



RICE UNIVERSITY

Office of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry

FAQs for SURF Students

What are the key details for SURF 2026?

Students are awarded the \$5,000 stipend through the Office of Undergraduate Research & Inquiry and are expected to conduct about 30 hours of research per week for ten weeks (May 26th to July 31st). Students are expected to treat SURF like a full-time job and be dedicated to the program M-F from 9-5. In addition to conducting thirty hours of research per week, they will spend five to ten hours on programming, including weekly workshops and graduate student advisor meetings and completing written assignments, posters, and reflections.

All SURF students must attend the orientation on May 26th and the final poster session on July 31st.

Who is eligible for SURF?

The SURF program is only open to returning Rice undergraduates.

SURF is designed to address some of the disparities in research specifically at Rice University. Therefore, the program prioritizes first-generation college students and students from limited-income backgrounds without prior research experience. While experience level is determined on an individual basis, we generally consider students with less than three months of college-level, mentored research experience as novice researchers. We also encourage students to express any barriers to research participation due to identity in the Personal Statement.

Students who complete the 1-credit UNIV 201: Research Readiness course will be prioritized in the application process.

International students are eligible to apply, especially those on need-based financial aid.

What should I know about the \$5,000 stipend?

OURI awards the \$5,000 stipend in two parts: one at the beginning of the program and the other after the program midpoint. In the interest of equitably allocating resources, students will be asked to disclose additional monetary compensation for their SURF project.

Do I have to be in Houston?

Yes, students must attend in-person workshops, advising, and a symposium. Excessive absences will result in delayed stipend payments, stipend reductions, and/or dismissal from the program.

Research activities that require travel are allowed on a limited basis but may not begin until after June 26th. Travel plans need to be approved by OURI to develop an appropriate plan to avoid stipend reduction.



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Can I take classes or have another job while participating in SURF?

Any responsibilities outside of SURF should equal 10 hours or less a week. If registering for a course not tied to the SURF project, the credit hours should be 3 hours or less. To be clear, SURF students may not take General Chemistry I or II, Organic Chemistry I or II, or General Physics I or II.

Activities that do not overlap with SURF dates (such as O-week advising) are allowed.

Will housing be provided?

On-campus housing will be provided free of charge for the majority of students in the program. Selection for on-campus housing will be based on non-local residency, financial need, and transportation needs. Students will be asked to indicate their interest in on-campus housing during the application process.

No meal plan or food allowance will be provided. Students will be responsible for figuring out and purchasing their meal options.

When will the selection committee notify applicants of their decision?

Applications will open Monday, January 26th and close Sunday, February 22nd.

The selection committee will notify applicants of the decision during spring break (March 16th-March 20th).

What is the Contract Discussion Lunch (Tuesday, March 31st)?

Accepted students are required to attend the SURF Contract Discussion Lunch at noon on Tuesday, March 31st. At this meeting, we will discuss SURF next steps, how to complete the payment paperwork, instructions for communicating with mentors, and explain key aspects of the contract.

Lunch will be provided. Students will not receive their mentor match or contract until they attend the discussion. Therefore, all accepted students should attend even if they are uncertain if they want to continue with the program.

Am I required to choose a mentor from the provided list of faculty?

When applying, students can choose to list their mentor preference from a list of provided faculty and projects OR apply with a mentor of their choosing. If the student applies with a non-listed mentor, they will be required to provide a project description determined by their desired mentor.

Students may apply with a mentor in the Texas Medical Center. Students will be responsible for ensuring the timeline for receiving appropriate clearance and conducting research aligns with the SURF schedule.



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Who completes the application?

Students are required to complete the application independently. The program application includes:

- A personal interest essay that shares how being a SURF fellow will benefit the student personally and enrich their experience at Rice.
- The project description (will only be required if the student applies with a non-listed faculty mentor).
- Resume.
- Unofficial academic transcript.

Recommendation letters are not a part of the SURF application.

How does SURF faculty mentorship work?

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 and appropriate for the project (such as technical skills, writing skills, specific software usage, etc.). Mentors can be in various positions (such as faculty, graduate students, or post-docs).

Because this experience is designed for novice researchers, weekly workshops and graduate student advising will support the development of a strong mentor relationship and aid in navigating challenges throughout the summer.

How are faculty mentors assigned?

Students will be assigned based on student preference and the qualifications listed by the mentor. Faculty will have an opportunity to discuss projects and interact with potential SURF mentees before confirming the match. We do this to ensure we can match student interests while at the same time allowing faculty to review if the student meets any skill qualifications necessary to complete the work.

What programming is available?

Workshops and program events will help students understand the roles and responsibilities of undergraduate researchers, set personal goals for the research experience, learn about graduate school and research careers, and practice research communication. Additionally, students will meet in small groups with a graduate student advisor for individual advising on these topics. A research symposium is held on the final day of the program for student students to present their work.

Research mentors cannot excuse students from these in-person requirements.

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