

If you have even considered graduate studies at any level, it is likely that at one point you have wondered about applying for a scholarship or fellowship. Whether awarded by the University or given by an outside institution, scholarships and fellowships go a long way to funding the essential academic research provided by the university.

Receiving a scholarship or fellowship provides a variety of positive outcomes for graduate students. “Obviously, they help you complete your education without incurring debt,” says Jolyn Schleiffarth, Fellowships and Benefits Coordinator for the Graduate School. “Beyond that, they help you open up a network of people whom you can collaborate with, lead to other opportunities, look good on your resume, and can help you qualify for other opportunities down the road. There’s no downside.”

Because there is so much at stake, applying for a fellowship or scholarship can be imposing. Following are some Dos and Don’ts to help guide you through the process of application.

Do: Build relationships with faculty.

Having a healthy relationship with faculty members will greatly help you in the application process. For one thing, faculty members will be the ones writing your letters of recommendation, and the more they know you and your work, the better they can use that knowledge to increase the value of their letter of recommendation. Faculty members can also help you make contacts that you might not otherwise have access to. For example, in the Fulbright Scholarship,

students need an affiliate to sponsor their research abroad. Having a variety of faculty contacts greatly helps students locate an affiliate that will be closely aligned to their interests.



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Applying for a fellowship or scholarship doesn’t have to be stressful. Follow these “Do” and “Don’t” recommendations to help increase your chances of a successful application.

Don’t: Expect faculty members to do all the work.

Faculty members need to be prepared to write your letters of recommendation, and they need adequate time to write a good letter. Talk to your recommenders early on in the process and find out an appropriate timeframe. Be sure to give everyone writing you a recommendation letter clear information about the nature of the fellowship or scholarship you are applying for, and the specifics of your proposal. It may also be appropriate to provide a written description of yourself and the context the faculty knows you in, to help your letter stay distinct from the other letters of recommendation the faculty member may be writing.

Do: Start early.

Learn about fellowship and scholarship opportunities early on. Many of the most rewarding fellowships/scholarships, such as the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, are limited to a student’s final year of undergraduate studies or her first two years of graduate school. Starting early also allows you to polish your proposals. A proposal for a fellowship or scholarship shouldn’t be begun and completed in a weekend: to be competitive, you should develop and revise your materials over several months, getting input from everyone you can as you work on it. The more you review and revise, the better your chances, and that takes time.



Don't: Wait till the last minute.

“I have students that contact me in the Fall asking me if there’s a scholarship or fellowship available that semester,” says Schlieffarth. “There will never be something like that. You always have to apply in advance to receiving the fellowship, so plan ahead and don’t miss the deadline.” Fellowships and scholarships aren’t quick fixes when you’re short of money, they’re rewards for hard work and discipline. Show you deserve the reward by planning carefully and budgeting the time needed to create a good proposal. As you plan, be aware that the more you apply for fellowships, the greater your chances. Each fellowship and scholarship is an opportunity, so make it a goal to apply whenever you qualify for a fellowship or scholarship.

Do: Work hard on your personal statement.

As a graduate student, you should develop a basic personal statement early on. That basic statement can then be tailored to be used in many different ways throughout your career. Writing a personal statement is difficult work, and you should approach it as you would any major academic writing; giving it the proper planning, drafting, and revision stages it needs to be exceptional. Throughout your time as a graduate student, you should make use of your advisors and the many writing resources on campus to develop and polish your personal statement. In many instances, your personal statement alone can open up opportunities that would otherwise be closed to you. Make sure that it really shines.

Don't: Make common mistakes in your personal statement.

Many personal statements are too general, which makes them forgettable. You may be diligent and resourceful and passionate about your subject, but it’s likely that everyone else who is applying is also those things. Show your attributes by relating a simple story or providing some specific details that demonstrate how you are unique. Be careful, though--remember that the personal statement is a serious document. Don’t try to be so personable that you sound frivolous. “The personal statement should be a story and be illustrative,” says Schlieffarth, “but ultimately it needs to demonstrate a correlation between where you are and where you want to be and how the opportunity will help you get there.” ▣

WEB RESOURCES FOR POPULAR FELLOWSHIPS

NSF - GRFP

<https://nsf-grfp.utah.edu>

The Graduate Research Fellowship from the National Science Foundation provides students with funds and tuition benefits.

Graduate School Fellowships

<http://gradschool.utah.edu/tbp/graduate-fellowship-opportunities>

The Graduate School offers several different Fellowship and Scholarship opportunities, including University Teaching Assistantships, the Steffenson-Canon Scholarship, and the Garr-Cutler Energy Award.