FAQs for SURF Mentors

What does it mean to be a SURF mentor?

While the exact meaning of mentorship often differs depending on the discipline and parties involved, we expect SURF mentors to offer guidance through the research process and their specific summer project. This relationship involves helping the mentee develop skills related to the discipline. What these skills might include are different depending on what is appropriate for the project and subject matter (such as technical skills, writing skills, specific software usage, etc.).

Given the versatility of these mentor relationships, we strongly recommend establishing shared and realistic expectations at the beginning of communications.

Mentors can also be in various positions (such as faculty, graduate students, or post-docs). However, we ask that the Principal Investigator of the research group be listed as the Rice faculty mentor in the student application.

What is changing in SURF 2023?

This year, we are increasing the stipend from $3,000 to $5,000. Along with this change, students are expected to conduct about 30 hours of research of week for a set 10 weeks (May 22nd to July 28th). There will still be programming during the week (such as workshops and graduate student advisor meetings).

Where does the funding for the $5,000 stipend come from?

Students are awarded the $5,000 stipend through the Office of Undergraduate Research & Inquiry.

Will housing be provided?

Housing will not be provided as a part of the program. Students will be responsible for determining and paying for their housing needs.

Do I have to be in Houston?

Remote mentorship will be considered on a case-by-case basis. We strongly suggest that the mentor identifies a postdoc or graduate student who will be in-person to serve as a day-to-day contact. The mentor will still need to keep consistent and regular contact with the mentee.

However, students are required to remain in Houston for in-person attendance at workshops, advising, and a symposium.

When will the selection committee notify applicants of their decision?

The selection committee will notify applicants the week of spring break (March 13-17). Applications will open Monday, January 30th and close Sunday, February 26th.
Will I get to approve the students who are assigned to me?

Students will be assigned based on student preferences. We will then send a list of potential mentees (with resumes). Faculty could (optional) then set up a meeting with the students. Faculty can veto potential mentees. We do this to ensure we can match student interest while at the same time allowing faculty to review if the student meets any skill qualifications necessary to complete the work. Potential SURF applicants and faculty have an opportunity to discuss projects and interact at the SURF Mentor Mixer on February 7th.

What is the SURF Mentor Mixer?

To provide additional support, OURI is hosting a SURF Mentor Mixer to allow students to meet with potential mentors before submitting an application. We are inviting a diverse set of students to a comfortable space to approach professors. This mixer is designed to be an opportunity for students to learn more about research projects and interact with faculty that they may select to be their SURF mentor. We strongly encourage SURF mentors to take advantage of this opportunity to welcome these students to undergraduate research. The mixer is scheduled for February 7, 2023 from 4-5 PM in the Grand Hall.

Can I have more than one student mentees in SURF?

The committee does not limit the number of mentees a mentor can have in SURF. However, OURI can support a limited number of fellows for the summer of 2023. We cannot guarantee all students who apply will be selected for the program.

What happens if a mentor is not matched?

OURI publishes the list of mentors who sign up each year on our website. We use this list to direct students to faculty who are willing to support undergraduates who are new to research.

Who completes the application?

Students are required to complete the application independently.

The program application includes:

- a 250-word personal interest essay that shares how being a SURF fellow will benefit the student personally and enrich their experience at Rice.
- The project description (only will be required if the student is applying with a faculty mentor and project already identified).
- an updated resume.

For any additional questions or concerns, please contact Jay Bethea at jb112@rice.edu.