

Guidance for NSE Off-Campus Applications

Here are a couple of questions students have had in the past with answers to get you started:

Q: I am interested in working on XXX (research topic) this summer. How do I find a good lab to work in?

A: Talk to Swarthmore faculty with expertise in the field. They will be able to point you to colleagues who work in the field and/or institutions that have labs that do the kinds of research you are interested in. If you've read research papers that you thought were interesting and exciting, consider contacting the corresponding author to see if they would consider accepting you into their lab. Or sit down with your favorite search engine and see what you can find.

Q: None of the faculty at Swarthmore have expertise in the field I am interested in. How do I arrange the required letter of recommendation?

A: Expertise in the field is broadly defined. The goal is for you to find someone who can 1) give you a strong recommendation and 2) can evaluate the merits of your proposed research project. Even if Swarthmore doesn't have a faculty member who works on exactly XXX, you are likely to find someone who understands XXX well enough to write you a letter of recommendation. In general, on-campus letter writers will be in the same kind of department that you are interested in working in. Do not ask your favorite non-NSE professor to write you a letter (i.e. an English professor writing a letter of support for a Chemistry research proposal).

Q: Can I use Swarthmore funds to participate in a [REU program](#)?

A: Usually not. If you are eligible to participate in REU programs, it's best to apply to the programs directly. If you aren't eligible (e.g. because of your citizenship status) it may be possible to use Swarthmore funds to participate. Begin by identifying individual faculty members who participate in the REU program you are interested in. Reach out to them and ask if they would accept you directly into their lab (outside of the REU program) if you bring your own funding. Alternatively, you might be able to get permission from the REU program director to participate if you bring your own funding. This usually requires a Swarthmore faculty member to help you identify and communicate with the REU program director. In both scenarios you will need a letter from a Swarthmore faculty member who can explain why this program and your proposed research project are likely to result in a meaningful educational experience and a letter from your off-campus mentor or the REU program director.

Q: Can I get a Swarthmore off-campus stipend and also get paid to do research for the summer by another program (for instance a REU program) or institution?

A: No. If you get funded by another program or institution you have to decline any funding provided by Swarthmore College.

Q: The research I want to do off campus is interdisciplinary and I'm not sure if my proposal should be submitted for funding by the NSE divisions or one of the other divisions. How do I figure this out?

A: Talk to a Swarthmore faculty member with expertise in the field you are interested in. Even if Swarthmore doesn't have a faculty member who works on your exact interests, you are likely to find someone who understands them well enough to help you decide how to proceed. You can also ask the chairs of the departments or divisions you think your project might belong in for their opinions about how to proceed. Getting this sorted out may take some time, so get started with this well in advance of the application deadline.