

"Bill of Rights" for Biology Undergraduate Researchers

As an undergraduate researcher, you are undergoing an apprenticeship that will be informative as you determine your future career plans. Your research activities will be mentored by a more experienced academic (professor, post-doctoral researcher, and/or graduate student) who will advise you on meeting the goals of your project. The following are what you are entitled to receive from participation in undergraduate research:

1. **Encouragement for intellectual growth:** You should feel like you are meaningfully contributing to the creation of new knowledge in your field. For example, your work could test a hypothesis or develop a useful technique. In either case, unexpected results (*e.g.*, learning how not to do something) are still an important contribution. You should experience active teaching of techniques and receive timely feedback on your work. You should also expect to participate in lab maintenance. These tasks help you and your colleagues to perform research and are a normal part of lab citizenship. They should not be the majority of your effort.
2. **Psychosocial support:** Participating meaningfully in research has the benefit of introducing you to a 'community of practice' – a place where you and your lab colleagues improve and refine ideas by building on productive interactions and collaboration with individuals possessing different levels of expertise. Along with doing research, you are forging new connections with others in your field. For ideas and relationships to flourish, your research environment should be a welcoming, supportive, and non-exclusionary community. Abusive, racist, or belittling behaviors are not acceptable.
3. **Clear expectations:** Your mentor should be transparent about the time commitment expected of you. UR expects undergraduate researchers performing independent research (IND 395) for four credit hours to spend ~10 hours per week on average on their project. If you are asked to do an amount of work that is outside these general guidelines, it is your right to raise concerns with your mentor, and you should feel empowered to do so. Some labs and projects will have more flexibility than others. Your mentor should clearly communicate their expectations of your work schedule. They should also communicate how independent you need to be, and any additional lab- or project-specific behavior that is required.
4. **Personal Safety:** You have a right to a safe working environment. Laboratory work may sometimes involve the use of hazardous materials, including but not limited to potentially harmful chemicals and infectious agents. Before undertaking any lab work, you should be trained to identify the risks involved and best practices for minimizing those risks. Laboratory safety is a shared commitment, and your PI is ultimately responsible. You are entitled to ask them about any and all safety concerns, and also to decline to undertake any procedures/experiments that you don't feel comfortable with.

5. **Career benefits:** You can consider your lab experience as an exploration of your career interests, and you should feel comfortable leaving the lab (or ending the experience for another lab) if you ultimately decide to pursue other interests. By the end of a research experience, a professor (or mentor) should know the strengths and weaknesses of a particular student well enough to be able to write a useful letter of recommendation.

Undergraduate research is expected to be a positive learning experience. If you have questions or concerns about your lab's expectations or working environment, you are strongly encouraged to reach out to your Peer Mentors in the Department of Biology (<https://rochester.edu/college/ccas/peer-advisors/>) or Sina Ghaemmaghami (undergradresearch@ur.rochester.edu) in the Office of Undergraduate Research.