

How to Find an Honours Supervisor

When do I look for a supervisor?

You are required to make arrangements for your Honours supervision by the end of the third year of your program. Once you have been offered an Honours research position notify the Honours Coordinator of the name of your supervisor.

The first step in organizing your Honours Research is to choose a supervisor. To do this, you need to familiarize yourself with the research interests of the faculty within the Department of Microbiology and Immunology (MICI). You should consult the MICI web page for the most up-to-date information on these interests:

<http://microbiology.medicine.dal.ca/>

Once you have consulted the web page, you should make a list of potential supervisors. Your choice of supervisor may be based on research topics that interest you, or labs that offer experimental techniques that you wish to learn before you graduate.

You should concentrate on finding a supervisor who is a member of the Department of MICI. Only in exceptional circumstances is a student allowed to have a Faculty member who is not a member of the Department supervise a MICI Honours student. Approval from the MICI Undergraduate Studies Committee is required in these rare instances.

If you are taking a Combined Honours degree with MICI and BIOC you may choose a supervisor from either of these Departments without special permission from either Department.

If you are doing a Combined Honours degree with any other Department you need special permission from the MICI Undergraduate Committee to have the non-MICI Faculty member be your primary supervisor. This permission is only given on a case-by-case basis and is usually limited to a non-MICI Faculty member who is pursuing research that is relevant to areas of research in the Department of MICI.

There are several methods for choosing a supervisor.

a) In the fall term a reception is held for all MICI students. At this event posters are displayed highlighting research from various MICI labs so you can see the types of research projects available to you. You will be able to talk with faculty and potential lab colleagues in an informal environment.

b) You could talk to current or previous students in the lab of interest prior to approaching the supervisor.

c) You can (highly recommended) join the Society of Microbiology and Immunology Students (SIMS) and attend the free events that it sponsors. The student society is a good way to get to know current MICI students and get their opinions on various Departmental matters.

After you have decided on a potential supervisor you should contact him/her to arrange a face-to-face visit. This will allow you to determine the exact nature of the project that a supervisor has available for an Honours student. You should look for a project that has a high probability of success in the short time that you will be available to work on it. This means that the techniques should be well-established in the lab so that you are not fumbling around with an experimental apparatus or protocol that has not been previously “proven” in the hands of a more experienced researcher. In addition, your project should have a “back-up plan”: if your first line of investigation does not yield results, what will you do, instead? Finally, it is important to interview your potential supervisor to ensure that your personalities are compatible.

Some students may have already identified a supervisor in second year, with the understanding that they will become an Honours student in that lab in their fourth year. In that case, please inform the Honours Coordinator as soon as your placement has been confirmed, and keep in contact with that supervisor so (s)he knows you are still interested in working under their supervision.

Do you need to work in the lab over the summer?

Although working in a research lab over the summer is not mandatory, there are certainly advantages associated with a summer research experience. Spending the summer after your third year working in the laboratory where you intend to conduct your Honours Research Project permits you to familiarize yourself with your research project, learn where items are located within the lab, and learn some of the techniques commonly used in the lab you choose. This will save you a lot of time when you start your research during your fourth year. It is not mandatory, however, that you conduct summer research in the lab where you also wish to pursue your Honours Research Project.

Whatever research is performed in the lab in the summer must clearly be specified as such in your Honours thesis. This is to ensure a level playing field in marking, since students who do not do research in the summer will not be able to perform as many experiments as those who work in the lab in the summer.

How can I get funding to work in a lab?

There are several agencies that will support students. Since there are often early deadlines for summer research grants, you should inquire about funding for the summer at the beginning of the previous fall term. Some research supervisors will have funds available from their operating grants that will permit them to hire summer students.

Co-op Students

Often, co-op students will be required to initiate their Honours Research Project in January rather than September. This places these students out of the regular sequence of events during the academic year. Co-op students who intend to start their Honours Research Projects in January should identify a research supervisor before April of the preceding year. Searching for a supervisor in the Fall term is

often too late since supervisors have usually committed to another Honours student in the “regular cycle” by that time.

Co-op students who start their Honours Research Project in January are required to pass in their “Winter Report” at the end of the second week of classes in the Fall term and their Honours Thesis on the last day of classes in the Fall term. In addition, Co-op students will present their Honours Oral Presentation in early December during one of the Department of MICI seminar slots.

The rules governing who can be your supervisor are the same as for regular Honours students.