SETTING UP YOUR RESEARCH ELECTIVE – STEPS TO AN OPTIMAL PROJECT

Document contents

What are the objectives of a research elective?

Broadly the objectives of the Research Elective are to: (1) increase skills to identify, develop, and answer scientific questions, and (2) advance your understanding of how to build a research career. Some objectives are fulfilled by activities, and others by asking questions! The richest electives depend on preparation and self-directed learning. For specifics, see “Research Elective – learning objectives” on the program website.

- Most research will extend beyond the dedicated Research Elective – for data collection, analysis, review, writing abstracts and possibly manuscripts, revising, and presenting your results.

- People evaluating you in the future (fellowship programs, jobs) will look to see not only if you have started projects, but if you have seen them through to completion!

When should I start planning my research elective?

As soon as you know you want to do a research elective! The earlier you start, the more time you have to set yourself up for success. The timeline below is a guideline of the process adapted from “You are Here” brochure (link below).

Clear interests: If you know what type of research and in which field you are interested, you can start looking for a mentor from the beginning of your intern year. Start by meeting with the Resident Advising Mentorship Program (RAMP) faculty advisor you were matched to before orientation.

Less clear interests: If you would like time dedicated for research in residency but are less clear on your specific interests, talk to your assigned Program Mentor early.

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<td>Mentorship huddle with Program Mentor or RAMP advisor</td>
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How do I start planning my research elective?

(1) Determine the type of research that interests you

(2) Determine the field of medicine in which your research interest fits or determine what type of research exists within your clinical field of interest

(3) Reflect on your goals - why are you doing a research elective? This information will be helpful to share with potential mentors

(4) Identify potential mentors through many possible routes
   a. RAMP faculty advisor
   b. Program Mentor (APD)
   c. Ask Peers, RAMP buddy
   d. Service teams - ask attendings, fellows you work with
   e. Find out what prior residents have done. See “Scholarship Directory: Connecting Faculty and Residents for Scholarship Projects” and interactive “Resident Research and Scholarship List” on the program website

(5) Meet with potential mentors.

How do I choose a mentor/project?

Choosing an appropriate mentor and project is inter-related and central to achieving your goals. See “You are Here” brochure for “Ten Truths about Mentorship” and “Ten Important Questions for Potential Mentors” (link below).

Selecting a project: Historically residents gained the most when a mentor had a prepared research question and either pre-existing data ready to analyze or a plan for efficiently obtaining the data necessary to address the question. Remember – reviewers heavily consider the feasibility of producing a meaningful result.

Selecting a mentor: Seek a mentor you “connect with” and whose mentorship style is compatible with your learning style. Would you work best with a mentor who walks you through the steps of your project? Or takes a more distanced approach? Ideally, a mentor has successfully mentored other residents and is accessible. Senior faculty members who are less available may offer support from a more junior colleague or other research team members, such as biostatisticians or research coordinators.

How do I apply for a research elective?

- Download application with instructions from program website, see program emails for deadlines
- See “Guidelines for Research Elective Application Review” on program website

How do I set my research elective up for success?

(1) Time your elective after obtaining approvals and data, when applicable. If your project will require new Human Subjects Committee or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee approval, start this process ≥6 months ahead of the start of your project due to the lengthy nature of the approval process.

(2) Confirm funding before selecting a project: although approved electives include salary/benefits, the cost of research activities must be covered by your mentor (software, supplies, equipment, biostatistician time, etc.)

(3) Maximize mentorship: consider requesting a few organizational meetings with your mentor leading up the elective and weekly meetings during the elective. Prepare questions/goals for each meeting. Consider requesting a meeting with the APD for Research & Scholarship to discuss your project before you apply, help set goals for the rotation once approved, or discuss progress or challenges during your elective.
Additional Local Resources

UW Human Subjects Division  
http://www.washington.edu/research/hsd/

UW Health Sciences Library Science Toolkit  
http://guides.lib.uw.edu/hsl/biomed#s-lg-box-11420772

UW Institute of Translational Health Sciences Research Services  
https://www.iths.org/investigators/services/

APD Research & Scholarship  
https://depts.washington.edu/uwmedres/people/program_leadership.htm

RAMP website  
https://depts.washington.edu/uwmedres/professional/RAMP/index.htm

“You are Here”, brochure for professional development developed by Dr. Jennifer Best, Associate Program Director for Professional Development & Wellness  
https://depts.washington.edu/uwmedres/pdf/professional/YouAreHere_UWIMRP.pdf