Intern Program FAQs

EARTH INSTITUTE SUMMER INTERN PROGRAM

EARTH INSTITUTE RESEARCH EXPERIENCES FOR UNDERGRADUATES (REU)

The *Beyond Basic Science* REU program will immerse participants in the transdisciplinary science being done at the Earth Institute (EI) of Columbia University. **We have research opportunities for both undergraduate students and K12 educators.**

1. **How can the Earth Institute Summer Intern Program help me?**

This summer internship is a chance to focus on a specific research topic, learn the skills needed to make sense of the data that you may collect yourself or may have provided to you, translate scientific research for different users, work with stakeholders, and identify opportunities to use scientific research to advance climate policies and initiatives in communities. This is a truly unique experience to have, as an undergraduate student or an educator.

Completing an internship will embed participants in the scientific process and provide them with a window into research. For undergraduates, the internship can help you narrow your professional focus by allowing you the opportunity to explore different fields. For educators, these research opportunities will allow teachers to enhance their knowledge of applied climate and sustainability science and translate that for classroom use. For both undergraduate students and educators, these internships are also a good tool to help you improve your resume, develop professional skills and network.

2. **Why should I choose the Earth Institute Summer Intern Program?**

Columbia University’s Earth Institute has world-class scientists in many scientific disciplines and applied research thematic areas including: climate modeling, atmospheric sciences, public policy, biodiversity conservation, peace and conflict, and many others. The internship at Earth Institute allows you to work one on one with these scientists in a collaborative setting, rather than as one of many students in a classroom setting. With a relatively modest time investment of ten weeks, you can discover if you enjoy scientific research and if you would like being a graduate student.

THE APPLICATION

3. **How do I apply?**

Fill out the Earth Institute Summer Internship Program Online Application. The online application form is open until April 9. We can accept letters of recommendation up until April 16.

4. **What are the application requirements?**

PLEASE NOTE that once you start an application, you must complete it. It will not be saved for you to come back to at a later time. Once you submit successfully, you will receive an automated message.
• FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS: A resume – attached to the application form as a PDF file
• FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS: College transcript(s) – (transcripts do not need to be official but do need to be legible and in English) Transcripts should be attached to the application a PDF.
• FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS: Statement of interest- You should provide a general statement about the three research projects that interest you most.
• The statement of interest should also be attached to the application as a PDF file.

For students:

  o Apply for research projects that interest you and for which you are qualified by your coursework (if available). If such courses are not available to you, be sure to mention this in your statement of interest.
  o Your statement of interest is very important. You should write your statement and proof it before you begin your online application. It should be no more than 1500 words long. In addition to describing the research projects you are most interested in and why, you should also include a paragraph on the qualities of a good scientist.
  o If you are intensely interested in more than the three research projects, say so in your statement of interest. It will increase your chances of admission to the program.
  o List potential research mentors by name in your statement of interest. (This flatters them and is a good tactic in general when applying for internships.) They often search for their name in the online applications and look at those applications first.
  o Two letters of recommendation. During the application, you will be asked to provide the emails of your letter writers. Once you submit your application, the application system will automatically contact your letter writers and provide instructions to them on submitting their letters.

For Educators

  o Identify areas of your curriculum relevant to the specific projects, and describe those connections in your statement.
  o In your statement, describe how your student population will benefit from your participation in the program. Be sure to highlight the multiplier impact this will have on your school and your students.
  o Describe your previous professional training in the subject matter, extracurricular activities in the subject matter that you’ve been involved in, and identify the gaps in knowledge, skills, and thematic areas that you hope to fill through this position.
  o Two letters of recommendation (with at least 1 from your current administrator). During the application, you will be asked to provide the emails of your letter writers. Once you submit your application, the application system will automatically contact your letter writers and provide instructions to them on submitting their letters.

FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS – 2 letters of recommendation are required. Please be sure to remind your letter writers about the deadline of April 16 for them to submit letters.
For students: we strongly recommend that both letters come from faculty members who know you well. Remember that our Admissions Committee wants to know about your potential ability to do independent research. Character references do not address those abilities. A letter from a faculty member who knows you as part of a class carries much more weight.

For educators: we require that at least one of the letters of recommendation must come from a current administrator (i.e. a principal or head of school). The additional letter may come from a past administrator or someone who supervises you in some capacity (i.e. a vice principal or lead teacher).

For both groups: when you are requesting a letter, you should provide the following information to them:

- What are you applying for, and why?
- The deadline for the letter
- The instructions for the letter (remind them that when you apply and enter their emails, they will automatically be prompted with an email the EI Summer Intern account, and the submission requirements will be outlined in this email)
- Your overarching interests in the program and how this opportunity fits in
- What big theme you want them to get across in the letter (i.e. perfect opportunity given your interests/this time in your career, how you would add value to a research team, etc.)
- Ask them to explain their relationship with you: i.e. advisors, professor, administrator, etc.
- Include information on how long they have known you
- The applicant’s major or intended major
- Any relevant academic or research experiences
- Examples of academic and/or research accomplishments, achievements, and successes Although hard work and focus are essential to success in science, we also are looking for originality, creativity, resourcefulness, and teamwork
- Other relevant internships or work experiences
- Examples of unique qualities (i.e. leadership, perseverance) important for these research experiences
- If applicable, favorite classes, sections of labs and why
- IF applicable, explanations of any irregularity in your record/resume

5. What additional requirements are you looking for in an applicant?

Specific requirements and preferences vary for each internship. Applicants should refer to the criteria outlined in advertised positions for position competencies and skill requirements. At a minimum, applicants should have completed courses in college level math (i.e. statistics, calculus, OR algebra), research methods, and an introduction to earth and environmental sciences and/or climate science.

6. When is the application deadline?

Earth Institute Summer Internship Program must receive the online application form no later than April 9, 2021 at 5:00pm EST for students to be considered. Recommendations and transcripts can arrive up to one week later on April 16, 2021 at 5:00pm EST but students will not be considered for acceptance until all of these materials are received. (Only complete applications are accessible to potential research mentors.)
7. **Is there an application fee?**

No. There is no application fee.

8. **I applied last year for an REU (i.e. the Lamont-Doherty Summer Intern Program) and was not selected; can I reapply?**

Yes. You should fill out a completely new Earth Institute Summer Internship Program online application and tailor it to our list of available projects. We cannot use material from a previous application; you must submit a new online application and re-submit all application requirements.

9. **I have previously participated in an REU. Can I apply again?**

No. We are not allowed to accept students who have previously participated in REUs.

10. **Can you give me an idea of my chances for admission, for example, based on GPA scores or Class Rank?**

Overall, intern mentors are looking for students who are intellectually curious and whose interests, skills, aptitude and experience best match their research program. The individual mentor evaluates all parts of the application (statement of interest, recommendations, grades, previous research experience, etc.) in an effort to get as complete a picture of applicants with similar research interests as possible. GPA does factor into the decision but other parts of the application are equally important. At a minimum, applicants should have completed courses in college level math (i.e. statistics, calculus, OR algebra), research methods, and an introduction to earth and environmental sciences and/or climate science. However, exceptions may be made in cases where the applicant’s college does not offer appropriate courses. While GPA is not the sole criterion for acceptance, students that demonstrate academic excellence are strongly preferred.

11. **Is it OK to send copies of awards, papers, posters, to supplement my application?**

No. You may only submit the required materials. Because of the large number of applicants, we must discourage you from sending in copies of awards, journal articles or other extraneous documents. You can list awards and published abstracts and papers on your resume. Note that we do not expect students to have prior research experience or publications.

12. **Can an applicant who was not accepted into the program request information as to why they were not accepted?**

Due to the large volume of qualified applicants to the Earth Institute Summer Internship Program and the small number of students accepted into the program, we are unable to provide specifics as to why an application was denied.

13. **Will the program keep me informed of my application status?**
The online application system will email you when your application has been submitted successfully. We will email you your acceptance results as soon as decisions are made. **Potential research mentors may contact you by email to set up a phone call to assess you more fully but this phone contact should not be considered an offer of acceptance unless it comes from Ms. Cassie Xu or Dr. Joshua Fisher.** If you are accepted, you will be notified via email.

14. **Whom do I contact if I have questions about the application process?**

Please send an email to: cassie@ei.columbia.edu

15. **Can I visit the school or contact faculty before being admitted?**

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Columbia Campus access is restricted. Once accepted for an internship, applicants can begin corresponding with your faculty advisor. Also, you can begin to read background material about your project. Applicants wishing further information about a faculty member's field of research should contact that professor via email, examine the professor's website and read the professors published papers. Applicants should keep in mind that faculty schedules are very full.

16. **I am still a first year student (Freshman standing). Am I eligible for the program?**

No. Only sophomores and juniors are eligible to participate in the program.

17. **I am not currently a science or engineering major. I am a humanities major. Can I still apply to the program?**

We usually only accept students that major in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) disciplines, but if you are an interdisciplinary major and have taken the relevant coursework (see application requirements), we would welcome your application. Other majors that are eligible include (but are not limited to): students majoring in sustainable development, environmental policy and economics.

18. **Is the REU program the same as the Earth Institute Summer Intern Program?** Yes. Both programs are nearly identical and candidates for both programs perform the same activities and run simultaneously.

19. **Can anyone apply to the Earth Institute Summer Intern Program and the Earth Institute REU program?**

The Earth Institute Summer Intern program is open to any student from any college or university in the United States. The Earth Institute REU program restricts applicants to American citizens or permanent residents.

20. **I have previously participated in an NSF funded REU sites program at another institution. Am I eligible for admission to the summer intern program?**

This depends on the funding source of your previous REU site as follows:
• If the REU site was funded through NSF’s Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences division, you are NOT ELIGIBLE.
• If the site was funded through any other division of NSF, for example Biological Sciences, you are eligible.

FUNDING
21. What kind of funding is available to support students and educators in the program?

All participants will receive a stipend of $6000 for the program. Undergraduate students will participate in a 10-week summer program and must participate in the entirety of the program. Educators will be on a different schedule than the 10-week summer program for undergraduate students and that will be finalized once accepted into the program.

22. How does the housing work?

For summer 2021, all programs will be remote. For summer 2022 and 2023, all undergraduate students will have housing provided to them on Columbia’s main campus in Morningside Heights, Manhattan, NYC.

23. If I am coming from out of state, will I have to pay for my airfare?

Students who travel to New York for this internship from more than 200 miles away are eligible for a R/T supersaver airfare. Trainfare will be provided for those who live closer.

24. Is my REU stipend taxable?

Yes, it is but you will not receive a W-2 form. You should save documentation of the direct deposit of your paycheck. (This is extremely important. Some students have had trouble with the IRS because they failed to save the documentation of their paycheck.)

THE PROGRAM

25. I am waiting to hear from a job offer. Can I join REU later after hearing the results of this offer?

Given the large number of applicants placed on the waiting list, we need to know if you would accept our invitation to participate by the deadline we give you. Applicants will be accepted on a rolling basis between May 3 – 7, 2021. We consider it unethical for you to give a written acceptance to the internship and later to decline it for another internship.

26. Are there opportunities to expand my involvement beyond REU?

There are potential opportunities. Students may continue the project as a senior thesis. Some sophomores continue their research project in the summer after their junior year. Ask your research mentor about this after you have been at Earth Institute for at least a month.

27. How are research mentors selected?
Students are matched with research advisors through the application process; this is why the student statement of interest is an extremely important part of his/her application. You are more likely to be accepted if you mention the research mentors for each project by name in your statement of interest.

28. **Do I select the project I want to work with?**

Students are asked to rank research projects as their first, second and third choices out of topics submitted by potential research advisors.

28. **When do I know which research project I will be participating in?**

When you are admitted (between May 3-7, 2021), you will be notified about your research mentor.

29. **Will I work alone in a research group or will I have other interns to collaborate with?**

The intern will be part of a research group that contains other interns or graduate students, but you will directly report to a research mentor.

30. **Can I be late to start the program?**

We discourage this but some advisors allow it for up to one week. Students do need to complete the full 10 weeks of the program.

31. **How will I get to work each day?**

Columbia has multiple campuses and while most of the projects are on our main Columbia campus, a few projects will be at our Lamont campus. There is a free shuttle bus that will take you directly to that campus and back each day. All student/educator activities outside of the research project will take place on the main Columbia campus in Morningside Heights.

32. **How many hours am I expected to work each week?**

Work schedules will be arranged with your faculty mentors on an individual basis. In general, you are expected to work between 25-35 hours per week. You are given reading materials and writing assignments to work on for an hour or so during weekday evenings. If you must be absent during the week, you should expect to make up the hours. You should not expect to take classes or hold down another job during the period of your internship. Teachers will again be on a slightly different schedule that will be determined with your mentor once accepted.