



FINANCING *your* **FUTURE**

WINNING FELLOWSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS
AND AWARDS FOR GRAD SCHOOL

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Introduction

Graduate school represents a significant investment of time and money. Fellowships, grants, and other sources of graduate funding can help you pay for your degree and fund research, travel, or other projects. We've put together this eBook to help you understand the different types of financial support you can apply for, when you should apply for funding, and the steps and strategies involved in assembling strong applications. We'll discuss both university-based and extramural types of funding, with special attention to high-prestige fellowships such as the Rhodes and Fulbright and the features that distinguish their application processes. We'll also draw your attention to awards that can be used for professional school programs.

In this guide, you'll also find links to additional resources for your fellowship and grant search, as well as a listing of funding opportunities.

Types of Support

There are several types of funding available for graduate study.

Fellowships/Scholarships are free money, either from your university or a foundation/institution, awarded to students to fund study and living expenses. Frequently, “fellowship” denotes a larger award and “scholarship” a smaller one, but that is not always the case.

Grants are free money, often from foundations or government sources, that you apply for to fund your research.

Academic Apprenticeships include Teaching Assistantships (TA) and Research Assistantships. This is a form of academic employment that is often awarded as part of a graduate funding package from your university (possibly in combination with a fellowship). Academic Apprenticeships are most commonly available to doctoral students, but MA and professional school students are sometimes eligible as well, so research your options. In some departments, Teaching Assistantships are awarded competitively. Depending on your field and future interests, working as a TA can provide you with valuable pre-professional experience.

Loans are a useful resource for graduate students, as well. We will not cover the need-based financial aid process in-depth here, but US citizens and permanent residents may apply for federal financial aid through the [FAFSA](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)¹ (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). International students should research funding sources in their home countries, and also contact the financial aid office at their institution. You might be able to obtain funding through government sources in your country; if you are already in the US, contact your country’s embassy or consulate for assistance. As a graduate student, you might also be eligible to apply for loans through private foundations or charitable groups on a low-interest or no-interest basis. Consult your institution’s financial aid office or search online databases for more information.

This eBook is primarily concerned with how to apply successfully for fellowships, scholarships, and grants, both university-based and extramural.

¹ <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

Sources of Support

University/Department

Support might come from your graduate program in the form of fellowships, research assistantships, or teaching assistantships. Depending on how well-funded your program is, you might be guaranteed funding for multiple years, or for the duration of your program. Some programs might ask you to periodically submit additional application materials or demonstrate sufficient degree progress in order to receive your funding. In other departments, positions such as teaching assistantships are awarded competitively and you'll need to re-apply each year.

When you research graduate programs and choose one to enroll in, carefully consider the funding situation and opportunities. You should also consider the availability of summer funding, such as short-term research grants, travel stipends, or summer teaching opportunities.

Extramural Funding

Depending on your field, you might be eligible to apply for fellowships or grants from funding sources outside your department and university. "Extramural" funding encompasses a wide range of funding opportunities, including grants and fellowships sponsored by government agencies, independent institutions, and national fellowship foundations. In the sections that follow, we'll provide detailed tips and strategies for navigating the application process successfully.

Getting Started: Researching Programs, Setting a Timeline

You're good at research: That's why you're going to graduate school. So, put those skills to use identifying potential funding sources to pay for your education. Even if you're enrolled in a graduate program that provides funding or advertises itself as "fully-funded" (as some PhD programs do), it's still a good idea to research fellowships and grants. First of all, as we noted above, "fully funded" might still mean that you need to apply to your campus' funding boards in order to claim or keep your fellowship funds. Second, winning prestigious outside fellowships can enhance your profile when it comes time to apply for postdocs and jobs (not to mention, teaching you the ins-and-outs of applying for academic awards and positions!). And if you're applying for a Master's degree program or a professional degree, fellowships can decrease your loan burden.

It's a good idea to begin researching funding opportunities as soon as you begin researching graduate programs. But if you're a little late to the game, don't worry — there's still time, especially if you're planning to be in school for more than one year.

Here are some factors to consider:

1. Some awards are intended for first-year graduate or professional students, or provide funding for multiple years beginning in your first year.
2. Before you submit your graduate school applications, find out whether you will automatically be considered for university fellowships, or if you will need to submit additional application materials.
3. As you research funding opportunities, keep a running list of awards that you might want to apply for later in your grad school career. For instance, if you're a first year law student and you learn about a fellowship aimed at third year students, file away the listing as something to consider applying for later. Similarly, you might find notices of travel awards, dissertation grants, or other funding that you're not ready to apply for yet (or don't need, if you currently have a fellowship from your institution), but would be great to know about later in your program.
4. Some awards can be used for any type of graduate or professional program. These include the [Soros Fellowship for New Americans](http://pdsoros.org/)², the [Jack Kent Cooke Foundation](http://www.jackkentcookefoundation.org/)

² <http://pdsoros.org/>

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- [Scholarship](#)³, [the Merage American Dream Fellowship](#)⁴, and some others (see [Resource Section](#)). These can be particularly valuable for professional school students. If you're on the hunt for professional school funding, start searching early and be aware that these awards can be extremely competitive.
5. Are you planning to apply for one of the high-prestige programs (national and international scholarships), such as Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, Churchill, etc.? Be aware that many of these scholarships require an official endorsement from your institution, and because of this requirement, you will usually face earlier campus deadlines that fall prior to the official application deadlines.
 6. Application deadlines fall throughout the year, but the majority are between October and February. If you're a current student and the award you're applying for has a campus deadline, the date could be as early as September.

³ <http://www.jkcf.org/>

⁴ http://www.meragefoundations.com/mfad_fellows.html

Staying Organized

You'll likely be juggling fellowship applications and your grad school applications simultaneously. Grad school itself can be a constant dance of deadlines, projects, courses, extracurricular activities, and work. Organization, needless to say, is key.

Whatever organizational system works best for you — using paper files, going all electronic, programming deadlines into your phone — make sure you use it consistently.

1. Track all deadlines and all activity on each open application.
2. Note your interactions with your recommenders. When did you contact your recommenders? When did they respond? Have you scheduled meetings or phone calls?
3. Check the order time for official transcripts. When do you need to order them?
4. During your research, when you identify future funding opportunities, file that information with your other fellowship materials and make a note of their deadlines.

Searching for Extramural Fellowships

There are many resources to help you get started.

If your university has a fellowship office in addition to the financial aid office (or if the financial aid office has a fellowship division), familiarize yourself with their services. Likewise, learn whether your department publishes lists of external fellowships and grants or if it circulates such information via a listserv. Often, professional organizations in your field will publish fellowship deadlines in their newsletters. If you’re not a member yet, you should think about joining — student memberships are usually cheaper than full ones — but in any case, your department or school will likely have current newsletters on hand.

There are also a number of very helpful online fellowship databases, including:

- [GRAPES](#)⁵ (Graduate and Postdoctoral Extramural Support)
- [Community of Science Funding Opportunities](#)⁶
- [IRIS](#)⁷ (Illinois Researcher Information Service)
- [SPIN](#)⁸ (Sponsored Programs Information Network)

It is also worth checking [grant opportunities from government sources](#)⁹.

If you’re in the sciences, you’ll want to familiarize yourself with the grant programs of the [National Science Foundation](#)¹⁰.

⁵ <http://www.gdnet.ucla.edu/asis/grapes/search.asp>

⁶ <http://fundingopps.cos.com/>

⁷ <http://iris.library.uiuc.edu/~iris/search.html>

⁸ http://www.infoed.org/new_spin/spin.asp

⁹ <http://www.grants.gov/>

¹⁰ <http://www.nsf.gov/>

Searching for Supplemental Funding **(including small grants, scholarships, and community funding)**

You can find small outside scholarships from a variety of sources: community groups, companies, alumni associations, etc. (If you applied for any scholarships as an undergrad, you might be familiar with this sort of award.) The amounts might not seem huge — awards for smaller scholarships often range from \$500 to \$5,000 — but they can add up.

So, how can you find small scholarships to apply for, and what are the benefits of applying for them?

First, search broadly according to your interests, affiliations, background, and goals. You'll secure that research grant based on your groundbreaking work, but you can win an additional scholarship because of your dedication to your hobbies or community service. Find out whether you might be eligible for any tuition-breaks or scholarship programs based on your work history or family affiliations (union, military, etc.). If you're especially active in a community or religious organization, find out whether there are scholarship funds to support leaders or alumni. Similarly, sometimes university alumni associations (or the alumni of particular student groups, such as the Black Alumni Association) will fund scholarships to assist the next generation of student leaders.

And where should you search? The key, again, is to look in more than one place. There are several very helpful free search databases online.

Some good ones are [ScholarshipExperts.com](http://www.ScholarshipExperts.com)¹¹, [School Soup](http://www.schoolsoup.com/)¹², and [Broke Scholar](http://www.brokescholar.com/)¹³. You should also consult books of scholarship listings (available in any bookstore or library), where you can search by your field of study. There is a helpful series published by [Reference Service Press](http://www.ReferenceServicePress.com)¹⁴, now available as ebooks as well.

¹¹ <http://www.ScholarshipExperts.com>

¹² <http://www.schoolsoup.com/>

¹³ <http://www.brokescholar.com/>

¹⁴ <http://www.rspfunding.com>

Awards for Conferences, Travel, Etc.

Presenting research at conferences is a vital part of many graduate students' professional development. Many departments budget a certain amount of money each year to be applied towards students' travel expenses. Like other funding, however, this is becoming strained due to budget cuts at many universities.

A few tips for conference presenters:

- Make sure you have all required paperwork necessary to apply for or claim any available conference travel grants or reimbursements from your home department. Never miss a deadline.

- When you submit your abstract to the conference, find out from the conference organizers whether there are funds available to assist graduate students with their travel expenses. (This is more often the case at large professional conferences than at grad-focused conferences.)

Resources Specifically for Professional-School Applicants

MBA Funding

Funding for your [MBA](#)¹⁵ may be offered by specific universities or programs, or by outside private sources (such as foundations, alumni groups, or companies). The key for scholarship candidates is **research**. Start by thoroughly reviewing any funding opportunities at your chosen school. Do they offer a full-ride fellowship program for high merit students? Perhaps the university participates in a wider fellowship program, such as the [Consortium Fellowship](#)¹⁶, which provides funding for outstanding applicants who demonstrate a commitment to the Consortium's mission of promoting diversity and inclusion in American business and who are applying to member universities and the [Forté Foundation](#)¹⁷, which provides funding for outstanding women.

Next, consider your interests, affiliations, and [goals](#)¹⁸. Maybe you already have a professional connection with an organization or company that offers scholarships. Maybe there's an organization that offers scholarships to support the next generation of leaders in the field you intend to pursue. Maybe you're a member of an underrepresented community, and there's a community-based MBA association (or alumni association at the school you plan to attend, or attended as an undergrad) that funds scholarships — see for example the [National Black MBA Association](#)¹⁹ or the [National Society of Hispanic MBAs](#)²⁰. International students planning to pursue their studies in the US might consider the [Fulbright](#)²¹.

Finally, conduct a general scholarship search. Many companies and foundations offer scholarships for MBA students, and the web makes it easy to find them. Create a profile on a free database such as [ScholarshipExperts.com](#)²² or [Fast Web](#)²³ — these contain a lot of undergrad listings, but they also have some MBA-specific scholarships. There are also targeted books

¹⁵ <http://www.accepted.com/mba>

¹⁶ <http://www.cgsm.org/>

¹⁷ <http://www.fortefoundation.org>

¹⁸ http://blog.accepted.com/acceptedcom_blog/2007/6/8/mba-admissions-what-is-a-goal.html

¹⁹ <http://www.nmbmaa.org>

²⁰ <http://www.nshmba.org/>

²¹ <http://www.iie.org/Template.cfm?section=Fulbright1>

²² <http://www.scholarshipexperts.com/>

²³ <http://www.fastweb.com/>

available—a good one is Schlachter and Webber’s [How to Pay for Your Degree in Business & Related Fields](#)²⁴, published by Reference Service Press.

Medical School Funding

The same qualities that make you a strong [med school applicant](#)²⁵ will make you a strong scholarship applicant: compelling essays, good recommendations, and a strong undergraduate record.

One step you should always take: Research funding opportunities at the med schools you’re applying to. Ideally, you should review scholarship requirements concurrently with your application research, so that you know when all of the deadlines are. Find out about need-based aid as well as merit-based fellowships (some scholarships will be based on both). Also learn whether there are special fellowship programs for outstanding applicants from target populations.

Next, broaden your search to include scholarships from outside foundations and organizations. Some brands or companies (especially in the healthcare industry) offer scholarships for future doctors; [Tylenol](#)²⁶ is one example—they distribute thousands of dollars every year to students planning careers in healthcare. For those considering joining the US military, it might be worth knowing that the armed services offer [substantial education benefits](#)²⁷ to students who promise to serve as medical officers.

Finally, there are a number of large fellowships offered by foundations that can be used for *any* graduate or professional program, including medicine. Some of these are quite competitive, but there is a great deal of money available. Examples are the [Soros Fellowship for New Americans](#)²⁸ offering \$20k/year plus half tuition for up to two years and the [Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarships](#)²⁹ awarding up to \$50k/year for up to six years.

²⁴ <http://www.rspfunding.com/catalog/item/1434422/895193.htm>

²⁵ <http://www.accepted.com/medical/>

²⁶ www.scholarship.tylenol.com

²⁷ http://www.goarmy.com/amedd/medical/corps_benefits.jsp

²⁸ <http://www.pdsoros.org/>

²⁹ <http://www.jkcf.org/scholarships/>

Law Funding

Finding scholarships for [law school](#)³⁰ involves many of the same strategies as finding scholarships for other professional school programs, as I have discussed. Here are some important things to consider as you search for law school funding:

1. Always investigate all scholarship opportunities at the schools you're applying to. Especially if you have a particularly strong undergraduate record, are a member of an underrepresented group, or are planning a career in public interest law, you might find that there are special fellowships offered by the law schools themselves.
2. Carefully research extramural funding opportunities that you qualify for based on your background, interests, affiliations, and goals. Are there professional organizations for the area of law you are most interested in pursuing? Often, such organizations offer scholarships that support the next generation of leaders in their field (again, this is particularly true of public interest fields).
3. Sometimes, field-specific fellowships are directed at third-year law students: If you find listings that interest you, make note of them so that you'll be aware of them when you're advanced enough in your program to apply.
4. As I discussed above, there are a number of general graduate/professional fellowships that may be used for any field. Examples include the [Soros Fellowship for New Americans](#)³¹ (\$20k/year plus half tuition for up to two years) and the [Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarships](#)³² (up to \$50k/year for up to six years).

Find additional scholarship opportunities by searching online databases that allow you to create a tailored profile. Examples include [Fast Web](#)³³ and [ScholarshipExperts.com](#)³⁴. Scholarship books can also be a very helpful resource, allowing you to search by your field of interest, the name of the sponsoring organization, and other terms. A targeted reference for law school applicants is [How to Pay for Your Law Degree](#)³⁵ by Gail Schlachter, also available as an eBook from Reference Service Press.

³⁰ <http://www.accepted.com/law>

³¹ <http://www.pdsoros.org/>

³² <http://www.jkcf.org/scholarships/>

³³ <http://www.fastweb.com/>

³⁴ <http://www.scholarshipexperts.com/>

³⁵ <http://www.rspfunding.com/catalog/item/1414355/881940.htm>

Assembling Your Application Materials

From applying to grad or professional school, you'll already be familiar with the ingredients of a fellowship application: a statement of purpose/proposal, letters of recommendation, and transcripts. Some programs will require additional materials, such as a budget and an anticipated timeline (for the completion of your project — this is particularly true of dissertation awards). If you're applying for a high-prestige national fellowship, you'll likely need to secure an "institutional endorsement," which can be as simple as a signed statement from the dean of your college or as elaborate as an additional letter of recommendation in support of your application.

Here are elements that contribute to a strong application.

Statement of Purpose

The centerpiece of your fellowship or grant application is your essay or proposal. This is the document where you will describe what you intend to do and make a case for why it's a significant contribution to your field. This statement should be well researched, clear, and articulate. You'll want to describe the current state of your work and what you intend to do. How will you use the funding? If you're planning to travel abroad (for example, on a Fulbright), why is it important for you to be in the country you're applying to?

If the award is a fellowship to fund the early years of your grad program (rather than funding a specific research project further on), your [Statement of Purpose](#)³⁶ can share much in common with the one you probably already wrote for your graduate school application, setting out in clear, specific terms what you hope to accomplish in and after grad school and how the fellowship will help you do that.

Tone

Tone is a major issue. How should you pitch your proposal? Who are you writing for? How should you propose what might be a very specialized project to a committee that may or may not be made up of specialists? And how can you strike a balance between the "personal statement" and "statement of purpose" genres?

The first step in deciding how to present your essay is to think carefully about the type of fellowship you're applying for. Is it a departmental grant at your university for which the entire committee will be specialists in your discipline (if not your precise research area)? Is it a program like the [NSF](#)³⁷ (National Science Foundation), where you can count on an expert audience, but not necessarily a reader whose expertise coincides exactly with your own? Or is it a program like the [Rhodes](#)³⁸ or [Gates](#)³⁹, where the committee that reads your application will be drawn from distinguished scholars and professionals from multiple fields — in other words, a highly educated audience, but one that might not have a high tolerance for extremely technical scholarly jargon?

In general, you should explain your topic clearly, without buzzwords or jargon. Explain its importance. Situate your study in the context of your wider field. If you're developing a

³⁶ <http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx>

³⁷ <http://www.nsf.gov/>

³⁸ <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/>

³⁹ <http://www.gatesscholar.org/>

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Statement of Purpose

breakthrough intervention, say so. Also, make a case for your project being achievable and realistic. Of course, some projects are huge and will take years of work! But always try to show how the funding you're applying for will advance your work.

Answering the Question

This seems obvious, but make sure your essay addresses the question you are asked. The majority of graduate fellowship applications will ask for a "[statement of purpose](#)"⁴⁰," meaning that they want to know, essentially, what you intend to do with the funding you're applying for. Some, though, will ask for a more personal essay (this is frequently the case with fellowships like [Rhodes](#)⁴¹, [Marshall](#)⁴², and [Mitchell](#)⁴³), where you'll face the challenge of situating and explaining your goals for graduate study in the context of your background, personal interests, and past achievements — a tall order for what's usually a 1000-word essay! In such a "personal statement," you'll want to think carefully and see what threads unite your past and present with the [goals](#)⁴⁴ you're proposing. Making such connections will allow you to develop a central thesis that you can build your essay around.

⁴⁰ <http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx>

⁴¹ <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/>

⁴² <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/>

⁴³ www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships

⁴⁴ <http://www.accepted.com/Grad/AboutGoals.aspx>

Letters of Recommendation

The average fellowship application requires two to three letters of recommendation. Some, such as the [Rhodes](#)⁴⁵ or [Mitchell](#)⁴⁶, require many more. (Rhodes, for example, requires at least five and accepts up to eight.)

If you're applying for funding straight out of college (or if you haven't yet enrolled in a graduate program), any academic letters will come from your undergraduate career. If you're applying after having worked or pursued other opportunities, or if you're seeking support for an MBA program, you might seek the recommendation of work supervisors, etc.

Read the application instructions carefully to see whether the program restricts who may write your recommendations. Some fellowships will ask specifically for academic references, while others will allow non-academic (or a mix of academic and non), which allows you to ask for letters from people who know you in a professional context or who can comment on your community service, extracurricular leadership, etc. (To take Rhodes as an example: At least four of the required letters must be from people who have taught or advised you, but the rest of your letters may be from people who know you outside of an academic context.)

As with graduate school applications, the key points with fellowship recommendations are that they should be strong and specific, and that they should complement each other and the other parts of your application to give the committee as detailed a picture as possible of who you are as a person.

Knowing that, select your recommenders carefully. If Dr. Big-Name Prof from your huge lecture course doesn't really know you (beyond a name on her roster), it's not worth getting a letter from her, no matter how famous she is. Ask people who can comment sensitively on how you contributed in class, to your extracurricular activities, to your work projects, etc. Meet with them, if possible, and give them a copy of your Statement of Purpose. Give them a current resume. Write them a detailed cover letter describing what you're applying for and what you're planning to do. Basically, make sure they have all the information they need to write an effective letter. (If the application requires them to mail the letter themselves, rather than returning a sealed copy to you or uploading it to a website, giving them a stamped envelope is also good form!) Give your recommenders plenty of time to write you a strong letter — at least a few weeks.

⁴⁵ <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/>

⁴⁶ www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships

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Letters of Recommendation

If you're already in grad school and you've selected an adviser, you should generally have that person write one of your letters.

It's a good idea to follow up with your recommenders with a gracious thank you note. One way to both thank them and gently remind them of the deadline is to send the thank you note a few days prior to the fellowship deadline. (The last thing you want is to be disqualified from a competitive fellowship because one of your recommenders forgot to post a letter!)

Supplemental Materials

Whatever additional materials the fellowship committee asks for, make sure you take full advantage of the opportunity to a) acquaint them with who you are (through your resume, annotated list of activities, etc.) and b) give them a detailed and realistic sense of your project through any budgets or timelines they request.

Some applications provide a form for you to list and describe your activities, employment, and honors; others allow you to include or upload your resume. In either case, maximize the space you have by including succinct descriptions of your activities and, most importantly, the impact you had. If you're pressed for space on an application form, you can sometimes combine multiple entries into one. For instance, if you won three undergraduate scholarships, you can list them in one bullet point.

What if I'm *Not* Offered Funding for a PhD?

Being offered admission to your top-choice PhD program can be a thrill, but if that offer doesn't come with any guarantee of funding, you might find yourself in a bind. Many universities have suffered budget cuts that have reduced their ability to hire teaching and research assistants, along with the money available for university-based fellowships. If you find yourself in this position, you'll have several factors to consider.

First, have you secured outside funding? Can you fund yourself, and if so, for how long would you be able to do so? Are you willing to accumulate student loans during your PhD program? (You'll want to think carefully about what type of PhD you're pursuing and what your employment prospects will be when you finish.)

If your program doesn't guarantee you funding for your first year, does it give any indication of what the realistic possibility might be of securing funding for subsequent years? Do they have a well-defined application process each year for teaching/research assistantships, or are all assistantships handed out at admission? It's a good idea to contact the department's graduate counselor for assistance. Other helpful contacts on campus include the financial aid office — ask about work-study programs for graduate students. Try to find out if there are other departments or offices on campus that hire graduate students as assistants, tutors, or readers.

If you can't secure funding, you have some decisions to make: Should you take out loans for the first year and reapply for funding? Or should you wait another year, work on strengthening your application, and reapply to grad school in the hopes of securing funding guarantees?

What you decide to do will depend on your individual circumstances and the financial rewards of your intended field of study.

Applying for High-Prestige Fellowships

What distinguishes this process from other fellowship applications?

Nationally competitive fellowships such as [Marshall](#)⁴⁷, [Mitchell](#)⁴⁸, [Churchill](#)⁴⁹, [Gates](#)⁵⁰, and [Rhodes](#)⁵¹ present certain unique challenges to the applicant, but the payoff can be correspondingly great.

As a rule, these nationally competitive fellowships require more letters of recommendation than the average award, and may require a higher minimum undergraduate GPA (at least a 3.7 for applicants for the Marshall Scholarship, for example). Some programs have an upper age limit for applicants (30 for Mitchell, 24 for Rhodes). If you're a student when you apply, that is, applying during the fall of the final year of your undergraduate program in order to take up the scholarship the following year, you'll usually need to secure an "institutional endorsement" from your university.

The application process also involves more steps than many other scholarship and fellowship applications, in that the selection committees will invite finalists to interview.

When Should I Start Preparing?

If you're thinking about applying for one or more of the nationally competitive fellowships, it's to your advantage to start working on your application as early as possible—as early as the spring before the deadline. (Since these applications require so many letters of recommendation and a commitment to clear future goals, the real process of thinking about applying usually begins much, much earlier.) All of these programs have fall deadlines, and as I discussed above, your campus may designate an earlier "campus deadline" to facilitate institutional endorsements or a campus interview process.

If you're a currently enrolled student (undergrad or grad), your first stop should be your campus' fellowship office. Here you will learn:

⁴⁷ <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/>

⁴⁸ www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships

⁴⁹ <http://www.winstonchurchillfoundation.org/Scholarships.html>

⁵⁰ <http://www.gatesscholar.org/>

⁵¹ <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/>

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Applying for High-Prestige Fellowships

1. Who handles institutional endorsements? Do I need to do anything special to get one? At most schools, this will involve a meeting with a university official—often a dean or fellowship adviser.
2. Who is the campus Fulbright coordinator? Do you need to file your materials on campus, or will you submit them directly to the fellowship?
3. Are there campus deadlines that precede the official program deadlines? Is there an internal campus selection process?

If you're not currently enrolled at a university, you'll probably be exempt from the "institutional endorsement" requirement. However, this is not necessarily the case: For example, Rhodes requires an institutional endorsement for recent graduates from their undergraduate institution.

Make a list of the programs you're hoping to apply for, and carefully analyze the reasons why. If you're interested in applying for a Marshall, Gates, or Rhodes because you're vaguely interested in spending some time in the UK, or you want to travel, or you just like the idea of winning a big-name scholarship, you should probably think again. Frankly, with such vague goals, you'd have a tough time writing a compelling application essay! All of these programs are looking for outstanding students who also have a clear goal for their graduate study abroad.

So: Research the academic programs you're interested in, and work carefully on developing a personal statement that accomplishes the dual task of introducing yourself to the selection committee by showing them what is important to you, contextualizing your interests, etc., and also setting out your goals for your scholarship tenure. Allow plenty of time to develop, write, and revise your personal statement.

The Churchill and Rhodes are for specific universities in the UK (Cambridge and Oxford), so your research will involve determining which program is the best fit for you at these institutions. The Marshall can be used throughout the UK, and the Mitchell throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland, so you'll want to research your options carefully. Your professors and fellowship advisers at your university can be helpful resources; once you've done some preliminary research, it's also a good idea to contact faculty in the department you're thinking of studying in with further questions. The academic system in Britain and Ireland is rather different from ours, and you'll want to make sure that you can a) achieve your goals in the time the scholarship will fund, and b) have the right academic preparation necessary to pursue your chosen course of study.

Other prestigious fellowships that provide funding for study abroad include the Fulbright. Again, to prepare a persuasive application, you'll need to do thorough research!

How to Address the “Personal Statement”

The high prestige scholarships we've been discussing are distinguished by the type of essay you'll be asked to write: a “personal statement” versus a “statement of purpose.” Where a “statement of purpose” looks forward, to what you intend to do, a “personal statement” straddles past, present, and future, juggling quite a lot of material as you try to express who you are, what experiences formed you, and what you want to do next. Here are some brainstorming tips for how to handle the personal statement requirement for scholarships like the Rhodes, Marshall, and Mitchell, which place such a high premium on your leadership skills and personal qualities.

How do I convey that I am a leader?

- Think about the activities you've participated in, and what's important to you. Have you taken leadership roles (with or without a title)? What have you learned about interacting with other people? About the causes you value? About what you want to do in the future?
- Describe your accomplishments and the impact you've had. Brainstorm three specific instances where you feel you made a difference.

How can I draw connections between my past activities and my future goals?

- Try to think about a few key activities or intellectual pursuits you've pursued in college. Are there connections among them? What themes emerge? Are there links to what you intend to study during your scholarship tenure?
- Ask yourself: How have my experiences and values prepared me for what I intend to do in the future?
- Think about specific experiences and events that have been significant for you.

Why do I want to study abroad (at Oxford or at another UK university)?

- If you're applying for the Rhodes, research degree programs at Oxford and choose carefully.

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- If you're applying for the Marshall, do careful research and look beyond Oxford and Cambridge to consider other UK university programs. The [Marshall Scholarship website](#)⁵² provides helpful links. The application allows you to list two university choices; we recommend that you do so.
- If you're applying for the Mitchell, you'll also be asked to rank your university choices on your application. Again, research! Learn which Irish universities have strengths in your area and look beyond the "big names."

Why do I want to pursue the course I have selected? Am I prepared?

- Foreign graduate programs may have different requirements from American degree programs. Part of your research will involve making sure that your undergraduate program has prepared you sufficiently for the degree you plan to pursue. This will be particularly important if you plan to change fields.
- Note that if you're applying for the Churchill Scholarship, you'll need to apply separately for admission to Cambridge. (The other scholarships arrange placement for scholarship winners after the scholarships are awarded.)

⁵² <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/studyuk/chooseuniversity>

The Selection Process and the Interview

The nationally competitive scholarships are characterized by a rigorous selection process, emphasizing academic achievement, extracurricular activities, leadership, and service. Very few scholarships are awarded each year (40 Marshall, 32 Rhodes, 12 Mitchell, and 13 Churchill), so the process is very selective.

For the Marshall and Rhodes scholarships, you'll apply in one of a series of designated geographical regions based on either your home address or where you attend university. For all that people try to calculate whether they might have a better chance if they apply using mom's address in Kansas rather than their school address in New York, the regions are grouped in such a way as to make the numbers of applicants from each region approximately even.

If you're selected to be a finalist, you'll be called for an interview. Some programs have multiple rounds of interviews. The best way to prepare is to review your application, especially your resume and essay, as most questions will be likely drawn from experiences you mention or goals you discuss. Review the website of the department you're proposing to study in. Make sure you can describe your goals and explain how they evolved. You should also be prepared to respond to general questions that often come up in interview situations, such as discussing successes and failures, etc., as well as broad questions about your field of study and outside interests. Be ready to discuss why studying abroad (in the UK or in Ireland) is the right thing for you to do. If you're able to schedule a mock interview to practice, do it — especially if you haven't done fellowship interviews before or been interviewed by any large committee. The committee will be trying to get a fuller sense of who you are, not trick or trap you.

If the interview weekend includes a reception, dinner, or similar event, you don't need us to tell you that you should be on your best behavior. If you're unsure about proper etiquette or lack social graces, prepare before you go. Business attire is usually appropriate for both interviews and the formal social events that accompany them.

Since so few of these scholarships are awarded, the organizations want to know that recipients will accept the scholarship if it's offered to them. They also generally don't allow deferrals. Applicants might note as well that in recent years, Mitchell and Rhodes have held their final interviews on the same weekend, requiring candidates who are finalists for both to choose prior to the interview which scholarship to pursue.

Program Tips and Profiles

Rhodes

The [Rhodes Scholarship](#)⁵³ is among the most prestigious programs for American graduate students, providing funding for 32 American students each year to pursue graduate study at Oxford University. These students join other Rhodes scholars from other parts of the world. The scholarship can be used for any field and funds two years of study; students generally pursue a master's degree, though it is possible to pursue a second BA or even study towards a doctorate, depending on your field. In some cases, recipients can obtain funding for a third year.

The selection process is notoriously rigorous, and is based on the ideals named by Cecil Rhodes in his will:

1. literary and scholastic attainments;
2. energy to use one's talents to the full, as exemplified by fondness for and success in sports;
3. truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness, unselfishness and fellowship;
4. moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one's fellow beings.

The committee tends to define the "energy/sports" requirement broadly. In other words, you needn't be an athlete, but you should demonstrate a vigorous dedication to your activities. Leadership experience and potential is a major concern, as is academic achievement. Your academic record should be very strong if you're applying for this scholarship. Make sure that you highlight your activities in the resume section of the application, and select recommenders who can flesh out your profile effectively. For example, if you've organized a fundraiser at your university to support medical care in developing countries, get a letter from the university official who oversaw the program. If you're a tutor for low income students or second language learners, ask for a letter from your supervisor. The reason Rhodes accepts non-academic references in addition to the academic ones is that they want to hear about your leadership both in and out of the classroom. So, tell them.

⁵³ <http://www.rhodesscholar.org/>

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While many fellowships have transitioned to an online application system, Rhodes (as of now) retains a paper process, requiring applicants to submit ten paper copies of all application materials to their district's selection committee. Your recommenders should send ten copies of their letters directly to the committee.

Marshall

Named in recognition of the post-World War II Marshall Plan, the [Marshall Scholarship](#)⁵⁴ is another of the most prestigious scholarships available to American students. Up to forty Marshall scholars are selected annually; the award funds two years of study at any university in the UK (occasionally extendable to a third year in special circumstances). The majority of recipients choose to study at either Oxford or Cambridge, but there are other top-ranked universities to choose from as well. You should research your options carefully; the application gives you the chance to list two preferred universities and it is a good idea to do so.

The application regions for the Marshall are centered on British consular centers, and regional interviews are generally held at designated British consulates.

As an "ambassadorial" scholarship, the Marshall (like the Rhodes and Mitchell) places a high value on the personal qualities of recipients, as well as their academic merit. They want candidates who are outstanding students and also have the potential to do outstanding things in their career and life. When you're assembling your application and writing your personal statement, think hard about what makes your experiences stand out. What experiences have shaped your perspective?

Here again, your letters of recommendation are absolutely key. Select your recommenders carefully, and meet with them. Make sure you ask people who know you well enough to write detailed letters that address your personal qualities and leadership skills; supplement your academic references with letters from people who know you through work or extracurricular activities and can comment on your leadership potential.

The Marshall Scholarship now uses an online application system. You'll create a login, and your recommenders will upload their letters directly to the site as well.

⁵⁴ <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/>

Mitchell

The [Mitchell Scholarship](#)⁵⁵, named for former Senator George Mitchell's contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland, is the youngest of the major international scholarships, but has rapidly attained high prestige. It funds one year of study at any university in Ireland or Northern Ireland for American graduate students. Twelve scholarships are awarded each year. The application process is similar to that for the Marshall and Rhodes, involving multiple letters of recommendation, a letter of institutional endorsement, and a personal statement, which is weighted very highly. Like the Marshall, the Mitchell uses an online application system.

The Mitchell Scholarship places a premium on applicants' leadership and community involvement; so once again, think very carefully about your background, your activities, and how you can highlight the values that are most important to you. Your letters of recommendation are a vital part of fleshing out your profile and showing the committee more about your achievements, your commitments, and your character.

Churchill Scholarship

The [Churchill Scholarship](#)⁵⁶ provides funding for American students (under age 26 at the time of application) to pursue graduate study in the sciences or mathematics at Cambridge University. The selection process is extremely competitive, as only thirteen scholarships are awarded annually. Like the other high prestige scholarships, the Churchill values applicants' academic excellence and personal qualities.

Unlike the Marshall, Mitchell, and Rhodes, where you apply to the scholarship and then the scholarship agency arranges placement at the department or college, if you apply for the Churchill, you must apply separately for admission to Cambridge in the department you hope to study in. You can find more information on [Cambridge's graduate admissions page](#)⁵⁷.

The Churchill Scholarship has a strict nominating process and limits the number of students who may be nominated by each undergraduate institution. If you intend to apply, you'll want to meet with the fellowship advisor at your school as early as possible to learn about the on-campus application/nomination process. Some campuses may conduct interviews and some may evaluate applications internally prior to the deadline.

⁵⁵ www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships

⁵⁶ <http://www.winstonchurchillfoundation.org/Scholarships.html>

⁵⁷ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/admissions/>

Gates Cambridge Scholarship

The [Gates Cambridge Scholarship](#)⁵⁸ is another fairly new scholarship available to American students. However, the application process is not run through the scholarship agency, but through Cambridge itself. Students apply for regular graduate admission at Cambridge, and excellent candidates are considered for the Gates, which is awarded annually to 100 students from all over the world.

Fulbright

The [Fulbright](#)⁵⁹ is the largest international exchange scholarship program. Sponsored by the US State Department, the Fulbright program awards thousands of grants a year to American students, faculty, and professionals for study/work abroad, and to foreign students for study in the United States.

You can apply for the Fulbright any time during your graduate career. If you're a currently enrolled student, you'll need to apply through your campus's Fulbright representative and usually participate in a campus interview process. The deadline for the US program is in the fall.

As with any application, you'll want to begin thinking about your proposal well ahead of time. You need to have a compelling reason to go abroad, and a project or course of study that can reasonably be completed during the tenure of the fellowship. If your project requires advanced language skills, your application should make a case for your having those skills; if you haven't taken courses in the language of the country you're proposing to go to, make sure you address your language skills somewhere in your application (either in your proposal or by having one of your letter writers address the issue).

Fellowships are available to over 140 countries around the world – some countries are much more competitive than others. You can find a [list of participating countries](#)⁶⁰ on the Fulbright website. International students applying for a Fulbright to study in the United States apply through US Embassies in their countries (deadlines vary); [more information is available online](#).⁶¹

⁵⁸ <http://www.gatesscholar.org/>

⁵⁹ <http://www.iie.org/Template.cfm?section=Fulbright1>

⁶⁰ http://us.fulbrightonline.org/program_regions_world.html

⁶¹ <http://foreign.fulbrightonline.org/>

General Advice and Final Tips for High-Prestige Awards

The high prestige fellowships take a great deal of effort to apply for. But they also represent tremendous opportunities.

Most of these award programs publish profiles of their scholarship winners each year. Read them. You're not reading them in order to be intimidated by the competition, but to get a real sense of what traits the committees value in scholarship candidates. In other words, you'll see what they mean when they talk about "leadership potential" or "personal qualities".

All fellowship applications require time and effort. Begin your application process as early as you can, and seek out the assistance of your professors and the fellowship advisors at your school (if you're currently a student). Allow as much time as possible to write and rewrite your personal statement.

Resources

Searching Resources

[Broke Scholar](#)⁶²

[Community of Science Funding Opps](#)⁶³

[FastWeb](#)⁶⁴

[GRAPES](#)⁶⁵ (Grad and postdoc extramural support)

[Illinois Researcher Information Service](#)⁶⁶

[ScholarshipExperts.com](#)⁶⁷

[School Soup](#)⁶⁸

[Sponsored Programs Information Network](#)⁶⁹

Grant Listings

[Foundation Center](#)⁷⁰

[Grants Net](#)⁷¹

[grants.gov](#)⁷²

[neh.gov](#)⁷³

[nsf.gov](#)⁷⁴

⁶² <http://www.brokescholar.com/>

⁶³ <http://fundingopps.cos.com/>

⁶⁴ <http://www.fastweb.com/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.gdnet.ucla.edu/asis/grapes/search.asp>

⁶⁶ <http://iris.library.uiuc.edu/~iris/search.html>

⁶⁷ <http://www.scholarshipexperts.com/>

⁶⁸ <http://www.schoolsoup.com/>

⁶⁹ http://www.infoed.org/new_spin/spin.asp

⁷⁰ <http://foundationcenter.org/>

⁷¹ <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/funding>

⁷² <http://grants.gov/>

⁷³ <http://neh.gov/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.nsf.gov/>

Fellowship Programs

[Churchill Scholarship](#)⁷⁵

[Ford Diversity Fellowships](#)⁷⁶

[Fulbright Scholarship](#)⁷⁷

[Fulbright Scholarship for Foreign Students](#)⁷⁸

[Gates Cambridge Scholarship](#)⁷⁹

[George Mitchell Scholarship](#)⁸⁰

[Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarship](#)⁸¹

[Marshall Scholarship](#)⁸²

[Merage American Dream Fellowship](#)⁸³

[Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans](#)⁸⁴

[Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship](#)⁸⁵

[Rhodes Scholarship](#)⁸⁶

[Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation](#)⁸⁷

⁷⁵ <http://www.winstonchurchillfoundation.org/>

⁷⁶ <http://www7.nationalacademies.org/fordfellowships/>

⁷⁷ <http://us.fulbrightonline.org/home.html>

⁷⁸ <http://foreign.fulbrightonline.org/>

⁷⁹ <http://www.gatesscholar.org/>

⁸⁰ www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships

⁸¹ <http://www.jkcf.org/>

⁸² <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/>

⁸³ http://www.meragefoundations.com/mfad_fellows.html

⁸⁴ <http://www.pdsoros.org/>

⁸⁵ <http://www.rotary.org/en/StudentsAndYouth/EducationalPrograms/AmbassadorialScholarships/>

⁸⁶ www.rhodesscholar.org

⁸⁷ <http://woodrow.org/>

Epilogue

We hope that by now you have a stronger sense of how to go about the process of securing funding for your Graduate School education. By understanding the various options, applying for the most suitable scholarships, and submitting your polished and well rounded essays, you will make yourself more competitive in an already competitive field of applicants. We also suggest you familiarize yourself with our [Ten Tips for Better Writing](#)⁸⁸ while working on your essays. And if you would like more help in planning any aspect of your Fellowship, Scholarship, or Awards applications, we hope you'll consider [Accepted.com](#)⁸⁹ as your go-to resource. We are proud of our track record, and look forward to helping you present yourself in your graduate school applications.

⁸⁸ <http://www.accepted.com/grad/tenwritingtips.aspx>

⁸⁹ <http://www.accepted.com/>

About the Authors

[Linda Abraham](#)⁹⁰ is the founder and president of Accepted, which since its inception in 1996 has grown to be one of the country's most highly respected graduate consulting firms. She earned a BA in political science from UCLA, graduating magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, and then an MBA from UCLA's Graduate School of Management. After several years working in real estate and lending, Linda took time off to start a family, and in 1992 founded a small writing and editing service, tapping into a need for professional help with personal statements, application essays, and application strategies.

Her clients have been accepted to Harvard, Stanford, Wharton, Columbia, Kellogg, MIT, Darden, Stern, Michigan, Chicago, INSEAD, LBS, and Anderson Business School. As a respected consultant, Linda has been quoted extensively in the media on admissions, including in The Wall St. Journal, The New York Times, The Sunday Times of London, Businessweek, and MBA Podcaster. She also speaks and leads online seminars, having presented to organizations as diverse as AMSA, the Graduate Management Admissions Council, JAM, and MBA Admissions Advantage and student groups at UCLA, USC, Pepperdine, and Yeshiva University.

[Rebecca Blustein](#)⁹¹ earned her BA (summa cum laude) in English and Comparative Literature from UCLA, her MA in Irish Literature from the National University of Ireland Maynooth, and her PhD in Comparative Literature from UCLA.

Before joining Accepted's staff in 2008, she worked as a scholarship counselor in UCLA's Scholarship Resource Center for four years, helping students navigate the scholarship and fellowship application process. As the recipient of a Mitchell Scholarship and Mellon Fellowship during graduate school, she also gained firsthand experience of the interview and selection process.

Rebecca has also taught literature and writing at UCLA. At the Scholarship Resource Center, she assisted students at all levels with their essays and personal statements for scholarship, fellowship, and grant applications, from newly-admitted freshmen to master's, professional school, and PhD students. She worked with Fulbright, Soros, and Merage applicants, helping students acquire awards of up to \$20,000 annually. Her clients at Accepted have gained acceptance to programs including USC Marshall, London Business School, Cass Business School, the University of Missouri, the University of Hawaii, the University of British Columbia, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Georgia, and UCLA.

⁹⁰ <http://www.accepted.com/aboutus/editors.aspx?editorid=1>

⁹¹ <http://www.accepted.com/aboutus/editors.aspx?editorid=30>