Dietrich College undergraduate students are actively engaged in groundbreaking research. International Relations and Politics and Global Studies offer a myriad of research opportunities for students, beginning as early as the first-year. Faculty in the majors are eager to work with students to develop and pursue their research goals. Learn more about the meaningful ways to get involved with research through the students profiled in this brochure. Contact the faculty director of your major or the academic program manager to jumpstart your undergraduate research career. Connect with the Office of Undergraduate Research to learn more about centralized support for research.

Undergraduate Research Opportunities

- Dietrich College Research Training Course
- Faculty Led Research Project
- CIRP Research Associate
- Student-Defined Independent Research with Faculty Advisor
- Global Studies Advanced Seminar
- Dietrich College Honors Research Fellowship
- Dietrich College Senior Honors Thesis

Central Resources to Support Research

- Small Undergraduate Research Grant (SURG)
- International Small Undergraduate Research Grant (iSURG)
- Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)
- Jennings Family Brave Companion Fund

Faculty Directors:
International Relations and Politics: Kiron Skinner, kskinner@andrew.cmu.edu
Global Studies: John Soluri, jsoluri@andrew.cmu.edu

Academic Program Manager:
Emily Half, ehalf@andrew.cmu.edu, 412-268-7082, Baker Hall A60C

Undergraduate Research Office: Warner Hall 5th Floor, wwww.cmu.edu/uro/
**Dietrich College Research Training Course**

**Simran Jagtiani**

**Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?**
I wanted to make the most of my time at Carnegie Mellon. After I graduate, I will rarely find myself in a position where I am surrounded by dedicated and experienced faculty that truly want students to succeed. I decided that research is a great way to utilize the resources offered to us.

**What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?**
I took the introductory course Decision Processes of American Political Institutions with Prof. Skinner. I attended office hours and asked her about potential research opportunities. When I learned about the research training course, I gave Prof. Skinner my resume and began to research in the CIRP lab. After my semester of research training was over, Dr. Skinner offered me a position as a Research Associate for my second year.

**How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?**
I focused on a multitude of topics and primarily used basic web and print sources to conduct research. Research Associates from the lab taught me how to create briefing books in the format that Dr. Skinner prefers.

**What did you enjoy about your research?**
One of the most rewarding aspects of research was the ability to work closely with CIRP faculty. I was able to witness the International Relations and Politics program while it developed and continued to add new initiatives for its students. Working with upperclassmen in the lab was also very beneficial, as I got a lot of advice from first-hand experiences with students whose career goals are similar to my own.

**What was challenging about your research?**
Adapting to the lab environment was challenging at first. However, once I was able to understand the format of the documents I was creating and the lab's expectations of its Research Associates, the environment became more comfortable.

**What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?**
I have definitely been able to get my foot in the door with various internship opportunities due to my background in research. Government organizations and NGOs are both looking for candidates with writing and analytical experience, which are skills that researchers develop over time. Also, being exposed to different topics allowed me to discern what I was most interested in, which helped me narrow down my academic focus. The research training course also turned into a position as a Research Associate in the CIRP lab, which allows me to continue my work as a permanent member of the team.

**What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?**
Take initiative. I would not have been offered the research position if I did not attend office hours and ask about any available opportunities. Even if you have not taken a class with the professor, do not be afraid to send him or her an email discussing your interest in research. The course catalog lists the professors and their particular subjects under Research Training, which makes it very easy to reach out to the faculty.
Having never had any experience with research, I was initially a little tentative to reach out and ask around for research. I would say to any student considering a similar endeavor to not be shy and go for it. Even though I did not have much experience or many qualifications, I found the research experience to be very enjoyable and worthwhile.

Having taken a course with Professor Golman, I was not only interested in his work, but also liked him as a professor. I wanted experience outside of the classroom, and found this research experience brought all these elements together.

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What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
Professor Golman regularly sends out emails pertaining to research opportunities. One included a possibility to work with him. I followed up on the email, and came into his office to hear more about what was being researched.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
Before even beginning research, I completed a CITI online course which consisted of a social and behavioral research basic refresher, as well as a social and behavioral responsible conduct of research course. I was then given a briefing of the research being conducted, and trials were run. This allowed me to get to know the material better and understand the process. Toward the end of the course, I was also allotted specific time to create my own mock survey and get to know the ins and outs of Qualtrics.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I liked how this was a research training course, so I not only got to learn through conducting research, but time was also put aside specifically for me to acquire particular skill-sets, such as learning how to use Qualtrics.

What was challenging about your research?
Having research on top of a full schedule provided a challenge in terms of juggling my work. I didn't realize there were so many different components to research, and although not overwhelming, there does need to be a significant amount of time dedicated to research. I had a lot to learn.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
Although I'm still not certain about what career path I want to take, my research experience has given me a new perspective and method of exploring interests outside of the typical classroom setting. In terms of the near future, I would possibly like to take on another research experience, as I really enjoyed this one.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Having never had any experience with research, I was initially a little tentative to reach out and ask around for research. I would say to any student considering a similar endeavor to not be shy and go for it. Even though I did not have much experience or many qualifications, I found the research experience to be very enjoyable and worthwhile.
I strongly recommend meeting with the professor before applying and ask questions. There are so many different ways of approaching research and every professor has his/her own methodologies. I was interested in Dr. Polansky's research project on the history of chocolate in Spain and the Americas. At the time, I was also taking courses in the Modern Languages Department.

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
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What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
The first step I took was to e-mail Dr. Polansky expressing my interest. From there, she gave me the paperwork that I needed to complete. We also scheduled a meeting where we discussed in depth the research training course.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
I was provided with multiple sources in both English and Spanish. Throughout the semester, I read through them on my own as well as with my professor. We discussed a myriad of themes and topics that came up in all of these sources. We had weekly meetings and communicated often via e-mail.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I enjoyed the discussions that came about each week. Reading and re-reading old documents about the history of chocolate allowed us to discover new things after every read. It was a whole new way of looking at history that I’d never encountered before.

What was challenging about your research?
This kind of research that we did required a lot of time and patience. There were weeks, when we felt that we had not progressed as much as we’d previously hoped. However, the semester as a whole shows a great deal of progress and findings.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
When the semester came to an end, I wanted to continue building research skills, because I was already thinking about pursuing my own research in the near future. During the following spring semester, I found myself applying to SIT, a study abroad program that allowed me to conduct field work in Chile and the opportunity to write a research paper by the end of the semester.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
I strongly recommend meeting with the professor before applying and ask questions. There are so many different ways of approaching research and every professor has his/her own methodologies.
Faculty Led Research Project

Ian Asenjo

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
I wanted to gain more experience outside of the classroom and work more with Prof. Nico Slate. It seemed like a very good use of my time.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
I first spoke to my professor, Nico Slate, with whom I had taken a class. I enjoyed my time in his class and was looking for something extra-curricular. I first met with him and asked him if he could recommend any good projects. He then invited me to help him with his new website. Establishing good relations with professors is always a safe way of acquiring these types of opportunities.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
I had to improve my writing abilities and learn how to effectively research different historical events and transcribe them in a clear, concise manner. This involved a lot of email correspondence with my faculty supervisor who worked with me and gave me feedback on my writing.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I enjoyed growing as a writer and learning about the historical events I was researching. I could feel myself thinking more and more about the way in which I phrased my sentences and conveyed historical context. I was also able to incorporate the knowledge I gained from my personal interests into my contributions to the website.

What was challenging about your research?
Sometimes I found it difficult to balance my research with my academic work. I was not able to work on it as much as I wished to because of the volume of classwork. At first, it was difficult to write effectively since I had not had that much experience writing at the college level.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
It has definitely made me more interested in future historical research opportunities. I feel much more capable of carrying out this type of research now. It also helped me decide to become a Global Studies major.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Take advantage of every opportunity you have to get research, since they are so valuable. You are not going to learn just in the classroom, a lot of the time it has to be applied, and research helps apply your learning. Also do not be intimidated if your advisor is critical of your writing abilities at first, you must remember that you are also there to learn and improve.
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?

The research project was focused on discovering methodologies to assist those in need financially. This is a topic that is very important to me personally.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?

I was made aware of the research opportunity by my academic advisor. I contacted the professor to learn more about the project and ultimately move forward with the research opportunity.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?

I gained knowledge about the topic and methodologies through book research as well as oversight from the faculty advisors.

What did you enjoy about your research?

It was interesting work. In addition, I got to learn about something that most individuals don't even know exists.

What was challenging about your research?

It was difficult to find enough time to participate in the research program. I had a heavy class load. There can be a lot of roadblocks to research, including receiving IRB certification, let alone actually enacting such a program.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?

I think that it will keep me interested in trying to find ways to impact policy that can help those in need.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?

Do something that you find interesting. Research requires a lot of work, so you may as well enjoy what you are doing.
Susanna Seltzer

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?

I decided to join this research project to sharpen my research skills and broaden the variety of topics in which I have experience.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?

I initially heard about the experience from a friend leaving the position, and then promptly contacted the professor in order to understand her expectations and requirements for the position. The professor gave me a small sample research project that I completed promptly and thoroughly.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?

By reading through a wide variety of sources on the subject, I quickly became familiar with the research topic.

What did you enjoy about your research?

It was a simple enough process that I already had the skill set for, so though I had to work hard, I was confident in what I was doing.

What was challenging about your research?

Occasionally sources conflicted or were unclear, or finding the data I needed required a lot of digging. This research definitely required a long attention span.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?

It has broaden my areas of interest to include sub-Saharan Africa, allowing me to confidently apply to future research jobs concerning Africa (as well as my main area of interest, the Middle East).

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?

Doing research like this, though time-consuming and occasionally dull, allows you to become much more efficient at future work. You can acquire a familiarity with a topic in such a way that future work in the area will be much easier. Your personal research strategies can be improved in the trial-and-error process of working within the university.
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
I have always been interested in learning about new cultures and I love helping the family I see regularly through FORGE so this seemed like a great opportunity to pursue these interests as well as study resettlement on a broader scale.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
I applied for my internship at the end of fall semester and upon notification that I had received the position I asked Professor Tardio if she would be willing to supervise the internship.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
Prior to my internship and research I was already interested in refugee resettlement because of my work with FORGE. Professor Tardio and my supervisors at my internship pointed me to some good resources to use for research and from there I spent a lot of time reading about related topics. I also learned which questions were especially useful to ask the families I was working with to maximize my learning and understanding.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I loved meeting the families and exchanging thoughts and information about each other's cultures. I was learning as much, if not more, about their culture than they were about mine. I also enjoyed meeting with Professor Tardio each week. This time allowed me to learn more about any topic related to my internship and has definitely helped me more clearly define what I am interested in and where I want to go with it. I was able to ask questions and explore them with the help of a professor but in a more conversational setting than a classroom. She supported me throughout the entire internship and helped push me to think about it in new ways.

What was challenging about your research?
I worked as part of a team with the caseworkers at JFCS, the other cultural orientation intern, and with the various families. It was difficult to create a schedule of times to meet that worked for all of us. In addition, there were times when what I was learning was very frustrating because the problems that the families faced were very large and it seemed impossible to tackle one of the problems without thinking about all of them at once. Professor Tardio was very helpful in keeping this in perspective when I was discouraged.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
This research experience was a turning point in my academic career. It helped me identify my academic interest in refugee resettlement and the larger geopolitical forces affecting resettlement. It has also pushed me to think more about where I want to study abroad and what type of work environment would be suitable to further my learning and make me happy.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
First, select a project about which you are passionate. Then, obtain a faculty advisor. This was by far the most important part of my project because my research became a part of my life rather than just being something that I did for school. Now, I naturally think about everything I learn in a more global context and in relation to resettlement.
José Lopez

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
I wanted to have a summer experience where I could develop professional skills, working with deadlines and challenging myself to adapt to situations, learn from my mistakes, and develop relationships within the Center for International Relations and Politics (CIRP) at Carnegie Mellon.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
I began sending e-mails to different professors, when the CIRP staff replied I interviewed for the position and sent my writing samples for review.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
First I made sure to read the methodology that they were using a few times to familiarize myself with the ideas and the procedures. Once I actually started using it, I made sure to ask questions about the procedure and the specific nuances of the project, but I also made sure I understood what the end product was being used for in order to make decisions when I was unsupervised.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I enjoyed the way they communicated goals and expectations throughout the summer, the staff ensured that we knew what we were doing and that we were doing it correctly. They also allowed me to lead a part of the project and assign tasks which helped me develop leadership skills necessary for a team research environment.

What was challenging about your research?
At some points we were thrust into subjects that were not easy to find either online or at the library, so it involved a lot of reading and a lot of understanding where to go when you are stuck. I was able to overcome this by asking for more specific questions and looking at smaller concepts that helped me understand the bigger picture at hand.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
It has made me see that I can continue researching and using my research skills professionally with my major. It also allowed me to focus my academic interests into the national defense/national security area.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Always communicate with your research director, make sure you understand the project when you begin working. If you don’t understand what is going on, your work might end up being incorrect and you will have to start over again.
**David Matvey**

**Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?**
I wanted to learn something about the current body of research activity surrounding the field of international relations and politics.

**What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?**
It was surprisingly simple. After speaking with my IRP advisor, I learned about the CIRP lab research project. I emailed inquiring about the research opportunity and set up an interview time to discuss my interest and the opportunity.

**How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?**
They way the work was divided up between each research assistant left us all working on our own sort of micro-projects. This way, I feel that I gained specific understanding of certain smaller facets of the research, for example I dealt with a lot of Ronald Reagan's first term political speeches as well as Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.

**What did you enjoy about your research?**
I enjoyed the pertinence to my academic interests and positive experience with this field of research.

**What was challenging about your research?**
This project is large and difficult at times because there are unexpected hurdles that arise along the way, but these challenges are excellent adaptive learning opportunities.

**What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?**
For me, this project has confirmed my interests and given me exposure to a professional setting for studying politics.

**What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?**
"Just! Do it!"-Shia Labeouf
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
The summer after my sophomore year I decided to self-design an additional major in Urban Studies, following a very meaningful city revitalization non-profit internship experience. I began an independent study the following semester with the intention of exploring the field of Urban Studies and discovering the potential avenues and disciplines within, with the guidance of an experienced faculty member.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
I met with an advisor in the History department who connected me with a professor whose research background matched my area of interest and who was experienced enough in the field to guide me through my exploration.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
My faculty advisor guided me through my research methods and instructed me on the form of my final paper.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I enjoyed the freedom and breadth of my research. It began as an analysis of the field of Urban Studies, which encompasses many disciplines (for example, architecture, policy, planning, transportation), and centered on a focus area I found particularly interesting—urban redevelopment.

What was challenging about your research?
The freedom and breadth of my research was also one of the most challenging aspects. At one point I had checked out nearly every Hunt library book (and scoured over a hundred terms in the encyclopedia) beginning with word ‘urban’. It was overwhelming, and finding a focus point was at both times challenging and relieving.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
My research experience has guided me through the process of designing the rest of my self-designed major, and has helped me tailor it to my interests. It has shown me the career possibilities within the field of Urban Studies, and has helped me narrow down those that interest me most.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Have discipline to keep yourself on track—especially if your research project, like mine, is less structured than a traditional class or job, and use the opportunity to explore something that interests you that might not necessarily align with your major or department. It may lead you, like me, to take on a new major and find an entirely new area of interest.
Kristin Dlesk

**Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?**
During my sophomore year I had the opportunity to do research with Professor Soluri. It was a chance for me to get to know a faculty member, as well as was my first look at what academic research really was like. After this experience, I was able to complete an independent research project with Professor Grama, as well as a Global Studies internship at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Finally, I completed a Global Studies Capstone paper with Professor Eiss in the Fall of 2014. Each of my experiences built on one another, and led me to be a stronger researcher and writer.

**What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?**
My advisor, Emily Half, was the one who suggested I first take the Research Training course in Fall of 2012. From that point on, relationships that I had built with faculty members through courses allowed me to create connections and start research projects.

**How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?**
Because of my double major, I was able to come up with research topics that spanned my interest of France as well as history. Once I identified subjects that I was passionate about, I was able to talk to faculty members about their backgrounds, and found a match. For the type of academic research I was doing, the methodology was similar every project I did. Once I got the hang of it, it became second nature.

**What did you enjoy about your research?**
Having the opportunity to dictate your own research topic based on your interests, and get to work closely one-on-one with a faculty member are both rewarding and valuable experiences.

**What was challenging about your research?**
Research projects are different from course work, because you have to have discipline to do the work when there are not necessarily weekly homework assignments or assessments.

**What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?**
My research experience at Carnegie Mellon certainly prepared me for graduate study, as well as gave me the opportunity to build real connections with faculty members, something that is very valuable in the long run.

**What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?**
Go for it! Research projects are a change of pace from the usual classroom experience, you get to know a faculty member very well, it prepares you for future projects or courses of study, and you become an expert in one topic or idea. Having the capacity to talk about something at length is very helpful in interviews or applications later on down the road.
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?

It was required for my Global Studies major.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?

My experience was a part of class. It was combined with a requirement for the Jennings Brave Companion Scholarship. My abroad experience in Brazil inspired my research for my Global Studies capstone.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?

I thought about my interests and then tried to make sure they were connected to Global Studies and Brazil in some way.

What did you enjoy about your research?

I learned more about the international NGO sector.

What was challenging about your research?

It was difficult to find a balance between the time I should dedicate to my work versus the time I actually could spend doing the research and work.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?

Honestly, it made me realize that research is not for me. It is something I can do for a short period of time, but not for an extended period of time (like an entire semester).

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?

Identify sources in the first two months and then spend the rest of your time developing your argument and writing your paper.
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
The capstone was the concluding course of my Global Studies curriculum.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
The first few weeks of the capstone course involved the daunting task of selecting a topic to focus on for the entirety of the semester. I had several different ideas at the time: post-conflict resolution, food insecurity, Middle Eastern affairs, etc. In thinking of where I’d best like to dedicate my time and energy, I decided to focus on India, where I had studied abroad my previous semester.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
I chose to study violence against women in India as a way to connect my study abroad experience to my Global Studies education at Carnegie Mellon. My time in India was complex, full, impassioned and even difficult at times. In my transition back to the US, I wanted to reflect on and process my experiences, and heighten my understanding of one of the country's biggest social challenges. When I began my research, I was in the unique position to be already physically and emotionally invested in my work. I only later developed a deeper relationship by finally being able to take a step back from my personal experiences, and grapple with the topic at a purely intellectual level. Once I engaged with the topic and methodologies pragmatically, I was able to add my perspective and opinions in a way that was thoughtful, and helpful.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I enjoyed delving deeply into the complexity of an issue as large as violence against women. So often human rights incidents from developing countries make global news, but for only a brief period of time, and only really graze the surface of the critical issue at hand. Through my research, I was able to dedicate several months to becoming more aware, passionate, and informed about an extraordinarily important topic in a way that felt meaningful, culturally sensitive, and productive.

What was challenging about your research?
It was difficult to explore the tensions between progress and cultural influence, shortsighted institutional changes, and normalized gender and class divides. Attempting to provide reasoning for the otherwise unreasonable was a challenge. I navigated the line between cultural relativity and demanding progress with apprehension, being careful not to make broad, encompassing declarations for Indian men at large.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
My research experience strengthened my passion for women's issues, and gave me the necessary opportunity to reflect on my study abroad experience in India. In this way, it has made me eager to become involved in women's issues in future non-profit work, both locally and abroad.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
When considering a topic, try to envision what broader lessons you might learn, or ways you might grow, from your research. Research is a challenging, stimulating, wonderfully worthwhile endeavor. That being said, you will dedicate a lot of time and effort to it, so be sure that you are passionate about your work, and will enjoy traveling the tumultuous intellectual path it takes you on.
I heard about the thesis and intended to do it, and even had the inklings of my project in mind. I thought I needed to get started over the summer to really succeed, so researched SURF and SURG grants, but while doing so I discovered the Fellowship on the Dietrich website.

I knew that I wanted to study music festivals since about January of the previous year. I also knew a lot of people working on Honors Theses, and it seemed like the perfect opportunity to delve deeply into my interest areas. I reached out to my advisor to see how she felt about the topic and when she seemed on-board, I applied.

I have taken a lot of anthropological courses while at CMU, and instinctively have leaned more from my own observations, and the observations of others rather than any kind of empirical, data-based work. Dr. Schachter was a huge help with this, because of all of her experience as a field researcher. In all honesty, my course history has been all over the place, and luckily a lot of courses I took more or less on a whim were useful to look at my project with a few different mindsets.

It's hard to work over summer vacation. Getting motivated to read and continue pushing your thought process can be difficult. I imagine during the school year it will feel like more of a break from my other work, but also being a very busy CMU student, I hope to find ways to balance everything well.

Since I am graduating this spring, I need to complete capstone courses for my majors. This project has given me an opportunity to learn about things which will make great lines of research in those courses to develop a deeper understanding. I also have considered going to graduate school to study Music Business. That would allow me to go into live music management. I think I'd like to be part of a planning team for a festival; they are a fascinating site of community and cultural discourse.

It's been so interesting! I get to talk about it pretty much all the time between blog posts, weekly meetings, and explaining my summer plans to friends and family, and I never get tired of it. Every time I find myself explaining, I also think and expand ideas. Because I chose the topic, I am genuinely excited to work on my thesis and feel like I am learning so much about something that interests me and may lead to a career path. Going to music festivals to take notes was a pretty great perk as well.

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Do it. You are never going to have the kind of support you have here at CMU, never going to have the amazing faculty with such varied backgrounds, never going to have the time and funding available. All you have to do is ask, and people genuinely want to help. Start early, but don't be afraid to change directions when you get started. Writing applications is scary because it seems like you don't have any of the answers yet, but that is the point or the research. If something changes, but seems like a stronger argument or better experience, go there. Learn about it.
If I could do it over again, I would first decide on a faculty mentor that I knew well and a field that I had experience in, then I would identify a relatively interesting topic. I decided to do an honors thesis because I realized that eventually I would like to go to grad school and doing a longer term independent research project in a topic of my own passions was a good way to prepare. I decided to apply for and do the fellowship because I wanted to prepare for my thesis which was in a field where I didn't have much previous experience.

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?

I decided to do an honors thesis because I realized that eventually I would like to go to grad school and doing a longer term independent research project in a topic of my own passions was a good way to prepare. I decided to apply for and do the fellowship because I wanted to prepare for my thesis which was in a field where I didn't have much previous experience.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?

I took a process that idealistically seems like a great way to choose research topics but realistically was somewhat backwards. I picked a topic based on my interests, independent of which professors I had relationships with and which fields I had experience in. Then I tried to find a faculty mentor to match these interests.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?

I spent the summer immersing myself in the literature. After I changed my topic to align better with my faculty mentor's expertise, I also received guidance and examples from my faculty mentor.

What did you enjoy about your research?

I really enjoy the intellectual challenges. I love reading articles that contribute something new: an interesting methodology, and interesting finding that doesn't seem trivial or obvious, a new way of looking at something that happens in my life or somewhere in the world. I am excited to get started on designing the study and having the chance to analyze the data to search for connections. I'm also very excited to try to use my findings to help language learners and educators.

What was challenging about your research?

In the beginning, I felt very lost in a sea of literature where I didn't know where to start. I didn't have a bibliography that was handed to me, so half the battle was figuring out what I needed to read. I also struggled with the feeling that I was paralyzed by the amount of reading and knowledge I could gain: I could read forever and still not know everything. Scoping and being in closer touch with my faculty mentor and other mentors helped me overcome this challenge.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?

I think this research experience has consolidated my academic and career interests in second language acquisition and education.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?

If I could do it over again, I would first decide on a faculty mentor that I knew well and a field that I had experience in, then I would identify a relatively interesting topic.
Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?

I knew I wanted to research foreign policy and militant groups, but I came to that interest late enough in my undergraduate career that I couldn’t quite work it into my official class schedule. So I pursued a Dietrich College Senior Thesis in order to write about a topic that I want to work with long-term, but didn’t have room for in my schedule.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?

My thesis advisor, Dr. Colin Clarke, was hugely helpful in crafting my plans for this summer. I took one of Dr. Clarke’s classes in the fall of my junior year. Since my thesis topic was within his academic specialty and we had a good relationship, I asked him to be my advisor for my thesis. My academic advisor, Emily Half, was also really helpful. Emily gave me the idea to pursue a Dietrich Honors Research Fellowship, which allowed me to work on my thesis over the summer with funding, and helped me with my application.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?

Reading anything I could get my hands on was a really helpful step. When I began my research, my advisor, Dr. Clarke, gave me a few foundational authors to investigate. I read their work, and that gave me a solid grasp on my thesis topics.

What did you enjoy about your research?

Learning about the way non-state actors and state actors interact was fascinating. I loved feeling like I was understanding important things about the world through my research - my work felt real and vital to me in a way that sometimes other academic work does not provide.

What was challenging about your research?

It was challenging to navigate research and analysis of groups that have a political identity in today’s media. For example, analysis of Hezbollah is usually deeply impacted by current political views of the Islamic world. Separating political agendas from academic research can be difficult, but ultimately rewarding.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?

I’d like to work in foreign policy as my ultimate career goal, so this thesis presents an opportunity to experience that kind of research at the undergraduate level. I’m very grateful for this opportunity.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?

It's important to take classes that you find interesting, and then to build relationships with faculty in those classes. My thesis advisor is one of the most important mentors I've had in my time at Carnegie Mellon. I ended up in his classroom because I thought his one of his courses, Diplomacy and Statecraft, looked interesting. I was able to do this research because I had a rapport with him, and I only met him because I was willing to step a little outside my comfort zone.
William Misitano

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
I wanted to challenge myself during my last year at Carnegie Mellon, and thought it would be cool to be able to do my own research on a topic of my choosing.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
It is important to get a good faculty advisor early on. They will be able to guide you while writing your thesis, and they have a strong network that can help you with interviews and with your research. It is also important to find a good topic and question you want to answer. It could be about something you enjoy, something you want to learn more about, or something that interests you.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
Reading a lot is probably the best way to get to know your research topic. Reading other research papers is a good way to learn about the different methodologies. A research methodology course is also a good way to learn about research, because it gets you to think like a researcher.

What did you enjoy about your research?
I was able to learn about a topic that relates to my career. I also learned a lot about what goes into research, and how much work and dedication the authors have to write a paper. My friends were also very encouraging, and helped get me through the last few weeks of writing my thesis.

What was challenging about your research?
Deadlines will always creep up on you, and it can be difficult to find the motivation to keep going, especially during the spring of your senior year.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
Writing a thesis gave me an idea of what goes into a paper, and I was able to look at other pieces of research with a more critical viewpoint. As difficult and stressful as it was, I could see myself doing research in the future, with either a government organization, or with a think tank like RAND.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Be ready to read A LOT. Keep your advisor updated about your research, and meet their deadlines. She is taking time out of her schedule to help you, so help her to help you. Keep track of your sources, there will be a lot of them. Get ready to put in a few late nights when the due date approaches. Have fun with your paper and make it your own. If you want to quote Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, do it!
Dietrich College Senior Honors Thesis

Christopher Skaggs

Why did you decide to pursue this research experience?
Completing a senior honors thesis was something I wanted to accomplish from the beginning of my college experience. I considered it to be a critical component of building adequate research in a specific area building up to graduate school.

What are the steps you took to identify and secure your research experience?
It is important to outreach and build relationships with professors. In securing a senior thesis advisor I met with at least four faculty to discuss my topic and methodology.

How did you develop a relationship with the research topic and methodologies used?
My interest in EU migration came from a field trip to a prison in the Netherlands during my semester abroad. Using game theory as a methodology was a result of exposure to it in a class called Autocrats and Democrats which was basically an extension on selectorate theory.

What was challenging about your research?
I am not very good at math and there are no game theory classes taught at Carnegie Mellon that are geared toward the social sciences. The one taught through the philosophy department assumes that you have taken at least Concepts of Mathematics and focuses on branches of game theory that have limited applications to International Relations and Politics.

What impact do you think your research experience has made on your academic interests and/or career trajectory?
I am going to graduate school in the EU after finishing my senior thesis on EU law and policy. I'm planning on specializing in the way that organized crime syndicates and terrorist organizations launder and move money - a key component of my research. So my research experience has had a great deal of impact on determining my academic and career interests.

What recommendations would you offer another student considering a similar research endeavor?
Travel as much as possible. Talk to professors about the work they do and the applications that it has. Attend the talks from visiting professors hosted by CIRP. Stay awake in your research methodology course and Theories of International Relations. It will become apparent quickly if research isn't for you, and if it is you'll develop areas of interest just as quickly.