

COE Fellowships Office Personal Statement Workshop



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Introductions

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Fellowships Office

Mission Statement: Help students find, compete for, and win national and international fellowships / scholarships.

Website: www.coe.utah.edu/fellowships

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Website Resources

- Fellowship opportunities – including postdoc positions
- Application guide
- Upcoming events
- Previous winners
- Information page for faculty
- Contact information

Benefits of Winning Fellowships

- Guaranteed funding for tuition and stipend, etc.
- Ability to choose a lab / university
- Improves your resume / CV
- Increases likelihood of additional awards
- Employment upon graduation
- Summer internships

NSF GRFP Reviews (1)

- NSF receives ~14,000 applications per year, award ~2000
- Applications are assigned levels
 - Level 1: Undergraduate seniors
 - Level 2: First year of first graduate program
 - Level 3: Second year of first graduate program
 - Level 4: Have completed more than one year of graduate program (maybe already have degree), but has been out of academics for 2 years
- Applications are reviewed according to the levels, with slightly lower criteria for Level 1

NSF GRFP Reviews (2)

- 3 reviewers assigned to each application.
- Each reviewer receives ~40 - 60 total applications to review.
- Reviewers likely spend ~5-10 min. per review (this includes everything you submit, not just your essays)
- Reviewers are divided up into panels (~30 reviewers per panel)
- Discussion of each application within each panel is probably < 5 min.

NSF GRFP: Know Your Audience

- Most of the reviewers are University Faculty
- These faculty will likely not be in your immediate discipline (although should be engineering faculty)
 - Avoid scientific jargon (a few exceptions may be OK)
- They are interested in your career goals and what you plan to do with your Ph.D. (work at a university, at a national lab, etc.)
- They will be looking to see that you have fulfilled the NSF review criteria (include as separate sections in your essay(s)):
 - Intellectual merit
 - Broader impacts

Intellectual Merit Review Criteria

- “Encompasses the potential to advance knowledge based on a holistic analysis of the complete application”
 - How does your research advance the state-of-the-art in your research field?
 - They are looking for research advances that will make an impact, rather than provide incremental improvements.
 - Conference participation, publications, and previous awards will particularly strengthen your application (list them in the bio form as well as at the end of your personal statement)

Broader Impacts Review Criteria

- “Encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes”
- Examples:
 - Look at full list of possibilities on the NSF website
 - Most common:
 - Volunteer work and outreach activities, especially relating to the applicants research or degree field
 - Improved well-being of individuals in society (research application)
 - If you don’t yet have significant broader impacts, provide a detailed plan for what your broader impacts will be during the years of the award

Personal Statement Questions to Consider

- Look at full list of possibilities on the NSF website
 - Why are you fascinated by your research area? (**demonstrate passion**)
 - What examples of leadership skills and unique characteristics do you bring to your chosen field? (**discuss only the relevant / significant ones**)
 - What personal and individual strengths do you have that make you a well qualified applicant? (**communicate clearly**)
 - What are all of your applicable experiences? (**do not provide them in chronological order; select only relevant / significant experiences that support your primary points**)
 - Did you work in a team and/or independently? (**what was YOUR contribution**)

Most Importantly:

- NSF wants foremost to fund **you** as an individual with high potential, not the actual you research project with high potential.

Other Notes:

- Submit your documents at least a day or two early to avoid submission issues
- Follow formatting requirements exactly
- Include details on both intellectual merit and broader impacts!
- No typos!!
- See example winning essays at:
 - coe.utah.edu/fellowships
 - Alex Lang's NSF website