



MAD LIBS FOR MAD SCIENTISTS: A LOW-STAKES ACTIVITY FOR CONTACTING RESEARCH LABS

Grace Ford, Brian Helmke

Department of Biomedical Engineering, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia



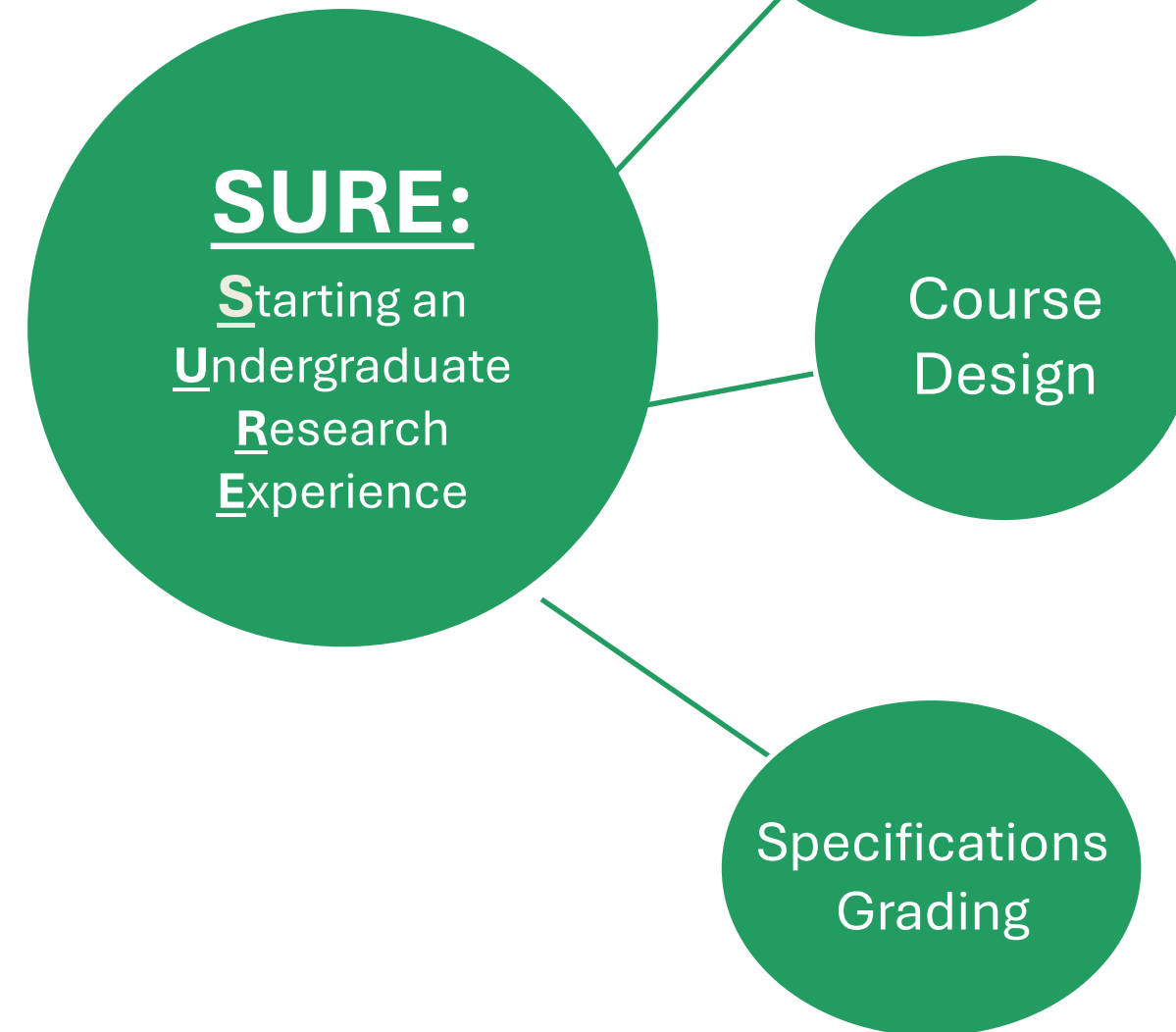
Starting an Undergraduate Research Experience

Undergraduate Research Barriers to Entry

Lack of belonging

Lack of awareness

Lack of self-confidence



- Undergraduate student who has taken the class
- Mentored by faculty member

- Active learning opportunities
- Lab tours, panels, mock interviews, mock journal club, contact emails

- Bundles of assessments to meet complex objectives based on skills needed to successfully join a research lab

WHO

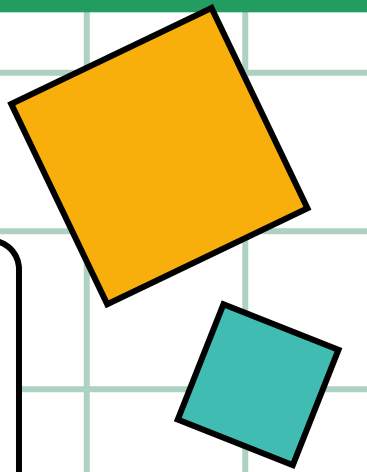
~ 40 First-year engineering students

PROBLEM

Students had learned what an undergrad does in a lab, went on lab tours, and identified labs of interest, but they felt intimidated by writing a cold email to the research PI.

OBJECTIVE

To introduce the process of writing a contact email to a lab principal investigator in a welcoming and supportive environment that reduces stress and anxiety





_____,
LAST NAME

ORDINAL NUMBER

ADJECTIVE

_____.
PURAL NOUN

PURAL NOUN

VERB ENDING IN -ING

_____.
ACTIVITY

NUMBER

_____,
ADJECTIVE

_____,
ADJECTIVE

_____,
ADJECTIVE

YOUR NAME

ACTIVITY

Dr. Smith,

I am a 7th year student at UVA seeking to get involved in research. When searching for information about labs at UVA, I came across your article on sadly cats. I'm very interested in brains because of experience in cutting. I'm specifically excited about hiking. I would love to explore it further with your lab if you have any available positions. I can commit up to 4447 hours a week to research and would be happy to work for credit, pay or just experience. I'm happy, shining, and stinky I believe I would be a good fit for your lab. Please reach out to me with any questions. I've included my resume for your reference. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,

Grace



Dr. _____,
LAST NAME

I am a _____ year student at UVA seeking to get involved
ORDINAL NUMBER

in research. When searching for information about labs at

UVA, I came across your article on _____
ADJECTIVE

_____. I'm very interested in _____ because of
PURAL NOUN PURAL NOUN

experience in _____. I'm specifically excited about
VERB ENDING IN -ING

_____. I would love to explore it further with your lab if
ACTIVITY

you have any available positions. I can commit up to

_____ hours a week to research and would be happy to
NUMBER

work for credit, pay or just experience. I'm _____,
ADJECTIVE

_____, and _____, and I believe I would be a good
ADJECTIVE ADJECTIVE

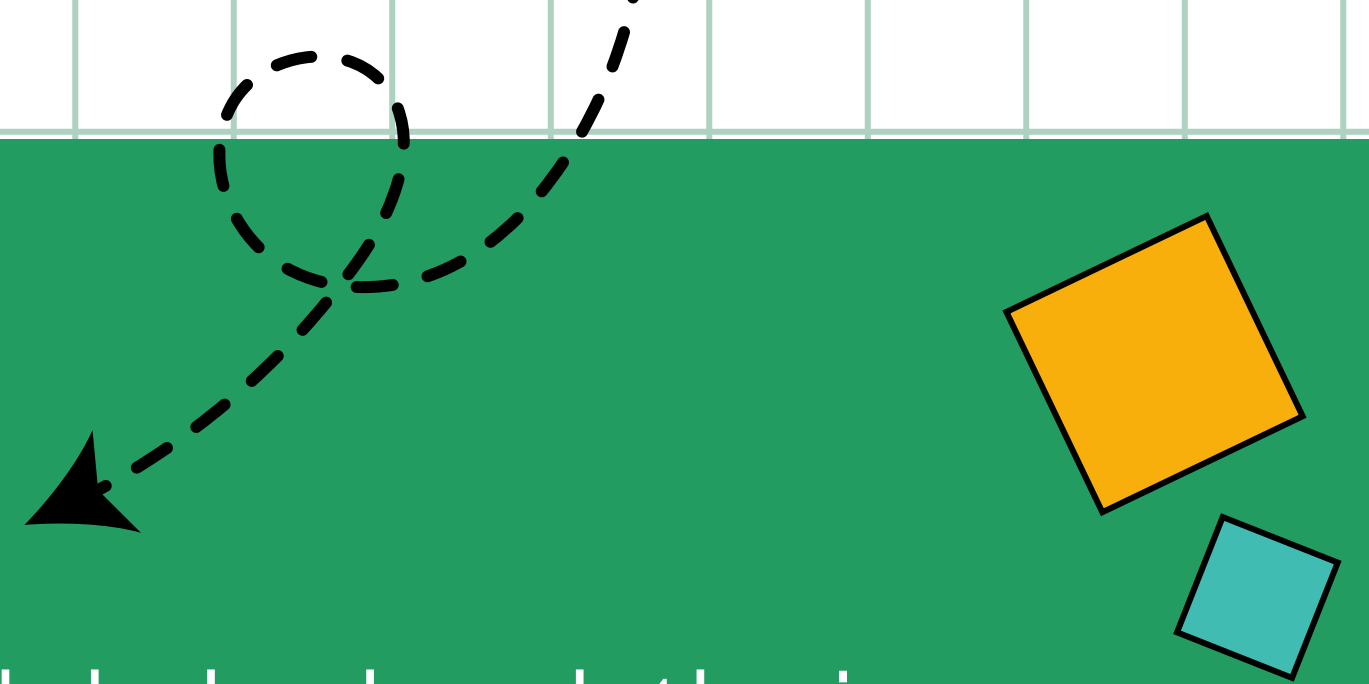
fit for your lab. Please reach out to me with any questions.

I've included my resume for your reference. I look forward
to hearing from you!

Best regards,


YOUR NAME

OUTCOMES



- The silly, low-stakes format of a Madlib helps break the ice and reduces fear of “messing up.”
- Familiarizing students with the structure and tone of professional outreach
- Builds a bridge to the “real” email
- Increases students self-confidence

STUDENT EXAMPLE

Dear Dr. 

I am a first year computer engineering student at UVA seeking to get involved in ECE research. I have recently found the Center for Automata Processing, and I am specifically interested in automata processing. I am interested in this topic because of my desire to work with electronics, including designing computer architecture. I would love to explore it further with your lab if you have any available positions. I can commit up to 9 hours a week during the school year and possibly full-time over the summer for credit and/or ideally pay. I have strong research and collaborative skills from my experience working in a research lab before my time at UVA. I have significant math experience, and am currently taking courses such as Probability, Computer Systems and Organization, Applied Circuits, and Digital Logic Devices. I am hard-working, open to learning, and excited to contribute however I can. I believe that I would be a good fit for your lab. Please reach out to me with any questions. I've included my resume for your reference. Thanks, I look forward to hearing from you!