

Why do Research as an Undergraduate?

While scholarly research has always been a part of academic life, it used to be introduced to students only after they had earned their bachelor's degrees and moved into graduate studies. That's no longer the case. Research is now an integral part of the learning process for many undergraduates. Undertaking a substantial undergraduate research project allow students to learn their major field in greater depth and to better understand how scientific knowledge is produced in their disciplinary training.

What is research?

Research is the systematic production of knowledge about some aspect of the world. The research process involves a variety of stages including:

- Reading about specific areas of sociological research
- Conceiving a research question
- Locating the research question in sub-areas of the disciplinary landscape through a literature review
- Identifying relevant theoretical ideas and concepts you wish to elaborate through your research question
- Designing appropriate methods of investigating the question, such as how to collect, organize and interpret the data
- Analyzing and discussing your results
- Inferring conclusions
- Presenting and writing up the results
- Publishing your findings

As an undergraduate you may be involved in any or all of these phases.

Some benefits of doing research

The main benefit of research is that it enables you to acquire a deeper understanding of how we come to know what we know about the world. This understanding can lead to a profound shift in one's thinking and a different relationship with knowledge and the world around us. There are, however, many other benefits of doing research. These include:

- Acquiring greater general familiarity with a topic of interest
- Learning new methodological skills
- Building relationships with faculty
- Preparing for graduate school or future occupations
- Demonstrating the value of your undergraduate education to future graduate schools and employers
- Being productively engaged in your college training and experience

Some questions to think about:

- What do you want to achieve through your college education?
- What are you considering and post-college career options?
- What kinds of topics or general fields/disciplines interest you?
- Is there a particular faculty-member with whom you want to work?
- What kinds of professional activities interest you?
- What kinds of professional activities are you good at?

Hands on research as an undergraduate can help guide you in exploring many of these issues.