

GETTING INVOLVED IN UFO STUDIES

Students commonly ask for advice on how to become involved in the study of UFOs (often called “Ufology”). What subjects should they learn, and what special training is most appropriate in order to become involved with either UFO investigation or research. Further, students wonder whether there is any full-time employment available with major UFO organizations to study the UFO phenomenon.

The answers to these questions are straightforward, but first we want to provide some necessary background that will help you understand the current situation in the field. The study of the UFO phenomenon has suffered over the years from a lack of funding from either government agencies or private foundations. As a consequence, all UFO organizations have relied almost exclusively on contributions from the public for their support, some on membership fees.

Regrettably, while public donations are most welcome, public donations have usually been barely adequate to maintain an office and pay for some clerical help, but—with rare exceptions—not enough to pay full-time investigators. And almost no grant money is available for scientists and other professionals to do research projects.

The basic reason why no adequate funding is available is that only a tiny minority of professional scientists and academics consider UFOs to be a legitimate topic for scientific study. Most are convinced that UFO reports are only a miscellany of mistaken observations of prosaic objects or phenomena, and all the controversy that surrounds them is based on nothing but a popular myth. At bottom, the pervasive problem is the failure of important opinion makers in society to recognize that the skeptical position on UFOs is not well founded; in fact, it is strongly contradicted by a large body of well-established facts (see the white paper on skepticism).

As a consequence, all those who study UFOs seriously do so as an avocation—an unpaid activity we pursue as professionally as possible, given the lack of resources. UFO investigators come from all walks of life, and people with a wide variety of backgrounds have made important contributions. However, their UFO work did not advance their careers, especially for those academics who have become involved. Others in the field—policemen, teachers, businessmen, engineers, librarians, writers, and computer specialists—are less troubled by conflicts between their UFO work and their jobs.

Of course, the lack of funding could change at any time, but it has been true for decades and the future is totally unpredictable. The current deadlock could go on for many more years, or some dramatic events or discoveries could bring urgent attention to and support for UFOs overnight. Still, it is best that you plan to do your UFO work as a volunteer.

UFOs as an Avocation

If you are ready to get involved on a volunteer level in the field, what should you study? Experience tells us that analysis of UFO reports is a strongly cross-disciplinary endeavor. The study of the UFO phenomenon can be broadly grouped into two categories:

- Investigation of UFO sightings themselves in the field
- Study of the reports and/or witnesses

Within these categories are numerous separate tasks. The field investigation of sightings involves many skills. Witnesses need to be interviewed in a manner that will provide the most reliable sighting details. Physical trace samples may be taken using careful protocols, with measurements and photographs of the site. Government agencies often will be contacted to obtain supplementary information (weather data, radar records). Reports must be carefully written to compile an accurate database for future use.

From the standpoint of field investigation work and report writing, backgrounds in interviewing, detective or police work, journalism, social work, and similar disciplines are valuable. However, many excellent field investigators have had other training. It is quite possible to learn to be a good field investigator, and there are handbooks that provide advice and training.

The study of the data from UFO reports includes many possible areas of evidence. UFOs are sometimes tracked on radar, so that electronics and other technologies related to those fields are important. Electromagnetic (EM) effects or gravitational disturbances frequently have been associated with UFOs. In EM effects cases, knowledge of the affected vehicle or power system becomes important, along with principles of electromagnetism.

If there are physical traces on the ground, or vegetation is affected, then knowledge of biology, soil properties, chemistry, and botany can be important. Photographs of UFOs must be studied by those knowledgeable in that field.

Other researchers have attempted to find patterns in the UFO data, such as where and when UFOs appear, their common characteristics, and any correlations between these data. Here, a background in statistics, databases, or intelligence analysis would be useful.

For those interested in the physics of the UFO phenomena, relevant knowledge can come from aeronautics, atmospheric physics, and optics, among other disciplines.

In most UFO cases, there is no physical evidence, just the witness reports. Consequently, witnesses have been the subject of several studies, as we try to see who is more likely to see a UFO, and whether certain people more commonly make specific types of reports. Here, social scientists have much to offer. Perceptual psychologists have, for example, studied the difficulties of observing something unusual in the sky or on the ground, and have placed limits on what can be perceived.

What all of the above implies is that almost any area you decide to study can be applied someday to the study of UFOs. For this reason, we strongly urge you get your degrees or training in areas that you find interesting and in which you would like to seek employment. Undoubtedly, you will need to make a living doing something besides studying UFOs.

You may find this advice rather unsatisfactory because it is not very specific. But actually, it should be encouraging that almost anything you learn can be applied to UFO studies. This gives you great freedom to choose. And if there are specific areas of UFO study that you find intriguing, our advice above should provide some guidance about where you should gain further education.

As part of your schoolwork (especially in college), you can seek opportunities to do term papers, science projects, honors projects, and theses related to some aspect of UFOs. With a little imagination, the possibilities are endless.

UFO Studies & Apprenticeship

To a great extent, it will be up to you to become expert in the UFO field, since there is no formal training in the subject. Whatever field of study or studies you choose to pursue in your formal education, there are many informal training and learning opportunities available. You should try to contact one of the major UFO organizations to see if you can become involved as a volunteer while in school. (Your schoolwork should come first, and we normally advocate waiting until you are in college to become a volunteer.) The organizations can put you in contact with someone in your area who is a member and/or investigator. You can begin to learn about the field from someone who is directly involved. You can possibly apprentice as an investigator, attend discussion groups, and help with other tasks.

Volunteering can lead to obtaining a personal mentor who can help guide you through the many pitfalls often encountered in ufology (rumors, gossip, unfounded speculation, poor science). You will want some advice on what to read and who is reliable. This is because there are no standards in the field of UFO studies; literally, anyone can declare him or herself a “ufologist,” although those of us who treat the field seriously only get involved with like-minded people.

In your free time outside of school or during vacation time, you can pursue personal studies of UFO sightings and/or human reactions to them. A good place to start is to examine the web sites of UFO groups and prominent advocates, many of which contain links or articles on various aspects of the subject. You should try to read widely in the UFO subject, learning about its history as well as famous cases, the government involvement with UFO investigation, earlier investigators and researchers, and, of course, what we do know about the UFO phenomenon.

The reading list and web sites below are a place to begin your education. If you have additional questions after reading this white paper, you can contact one of the UFO organizations for further advice. We wish you all the best in getting involved in this most intriguing field.

Web Sites

Here are some websites that have reliable information on the UFO phenomenon. There are many more than listed here, and you can find several other good sites on the CUFOS website links page.

Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS)	www.cufos.org
Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR)	www.fufor.com
Mutual UFO Network (MUFON)	www.mufon.com
National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP)	www.nicap.dabsol.co.uk
Project 1947 (UFO history)	www.project1947.com
UFO Research Coalition (URC)	www.ufoscience.org
Bernard Haisch, Ph.D. (astronomer)	www.ufoskeptic.org

Recommended Reading

We have chosen the best books that provide an overview of the UFO phenomenon, rather than books on specific topics, such as abduction cases. Some are out of print, while others are quite expensive, so you will need to use your local library and used book services to find some of these references. For additional reading material, you can check the recommended reading lists of the websites listed above.

Clark, Jerome. *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial*. Detroit, MI: Visible Ink. 1998.

Clark, Jerome. *The UFO Encyclopedia*. Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics. 1998.

Fowler, Raymond E. *Casebook of a UFO Investigator*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 1981.

Hall, Richard H. *The UFO Evidence, Volume II: A Thirty-Year Report*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. 2001.

Hall, Richard H. *Uninvited Guests*. Santa Fe, NM: Aurora. 1988.

Hendry, Allan. *The UFO Handbook*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. 1979.

Hill, Paul R. *Unconventional Flying Objects: A Scientific Analysis*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co. 1995.

Hynek, J. Allen. *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry*. Chicago: Henry Regnery. 1972.

Randle, Kevin D. *The UFO Casebook*. New York: Warner. 1989.

Randles, Jenny and Peter Hough. *The Complete Book of UFOs*. New York: Sterling. 1996.