EMORY

Undergraduate
Research Programs
Pathways Center

Summer Undergraduate Research Experience Application
Research Proposal Guidelines

Your proposal is an essential part of the application process—it demonstrates both your readiness to undertake a ten-week independent project and your ability to communicate your research or creative goals clearly. The following guidance will help you craft a competitive, well-organized abstract and proposal.

I. Understanding the SURE Proposal

Your proposal (maximum 1,000 words) is your opportunity to **articulate what you plan to explore, how you will pursue it, and why it matters.**

Because SURE welcomes applications from *all* disciplines—sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts—your writing should be clear and compelling to a general academic audience. Avoid field-specific jargon or overly technical detail. Think of your reviewers as intellectually curious readers who may not share your disciplinary background.

II. Suggested Proposal Elements

Your proposal should include the following components, though the exact structure may vary slightly by field.

1. Introductory Sentence(s)

Begin with a clear, engaging opening that introduces the topic and situates the reader. Explain what general area your project explores and why it is of interest.

Example (STEM): "Every year, over two million people worldwide are diagnosed with antibiotic-resistant infections, yet the biological mechanisms that drive bacterial resistance remain poorly understood."

Example (Humanities): "This project examines how twentieth-century Southern writers used landscape as a metaphor for social change."

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2. Background, Context, and/or Research Question(s)

Provide just enough background for a non-specialist to understand the context of your project. Identify the knowledge gap or problem your research addresses.

Ask yourself:

- What has been done in this field before?
- What question remains unanswered or what issue remains unexplored?

Example: "While previous studies have identified several genetic mutations linked to resistance, few have investigated how environmental stressors contribute to rapid bacterial adaptation."

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3. Statement of Hypothesis, Thesis, and/or Purpose

State clearly what your project will test, argue, create, or explore. In other words, what is the central purpose or claim?

Example (STEM): "I hypothesize that oxidative stress accelerates the emergence of antibiotic resistance in *E. coli* populations."

Example (Humanities): "This project argues that the shifting imagery of the Southern landscape in midcentury fiction reflects broader anxieties about modernization and identity."

For **creative or performing arts** projects, an **artist statement** may replace a traditional abstract. In this case, articulate the conceptual goals, artistic influences, methods, and intended outcomes of your work.

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4. General Methods, Procedures, Sources, and/or Media Used

Describe how you will carry out your project. Outline your approach clearly but succinctly:

- **For lab-based research:** Identify the experimental design, techniques, and materials you will use.
- **For social science projects:** Explain data sources, participant groups, or analytical frameworks.
- **For humanities or arts:** Describe texts, archives, creative media, or performance techniques you'll engage.

Emphasize feasibility—what can realistically be accomplished within nine to ten weeks?

Example: "Using quantitative PCR and RNA sequencing, I will compare gene expression profiles of *E. coli* populations exposed to oxidative stress versus control conditions."

Example (Arts): "Through a series of large-scale charcoal drawings, I will explore themes of migration and memory, informed by oral histories collected from Atlanta's immigrant communities."

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5. (*Optional*) - Primary or Preliminary Results, Findings, Arguments, Outcomes, and/or Products

If you already have data, preliminary results, or creative prototypes, briefly describe them. If not, explain what outcomes you expect or what forms your results will take (e.g., dataset, paper, exhibition, performance).

Example: "Preliminary analyses suggest that oxidative stress significantly increases mutation rates, supporting the proposed hypothesis."

Example (Creative): "I expect to complete a cohesive portfolio of six mixed-media works accompanied by a reflective artist statement."

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6. Conclusion, Implication, and/or Significance of the Work

End by emphasizing the broader significance of your project. Why does it matter? What new knowledge, perspective, or contribution will it offer?

Example (STEM): "Understanding how stressors influence resistance could inform the development of novel treatment strategies for persistent infections."

Example (Humanities): "By illuminating how regional narratives mediate social change, this project contributes to ongoing discussions about identity and belonging in the American South."

Optional - You might decide to highlight potential next steps or how the project will inform future study, career goals, or public engagement.

III. AI Guidelines

Any use of AI to write your research proposal must be disclosed at the time of submission.

- The use of AI in performing research is subject to the review of your research mentor. Such use must be explicitly acknowledged and disclosed.
- Using AI to generate text, data, or figures presented as original by you, the author, is NOT acceptable.