



Meet your researcher

An adaptable induction activity designed to engage first year undergraduate students in learning through and about research during their first weeks at UCL

Introduction for UCL staff

This is an example of a group activity which engages students in research-based education – that is, learning which is built around activities typically undertaken by researchers – right from the start of their undergraduate experience. The generic guidance presented here is highly adaptable to meet the needs of particular subjects and departments.

This activity entails putting students into small peer groups (typically 6-8) on arrival and giving them a group task which will be completed in their own time by Week 4. In summary:

- Each student group is given the name of one UCL senior academic in their subject area, and asked to investigate the work of that person. Typically this will involve internet searches, but might also entail (with the department's guidance) looking at any relevant objects such as art works, lab equipment or buildings.
- The group meets to collaborate on the task, and share key findings.
- The group then interviews the academic in person about their research, questioning him or her about it.
- Group members then collaborate in creating a communications artefact of their choice which introduces the work of the academic, in broad terms, to a non-specialist audience.
- Finally, the group presents that artefact back to the academic, either virtually or in person; she or he then gives some informal feedback to the group on the accuracy and effectiveness of what they have produced.

Aims of the activity

The core aims are to:

1. Introduce students to the research culture of the department in general and to the work of one research-active academic in particular;
2. Help students to get to know one another, and to begin to develop team work and project management skills;
3. Develop students' abilities to distil, synthesise and communicate key ideas;
4. Develop their communication skills, including their ability to select appropriate language and media for a specified audience, and enhance related digital practices (for example, the use of PowerPoint, video or e-poster).

In adapting the activity to local needs, departments or programme leaders may of course opt to build in additional aims, for example introducing students to Moodle, and/or to key academic skills such as citation, referencing and academic honesty.

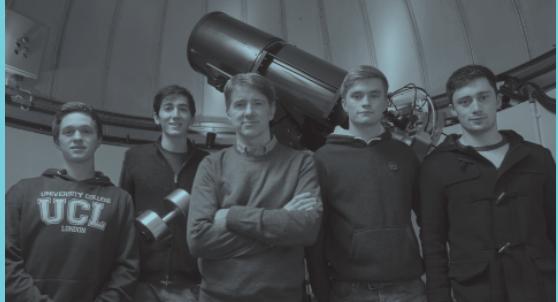
CALT welcomes examples from staff of other activities which enable students to learn through and about research. Please contact us on Arena.Open@ucl.ac.uk if you have ideas and approaches which you'd be willing to share, either virtually or in person, with colleagues across UCL



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Key information for students Group Task

Summary

As a group, you will investigate the research of an academic in your department. Your group will be given the name of your academic, and will have the opportunity to meet them and question them about their research. You will then need to summarise what you've learned about their work and work together to create a single artefact – for example, a PowerPoint presentation or a leaflet – which communicates the key themes of the research to a non-specialist audience. The academic will see what you have produced, and give you feedback on it.

Instructions

1. First group meeting: Introduce yourselves to each other. Make sure you learn one another's names and take each other's contact details.
2. Together, read your department's full Meet Your Researcher assignment brief carefully. Note that *together* you will need to produce a single communications artefact, such as a PowerPoint presentation, a short video, a leaflet or a detailed poster, which will introduce the staff member and her or his academic work to a non-specialist audience. Your challenge is to *work effectively together* as a group to complete this assignment *by the due date*.
3. During your first meeting, plan a sequence of meetings together, to ensure that you have sufficient time to complete the task. Agree on when and where you will meet.
4. Week One: undertake as much research as you can - online, through the UCL library and through any other means suggested by your department - into the expertise of your researcher. What is her/his area of specialist interest? Read some of what the staff member has written: journal articles, books and online publications. Investigate, too, what others have written about the work of your researcher. Make summary notes on your findings.
5. Second meeting. Discuss your findings with your fellow group members. Begin to agree on an outline or narrative for your communications artefact. Begin to consider which ideas and material you should include, and what type of artefact it should be. Then discuss and agree upon questions you will put to the researcher when you meet her/him in Week Two (see 6 below). Decide in advance who will ask which questions, to make sure that everyone is involved, and agree upon a strategy for noting or recording in some way your researcher's answers. If you choose to record the meeting, you should ask the researcher's permission.
6. Week Two: You will have been given a time, date and room for meeting your researcher. Make sure that you are fully prepared to ask her/him your series of demanding questions, and to take notes so that this information can be discussed, selected and used later in your group's communications artefact. Your objective for the meeting is to find out what it's really like to be a researcher in your subject. What does it involve, on a day-to-day basis? What are the highs and lows of research? What is the researcher trying to achieve, and why? How will s/he know when s/he is successful? What excites them about their subject area?
7. Weeks Three and Four: You will need to work together and perhaps individually on your communications artefact. In the first follow-up meeting of your peer group, agree on your strategy for completing a draft version. Arrange a final meeting to review it before submission, and ensure that it is submitted on time, clearly labelled with the names of your group members. Your Department will give you detailed information about submission, and about how and when you will receive feedback on your work.

Image credit
Supernova Discoveries with Dr Steve Fossey and second year natural science students. Photo Max Alexander.