



Office of Graduate Fellowships

Advice for:

**Fulbright U.S. Student Program
Research / Study Grant Applicants**

The Fulbright Research / Study Grant: What it is?

The Fulbright Research / Study grant offers U.S. students the opportunity to undertake independent research and/or study in another country for one academic year. The applicant designs his or her own program of research and study and presents this program in the Grant Purpose Statement as part of the application package. The proposed project may include independent research, university coursework, professional training (for example training in the arts, STEM fields, or foreign language study), or a combination of these and other projects.

Graduate students frequently look to Fulbright research/study grants to support international or “field” research as part of a thesis or dissertation project. This can work out well for all involved, but it is important to remember that Fulbright is not primarily a grant to carry out graduate-level research. It can accommodate graduate research projects, but only when they also contribute to the broader goals and priorities of the Fulbright program. Some countries openly state a preference for post-baccalaureate applicants, though all countries do also make awards to graduate students. Doctoral students in particular should consider simultaneously applying to other grant competitions designed to support overseas research in their field, such as SSRC, CAORC, and regionally-focused dissertation research grants.

Fulbright Research/Study Grant: Are you a good candidate?

Preferences vary slightly from country to country in terms of what kind of candidate is prioritized. Prospective applicants should always read the country profiles provided on the web site carefully. However, the following factors are always important:

- **Well-Developed Research Proposal:** The applicant should go into the application process with a well-developed idea of the form their project will take, and how its various components form a coherent whole. If the project is invented from scratch for the purposes of the Fulbright application (as opposed to part of an on-going thesis or dissertation project) the applicant should take special care to link it to what they have been doing previously and what they plan to do in the future.

Are you a good candidate? Continued...

- **Mutual Cultural Understanding:** Research/study applicants should also give some thought to how their project will contribute to the overall goals of the Fulbright program, including the fostering of “mutual cultural understanding” and “leadership, learning, and empathy between cultures.” The Fulbright program is open to creative and flexible interpretations of this mandate, but proposals that make no effort to address it will not receive favorable consideration regardless of how brilliant they (or the applicant) may otherwise be.
- **Choice of Country:** If a research/study applicant does not know from the outset what country to apply to, it raises the question of whether the applicant’s research idea and preparation are where they need to be for this grant.
- **Relevant Long-Term Goals:** The ideal candidate will be able to demonstrate how this experience relates to their longer-term goals and aspirations. Where are you now, where are you going, and how does the Fulbright research/study grant help get you there? An indication of longer-term prospects for engagement with the host country (whether in terms of continued study, career goals, cultural or economic engagement, or finding ways to share what you’ve learned after returned home) is also a positive. Things may not turn out exactly as you propose – that’s OK – but you should have a vision of where you are headed and put that forward in your essays.
- **Adaptability / Flexibility:** Being a Fulbright scholar brings all the usual challenges of international travel, plus more: An unfamiliar and often unstructured work environment; language barriers; bureaucratic hassles; lack of creature comforts; and finding your way in a new community. Particularly in less developed countries, selection committees look for candidates who have some sense of what they are getting themselves into and are up to the challenge. Not that a more “familiar” destination gets you off the hook – in those cases committees will be looking for candidates who can successfully move beyond the “tourist” or “foreign student” mindset to find a deeper level of engagement with the host society. Think about how to convey this in your application.

The Research/Study Proposal Tips: What are they looking for (... or not)?

- Good writing and a strong sense of direction.
- While technically eligible, proposals that consist only of coursework and/or language study are usually not preferred. The Fulbright research/study grant is not a “study abroad” or language training scholarship. Coursework and/or language study can be successfully integrated into a candidate’s project, but there must be a larger purpose. This is true for all candidates, but even more so for graduate students.
- Note that multi-country proposals are not supported; the project should focus on one country and all work be carried out in that country. Travel outside the designated country during the tenure of the grant is discouraged. Proposals that make reference to travel outside the designated country (whether for project-related purposes or otherwise) will not receive favorable consideration.
- Challenge yourself, but make certain that you have the language and cultural skills (and local support) to realistically execute the project you propose.

Proposal Tips, Continued...

- Remember that the Fulbright is a U.S. State Department program, and that your application will be judged at the country level by a committee that includes local academics, diplomats and foreign government personnel. Proposals should take this context into account, particularly if the topic is potentially sensitive, either politically or culturally. Some countries are more open to such topics than others, but they must always be approached with sensitivity. Topics that could prove dangerous, illegal, or embarrassing for anyone involved, or that have patronizing overtones (e.g. idealistic Americans out to save the world!), will not win favor. The same goes for projects that hint at activist or missionary motivations.
- A note about prior overseas experience: Because the Fulbright competition expresses a preference for students who have not had extensive prior experience in the host country, some students wonder if previous experiences living, traveling, or studying in the host country or region will render them ineligible -- or at least unlikely to be selected. This is not always the case, especially for the research/study grant, where knowledge of the language and culture of the host country may be an important pre-requisite for meaningful academic and cultural exchange. Prior study abroad, language study, military service, or short-term travel experiences do not normally count against an applicant, and in many cases they have a positive effect. Less preferred are cases of immigrant or heritage candidates who have spent a significant part of their life in the host country, candidates who have already done a year or more of graduate-level research in the country, or candidates who have had significant professional experience in the host country before returning to school.