



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

Finding research projects and approaching supervisors

Associate Professor Louise Kuchel
Deputy Associate Dean Academic
(Students)
Faculty of Science

Acknowledgement of Country

- The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.
- We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.
- We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

*The Brisbane River pattern from A Guidance Through Time
by Casey Coolwell and Kyra Mancktelow.*





Introduce yourselves

In chat, please answer these questions:

- 1) Who are you?
- 2) What would you like to learn from this session?

Overview

What activities require a supervisor?

How do I identify a supervisor and a project?

How do I contact the supervisor?

How do I convince them I'm the right person for the project?



What activities require a supervisor?

What do you think?

Share some ideas in the room or on chat



What activities require a supervisor?

- ✓ Undergraduate Research
 - Summer research projects
 - Winter research projects
 - For-credit research projects (e.g., SCIE3060/3061)
- ✓ Honours Projects
 - Honours within the university
 - Honours with industry
- ✓ Masters research projects
 - Literature reviews
 - Research courses



What activities require a supervisor?

✓ Undergraduate Research

Summer research projects

Winter research projects

For-credit research projects (e.g., SCIE3060/3061)



✓ Honours Projects

Honours within the university

Honours with industry

✓ Masters research projects

Literature reviews

Research courses



Honours

Bachelors

Honours

Graduate
Certificate

Graduate
Diploma

Masters

MPhil

Doctorate

PhD

- Independent research project, supervised by an academic for 10 months (+/- coursework)
- Pathway to a Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

Pathways to Honours

- Summer and Winter Research projects available for undergraduate students
- Some UQ programs offer Honours as part of a four year program
- (UQ students) Honours co-ordinator in each School within the Faculty
- (External students) Apply to the School, find a potential supervisor, and complete a School application form
- Pilot project of Honours with industry



How do I identify a supervisor and a project?

What do you think?

Share some ideas in person or the chat



How do I identify a supervisor and a project?

- ✓ Websites from Schools and Institutes
- ✓ Personal websites from academics
- ✓ Project booklets from Schools and Institutes
- ✓ Authors of papers you have read
- ✓ Someone you like from your lectures
- ✓ Recommendations from other students
- ✓ Supervisors of 3MT students
- ✓ Supervisors of tutors in your courses

Start thinking about supervisors early

– don't wait until 1 month before the course start date!



How do I contact a supervisor?

What do you think?

Share your ideas



How do I contact a supervisor?

Email is best for the first approach



What should I put in the email?

What do you think?

Share your ideas



Contacting a potential supervisor – Dos and Don'ts

A guide to killer mistakes and excellent practice





Don't



Female supervisor

Mis-gender or de-title the potential supervisor

- “Hey Mr Dog”

Launch in without an introduction

- I’m looking for an honours supervisor

Make the supervisor feel like a last resort

- I’ve contacted other people, but their labs are full, so I thought you might take me

Be vague about their research (because that indicates you don’t know/don’t care about what they work on)

- I am interested in your research. It looks cool.

Assume they will do the work to meet you in “friend”/non-professional mode (and leave out your details)

- Text me if you want to meet up or something

Sign off the way you would when you are texting

- Later dude



Do



Start with a title

- “Dear Professor Cooldog”

State who you are and what you want

- My name is Smileycat and I am a third year BCatness student looking for an Honours project for 2022.

Explain why you want to work with the supervisor, and how you know them

- You taught me in “PUPS2000: How Dogs Learn to Read” and I really enjoyed your lectures.

Say what you are interested in, specifically

- I am interested in your work on dog dyslexia, and would value the opportunity to speak with you about a potential honours project in this area

Say what you are providing right now, and indicate the next step

- I am attaching my CV and academic transcript. I would be delighted to speak with you about honours.

Sign off

- Kind regards, Smileycat



Keep this in mind.....

EFFORT
IS THE BEST
INDICATOR OF
INTEREST.

I DON'T NEED STUDENTS
TO BE PERFECT.
JUST SHOW ME YOU CAN
PUT IN GENUINE EFFORT.



What if I don't hear anything from the supervisor?

Supervisors are human and also really busy.

They can be overwhelmed by the other things that are happening in their world.

Their groups can be full.

Sometimes they are out of grant funds.

Follow up with a polite email about a week later.

If you still hear nothing, move on to another supervisor request.
Don't take it personally.

You may have to contact 10 or 20 people before you find a supervisor.



**How do I convince them I'm the
right person for the project?**

What do you think?

Share your ideas



How do I convince them I'm the right person for the project?

Treat the interactions with the supervisor like a job interview, whether on email or in an interview.

Supervisors are looking for students who are curious, self-driven, interested in communicating, and who will be a good fit for their group environment.

Some will only take students who want to do a PhD.

Be prepared to answer the question "Tell me about why you want to do honours"

Be prepared to answer the question "Tell me about why you want to do honours in my group/on this project"



What if?

At this point, you probably have some questions....



Summing up



Finding a supervisor isn't easy, but you can be more successful by putting some strategies in place.

Treat the interactions with the potential supervisor like a job interview.

Be professional at every stage and put in the required effort.

Supervisors are looking for students who are curious, self-driven, interested in communicating, and who will be a good fit for their group environment.

Be prepared to answer the question "Tell me about why you want to do honours".

If you don't succeed on your first few supervisor approaches, keep trying others! There will be a supervisor for you.

Thank you!

Louise Kuchel
l.kuchel@uq.edu.au