GETTING STARTED EXPLORING FELLOWSHIPS

Updated May 21, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Have you wondered if there is a fellowship out there for you? Do you have questions about when you should begin to prepare an application? Or what steps you might take to make you an even stronger candidate? If any of these are your questions, come along to an informal session on fellowship opportunities (several scheduled each semester), talk with your faculty advisors, or talk with an advisor in the Fellowships Program.

Whether you are a first year student or a senior, ask your fellowship questions. Some programs are open to sophomores and juniors; some are aimed at graduating seniors and recent graduates. In all cases, strong applications require sound planning, well in advance. Start early, as early in your college career as possible! This note suggests where you can get started, even if you are not yet ready to sit down and write your application.

Note to the graduating seniors: Even if it is still early in the fall semester when you read this, any fellowship planning you do may have to be for next year. Virtually all national and international fellowships have their external deadlines in early fall. You need one to two months – at the very least – to prepare a competitive application package, and longer if you want to apply as a Smith College nominee. If you are starting to think about applications you’ll make in the fall after you graduate, then you should use your senior year to gather information and advice and make your plans! In many ways, it’s harder to complete applications once you graduate; do as much as you can before you leave campus.

WHEN WE SAY “FELLOWSHIPS” WE MEAN …

By "fellowships" we mean merit scholarships or grants for formal education or an educational experience. The most prestigious, highly coveted awards last for an academic year or more and are awarded after a national or international competition. Membership in an active community of fellow scholars (sometimes including fellows' conferences) is part of the benefit. Each award at this level is also high-level external validation of the quality and high achievements of the awardee; such validation has broad recognition in national and international higher education and professional circles. With high esteem and high benefits come high competition.

Note about summer “fellowships”: Competitive summer internships and other experiential programs are often called “fellowships,” too. These are valuable opportunities and may form part of a plan to enhance your profile and make yourself a more competitive candidate for graduate school and the longer-term fellowships on which we focus in this note. You can talk about summer fellowships with any of your advisors: career advisors, faculty members, and fellowship advisor.

COMPETITIONS WITH SELECTION CRITERIA

The awards on which we focus are highly competitive and require a very strong academic record. You may see references to a 3.0 as the GPA minimum for a particular fellowship. Don’t be fooled into thinking that this is the standard required. Virtually all fellowship awardees have GPAs that are much higher than any minimum mentioned, with the very most competitive opportunities awarded to candidates with very high GPAs skewing toward the top part of the 3.5-4.0 range. Fellowship applications will require something more than very good grades: often it is research experience and achievements; leadership (political or civic, but also leadership in a research group or an org or on a team or as a peer mentor); and/or community service (substantial work done on campus or in the wider community). Most programs are looking for individuals who make commitments to a few important activities or causes and fulfill those commitments really, really well.

CATEGORIES

Fellowships can be thought of in several categories:

- for undergraduates.
  Programs like Beinecke, Goldwater, Truman, Udall, and Hollings are for sophomores and juniors.
• for undergraduates who are planning graduate school.
Programs like Truman (for public service-related graduate degrees) and Beinecke (for those in the arts and humanities, and social scientists) ask you to apply while you are a junior for an award you will take to graduate school with you.

• for seniors or recent graduates who want to go to graduate school in the US.
The NSF Graduate Research Fellowships (for some social sciences and the natural sciences) is one of the biggest programs in this category. Knight-Hennessy is a new program just started at Stanford for any graduate discipline at Stanford.

• for seniors or recent graduates who want to go to graduate school abroad.
There are prestigious programs for study in the UK and Ireland (Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell. Gates Cambridge). Germany offers a range of options through its DAAD program. Two programs in China offer one year masters aimed to create cohorts that are international and interdisciplinary: Yenching Academy and the Schwarzman Scholar program. And there are others in this category if you do your research and keep looking!

• and last but not least, there is the Fulbright US Student Program for seniors and recent graduates that opens up a very wide world to its applicants.
This is a very big program for one year funded abroad. It can be very experiential (you work as an English teaching assistant or you find a research opportunity) or more structured as a study program.

PAY ATTENTION TO ELIGIBILITY FINE PRINT – CITIZENSHIP STATUS
Programs listed that are funded by the US government (Fulbright, NSF, Goldwater, Udall, Hollings, Truman) are eligible to US citizens; in some but not all cases, US nationals and US permanent residents are also eligible. Some other programs will also limit eligibility to a US focus, but specific eligibility rules may be more broadly defined (e.g. P. & D. Soros Fellowship for New Americans). Rule of thumb: You have to check the fine print of eligibility!

Some programs offer opportunities to a much wider range of citizenships. Knight-Hennessy and Schwarzman are open to any nationalities. Gates Cambridge is open to any citizenship except the United Kingdom. Rhodes has application routes for all nationalities. DAAD recruits great graduate students from many countries.

SMITH COLLEGE ROLE
Some fellowships programs require nomination, endorsement, or preselection review by Smith College. For these, the first stage of application may be an internal competition to be one of the students that Smith nominates. Sometimes it is just one nominee (e.g. Beinecke), sometimes more (e.g. Goldwater, Truman, and Udall permit four each). Some programs do not require Smith approval of your application (e.g. Gates, NSF), but your competitive chances improve if you take advantage of all opportunities to develop a strong application – including consulting a Fellowships Program advisor!

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT FELLOWSHIPS OPPORTUNITIES?
• Get started on the Fast Track to Fulbright: https://www.smith.edu/fulbright/intro.php. The first step is to complete the Enquiry Questions.

• Explore other options:
(other fellowships offered through Smith) https://www.smith.edu/fellowships/smith.php
(database of opportunities for international students) http://bit.ly/NonUSCitizenFellowships or here

• Information for natural science majors: http://www.science.smith.edu/student-opportunities/scholarships-and-fellowships/

• Make an appointment to talk with a Fellowships Advisor: Don Andrew (Fulbright Program, Director) dandrew@smith.edu or Margaret Lamb (Other Fellowships Advisor) mlamb@smith.edu.