Undergraduate Research Courses (BISC 290/490) FAQ

1. ***What are Directed Research and Introduction to Biological Research?***
   These are courses that give undergraduate students the opportunity to work in the laboratory of a USC faculty member as a research assistant. BISC 290 (Introduction to Biological Research) does not count toward any upper division elective units for Biological Sciences majors. BISC 490 (Directed Research), however, can count towards up to 4 units of upper division elective credit for Biological Sciences majors.
2. ***Who is Directed Research for?***
   Students with sophomore standing can participate in BISC 290 (assuming completion of CHEM 105b and BISC 120 or 220); students with junior or higher standing (64 or more units) can participate in BISC 490.
3. ***What will I be doing throughout the course of my research experience?***
   This is entirely based upon the plan that you and your faculty sponsor will lay out during the application process. Your duties in lab will depend on your prior research experience, interests, and the necessities of the lab. You will likely employ some of the techniques that you have learned throughout your laboratory course work.
4. ***How do I sign up? Am I eligible?***
   In order to participate in either BISC 290 or 490, you will need to submit an application (found at http://dornsife.usc.edu/bisc/undergraduate/forms/). The minimum overall and science GPA to apply for either course is 3.0. This may include courses taken outside of USC. Your sponsor must be a USC faculty member. For the application, you will need to develop a proposal for your research with your faculty sponsor, include an abstract or cover page from a research article related to the work you will be doing, and your faculty sponsor's CV if they are not in the Biological Sciences department.
5. ***What are my chances of being accepted? Is the process competitive?***
   The application process is not competitive. Any student who is eligible for the course and their proposal meets criteria will be accepted.
6. ***How will my work be evaluated?***
   Your faculty sponsor will assign your grade based on the criteria mutually agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. The student is responsible for initiating this conversation with their sponsor. Typically, sponsors evaluate their students on lab attendance, performance and the final project (discussed below). Your sponsor will need to submit your final grade via email to Glen Smith (glensmit@dornsife.usc.edu) at the conclusion of the semester.
7. ***What are the criteria for a research proposal? Who will review my application?***
   Proposals where the research techniques are biological in nature are likely to be accepted, especially if the faculty sponsor is in the biology department. Projects that use human subjects (psychological, sociological, etc.) and clinical research trials may not qualify. The Vice Department Chair reviews all applications for BISC 290/490.

8. *What the course requirements?*

For every one unit of BISC290/490, you are expected to work in the lab for 3-4 hours per week. For example, if you are taking 4 units of BISC490, you are expected to work in the lab for 12-16 hours per week. Also, you will be expected to turn in a final project, due on the last day of finals for that semester. Only one final project will be required, so if you plan on taking two semesters of BISC490 you'll only need to turn in one project at the end of the second semester. You should discuss what this final project will be with your faculty sponsor. Typical projects include: research paper, PowerPoint presentation or poster. The Biological Sciences Department does not have any specific requirements for this project, but you will need to turn in a copy of your project to the BISC Department (specifically, Glen Smith) in addition to your faculty sponsor.

9. *I'm interested but I have no idea on how to find a sponsor.*

- Talk to your current instructors. Initial correspondence via email is appropriate but we recommend discussing research opportunities with professors in person when possible.
- Visit the Biological Sciences website to locate faculty based on their research topics. You can peruse faculty in Marine Environmental Biology, Molecular and Computational Biology, Integrative and Evolutionary Biology, and Neurobiology to find prospective sponsors that match your interests.
- Visit the PIBBS Faculty Research Topics website. The Programs in Biomedical & Biological Sciences site has a similar page where students can locate faculty who are predominantly working in biomedical research on the USC Health Sciences Campus. Many pre-health/pre-med students have participated in exciting research experiences in labs on the Health Sciences Campus with their faculty.
- If you are still having difficulty locating a faculty sponsor or you would like additional tips, please speak with your academic advisor.