



Office of Graduate Fellowships

Understanding Graduate Fellowships, Scholarships, & Grants

Graduate fellowships, scholarships, and grants provide financial support to graduate students for research, writing, travel, fieldwork, language study, professional development, or independent projects undertaken as part of their degree program and/or associated professional training. The majority of nationally competitive graduate fellowships support research at the Doctoral level (pre-dissertation, dissertation, or post-doctoral), though some fellowships also target Masters students or those pursuing professional degrees such as law and medicine. At the graduate level most fellowships are merit-based and are decided by competitions that judge students according to past academic performance, future promise, and the viability and importance of their proposed program of research or study. The applicant's (and/or project's) "fit" with the purpose, intent, and ethos of the award is also an important factor.

Some common types of graduate fellowships are:

- Fellowships that help launch talented student in graduate studies (particularly in STEM fields.)
- Fellowships that provide support for the researching or writing of a Ph.D. dissertation.
- Fellowships that pay for research, fieldwork, teaching, or professional development overseas.
- Fellowships that seek to encourage education or professional development for underrepresented minorities (or other targeted demographic groups), either in general or in particular fields.
- Fellowships that seek to cultivate talent for service in government, private industry, or a specific academic / professional field.
- Fellowships that sponsor research in specific archival, museum, or library collections.
- Fellowships for language study (usually overseas).
- Smaller awards that support research, travel, or pay for the student to attend a professional meeting.

Note that at the graduate level very few awards take individual financial need into account. It is also rare at the graduate level to find awards that simply help you pay for your education (tuition, etc.). Instead, awards are more likely to provide funds for research or offer paid professional development experiences.

The Office of Graduate Fellowships provides lists of well-known fellowships grouped by field of study, type of award, or targeted demographic. You may wish to use these as a way of familiarizing yourself with the various kinds of fellowships and with how application processes are structured.

Eventually, you will also need to learn how to search for awards specific to your research area and academic/professional goals. A variety of search tools exist for this purpose, which you can learn about (along with tips) by consulting the OGF Handout "**Finding Funding Opportunities in Graduate School.**"

Before you start searching, sit down and take some time to do the following:

- **Map out your graduate school path.** Things may not turn out exactly as you envision, but you have to have a plan, because this is the only way for YOU to know what kind of funding you are likely to need (or be eligible for) and when. A long-range plan is crucial to your success, since in many cases you must apply to a fellowship competition a year or more before you actually need the award.
- **Try to synchronize your plan with the academic calendar.** Most graduate fellowship opportunities run on a traditional academic calendar (starting in the fall and ending in the spring.) You will find that more opportunities are open to you if your plans conform to this calendar.