

Tips for Finding an Unpaid Lab Placement at Stanford from the Office of Science Outreach

First of all, the student himself/herself should make these arrangements, not the parents; it's part of the learning experience for young students and it demonstrates commitment.

1. The first step is to peruse Stanford's website and look for some faculty/labs doing research of interest to you (see note below). Go to <http://stanford.edu/> and use the search feature in the top right corner. Within the website, you can search generic words such as "plant biology" or more specific topics. Most professors and labs have their own websites that will provide lots of information about the various research projects taking place. You can also gauge the size of the lab by looking to see how many graduate students and post-doctoral fellows work in that lab. Typically, the larger the lab, the more bandwidth a professor might have to host an intern.
2. Compile a list of 6-8 faculty members/labs you're interested in and note the email address of the professor in charge. If you can't easily find the professor's email address on his/her lab page, you can find it here: <http://stanfordwho.stanford.edu/SWApp/>. (Phone calls to professors are not recommended and will probably be ignored.)
3. Next, craft a short but compelling message, addressing it to Professor XXXXX. Your message should:
 - State the type of project you're looking for (What subject area? What are some possible research questions you're interested in?);
 - Briefly describe your availability to come to campus (i.e., when you are free to work in a lab); and
 - State the time period you're interested in (summer only, part-time during semester or school year, etc.)
4. Generally speaking, most labs will not consider an intern for fewer than 6 hours/week or for a period shorter than one quarter or semester. That's simply not enough time for an intern to learn much or be able to contribute anything to the project.
5. Attach a one-page Curriculum Vitae (similar to a resume) showing contact information, courses completed (with letter grades), overall GPA, any other internships, work experience, summer programs you've participated in, hobbies, skills, etc. Instructions and CV samples can be found here: <http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/curriculumvitae/a/curriculumvitae.htm>
6. Professors are very busy and they receive a lot of email. It is not uncommon for them to ignore this type of request. But if you send a message to 6-8 professors, you have a good chance that one of them will reply. If you don't hear anything after 2-3 weeks, it's okay to re-send your message *once* to a professor. But after that, if you don't get a response, move on to other researchers, go back to the first step, and repeat. Persistence is key!

NOTE:

If you have no idea of the type of project you're interested in, this student self-assessment tool available at Science Buddies will be very helpful:

http://sciencebuddies.org/science-fair-projects/recommender_register.php

Although it is geared for science fair projects, it can be helpful in narrowing down interests. Potential hosts/mentors will be more responsive if they know the student already has some idea of possible research interests or projects. Or this list of project ideas may be helpful as well: http://sciencebuddies.org/science-fair-projects/project_ideas.shtml