



Office of Graduate Fellowships

Tips and Advice: Working with the Office of Sponsored Programs

What is the Office of Sponsored Programs? What do they do?

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) is an office for administering externally funded (or “sponsored”) projects at Mason. OSP manages grants and fellowships where the funds are channeled through the university as opposed to being awarded directly to an individual.

Most graduate fellowships are individual awards that do not require the involvement of OSP; however, a few are institutional awards that do require that the application be processed through OSP. If you are applying to such a competition it is important to be aware of the additional steps required to make a complete and timely application submission. Note that you will be required to submit the complete application package to OSP about a week in advance of the posted deadline. Consult with OSP early and be sure you are aware of *their* submission deadline, not just the competition’s.

Fellowships and grants requiring OSP involvement typically use specific budget guidelines and require additional paperwork for submission, including paperwork that is completed / signed by a representative of the institution rather than by the applicant. OSP provides assistance to applicants in these matters, including budget development, completing necessary forms and obtaining necessary signatures. If you win one of these awards, OSP will help arrange the disbursement of the award and enforce any reporting requirements.

OSP’s services are organized into two divisions: “Pre-Award,” which deals with the application development and submission process; and “Post-Award,” which handles the administration of the grant after it has been awarded.

Do I need to work with OSP on my Fellowship or Grant Application? How will I know?

In most cases, the application instructions will make this clear. If not, the Office of Graduate Fellowships can help you determine if you need to work with OSP on your submission.

The most commonly sought-after graduate-level awards requiring OSP involvement are:

- NSF Dissertation Grants, including the DDRIG opportunities in the Social/Behavioral/Economic Sciences and the DDIG opportunities in the Biological Sciences. (NOT, however, the GRFP and EAPSI programs.)
- NIH F31 NRSA (“Ruth Kirschstein”) and R36 (AHRQ) grants.

- Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Fellowships administered by the Department of Education. (NOT, however, regular Fulbright U.S. Student Program grants administered by IIE.)
- NIH Graduate Fellowships (Department of Justice)

I'm confused! Do I work with both OSP and Graduate Fellowships on my submission? Or just one? Can't I just apply on my own?

Some competitions (including those listed above) *require* you to submit through OSP. You cannot just apply on your own – institutional vetting and/or signatures are required.

Regardless of whether or not you need to work with OSP, you have the option to work with the Office of Graduate Fellowships to receive guidance and feedback. In most cases you are not required to do so, though it is generally to your advantage.

The Office of Graduate Fellowships can provide forms of support not normally available through OSP, such as editorial feedback on proposals / personal statements and general fellowship advising. OSP and Graduate Fellowships can work together with you to make sure your application is complete, has the necessary supporting documents, is polished and professional, and represents your work in the best and most accurate way.

In some cases, OSP and Graduate Fellowships work together on the administration of an award, and both offices will be working jointly with you on the submission and/or the award process.

There are a small number of awards that require the involvement of the Office of Graduate Fellowships but *not* OSP. The most notable for graduate students is the Fulbright, which requires a campus-level review process coordinated by the Office of Graduate Fellowships prior to final submission.

Do Fulbright, Boren, or Critical Languages applications need to go through OSP?

No. These competitions are set up in such a way that a student can apply directly in their own name. Funds (and other benefits) awarded through these programs go directly to the student without passing through the University. (However, be aware that the Fulbright-Hays program, which is a doctoral-level Fulbright awarded through the Department of Education, does require the participation of OSP.)

Do NSF applications need to go through OSP? What about other major competitions in STEM fields, such as NDSEG, DoD SMART, EPA STAR, and CSGF?

Some NSF graduate fellowships require OSP participation and some do and some do not. The Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP), which is the largest NSF graduate fellowship program, does NOT require OSP participation. Neither does the East Asia Pacific Summer Institutes (EAPSI) grant, which offers opportunities for doctoral students in NSF-supported fields to do summer research in East Asia. NSF dissertation research grants (DDRIG and DDIG, which are offered for some, but not all, NSF-supported fields of study) DO require OSP participation.

NDSEG, DoD SMART, EPA STAR, and CSGF do NOT require OSP participation. These grants (like the NSF GRFP) are not tied to the university because they are designed to be “portable,” meaning the applicant takes the grant with them wherever they go to graduate school – the award attaches to the individual, not the institution.

What / Who is a “PI”?

“PI” stands for “Principal Investigator,” and refers to the lead researcher on a grant application. Grant applications of the type handled by OSP always require the identification of a PI. Some graduate fellowships (such as NSF dissertation improvement grants) require that the PI named on the application be a faculty member, even though the award will go to the student. In these cases, the PI is the student’s dissertation advisor, and the student is listed as a “co-PI.” For internal record-keeping purposes, OSP policy normally follows the same guidelines – the PI listed in their system must be a faculty member. However, some grant competitions (including, notably, NIH fellowships) require that the student be named PI on the application. If the instructions specify this, be sure to bring it to the attention of your grants administrator in OSP.

Would there ever be a reason to work with OSP on my application even though it is not required? Some parts of the application are confusing – can OSP help?

If you are applying to a grant that does not require OSP involvement, OSP’s capacity to advise you will be limited – though there are some cases in which it can be helpful.

For example, some fellowship applications require detailed budget documents, and there may be instances in which OSP can help an applicant write or revise their budget to conform to stated guidelines and expectations. If your application requires this kind of attention, the Office of Graduate Fellowships can advise you on setting up a consultation with OSP.

So, to summarize: Turn first to the Office of Graduate Fellowships, which has experience with a wider range of graduate fellowship competitions, and can help you troubleshoot most application processes. Graduate Fellowships can also offer feedback and review of proposals and written statements, which OSP does not provide. If your application could benefit from OSP services, Graduate Fellowships will be happy to refer you onward for this assistance.

I need to meet with OSP about my grant or fellowship application. How do I do that?

Go to <http://osp.gmu.edu>. On the right side of the screen, you will see a list of “Helpful Links.” Click on “Request Proposal Assignment” and complete the required fields in the form that appears. (If you’re not sure of the answer to a required field, just answer as best you can or enter some information, as the form will not be accepted unless an attempt has been made to complete all required fields.) Submit the form online. OSP will contact you to schedule an appointment with a “Pre-Award” specialist to work on the application. If OSP does not respond within a week of submitting the form, contact them to follow up.