks.

**How does summer research apply to the Research Honors Program?**

The research that students do between years 1 and 2 can be credited toward the 16 weeks of mentored research required for the new Honors in Research Program, and can provide the basis for the paper or thesis that is submitted for the honors degree. Some of the didactic and seminar sessions related to research that students attend during the summer can also fulfill requirements for the honors degree.

Students who do not do research between years 1 and 2 will find it challenging to meet the 16 week requirement unless they take time off for a year-long research experience.

If you are thinking of pursuing the honors program, we strongly encourage a summer research experience. Applications to the honors program are made during your second year of medical school. More specific information about the requirements will be provided to summer research students.