

REU APPLICATION ADVICE

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Hello! I attended REUs at Auburn University (2014), UC Santa Barbara (2015), and the University of Minnesota Duluth (2016). I returned to the Duluth REU in 2017 and 2018 to work as an advisor. During my summers at Duluth, I've had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Joe Gallian, who started the Duluth REU in 1977 and has run it every year since then except in 1978. There are three tangible pieces of advice that I have collected from my conversations with Dr. Gallian.

- (1) Before you apply to any programs, you should pick your absolute favorite. You should decide beforehand that you will accept an offer from this program without hesitation if you are given the chance. Then state this blatantly in your personal statement. The program director wants to have students who want to be in that program. Of course, you should only mention this in one of your personal statements. Don't tell the other programs that they are not your favorites.
- (2) Express an explicit interest in the specific area of research that the REU handles. Try not to sound too generic here. I remember applying for an REU dealing with arithmetic dynamics, an area that really fascinates me, so I wrote in my personal statement about the specific problems I had encountered in a book I had been reading about arithmetic dynamics. In the end, I went to Duluth instead of the arithmetic dynamics REU, but still.
- (3) Find a way to show that you are a fun and likable person. This is more important than you might think. You might expect the REU director will choose the applicants strictly based on who has the best mathematical credentials, but the reality is that they want to know they won't be spending the summer with someone who is rude or argumentative. Your letters of recommendation are a good place for this. Try to find a letter writer who has spoken with you and interacted with you enough to know that you are not a serial killer. When you ask that person to write a letter, you can kindly suggest that they write a sentence or two about your personality.