

## Fellowships, Scholarships, and Assistantships

Kirsten E. Wood, Associate Professor  
Florida International University

*Note: This advice is geared toward graduate students and newly minted Ph.D.s looking for post-doctoral fellowships. Established scholars should check Carole Bucy's toolkit piece on "Grants and Fellowships."*

### General advice for identifying opportunities

- Check with the relevant professional organizations. They may have listings of fellowships for graduate students, and some offer small fellowships of their own.
- Ask more advanced graduate students about where they have applied.
- Ask your advisor or faculty mentor. Someone who knows your work well *and* is well-connected and active in the discipline is likelier to know the most relevant resources for you than someone who knows you *or* is well-connected, but not both.
- Check with your university graduate school, office of sponsored research, or career services office (all universities will have offices like these, but their names vary). They should have resources for identifying fellowships.
- Look for presentations and workshops geared to grantsmanship in your department, college/school, and university.
- Check whether your department, college, or university offers fellowships or assistantships. These may be competitive rather than need-based, and some will involve service.

### General advice for applications

1. Make sure you're really qualified for the particular fellowship.
  - Is it for advanced or beginning students?
  - Are there citizenship requirements?
  - Do you have to present a research-related or a teaching-related proposal?
  - Do you meet the requirements for technical or linguistic proficiency?
2. If the application requires recommendations, consider your choices carefully.
  - Who will be able to write the most positive and the most relevant letters?
  - Who knows you best in a context that is relevant to the fellowship?
  - Who will follow through on a commitment to write for you?
  - Who has a sufficient professional reputation to make the letter noteworthy?
3. Ask to read copies of other people's past applications, especially for the same fellowship, if possible.
  - Successful applications are particularly useful, of course, but even unsuccessful ones can give you a firmer idea of what your application should look like.
  - Talk to more advanced graduate students about their experiences with applications in general, and, if possible, with particular grantors and particular faculty letter-writers.

4. Make sure you provide your recommenders with all the information they need about the fellowship.
  - A draft of your application can be useful, as well as a current CV and a writing sample, depending on the fellowship. Make sure that you provide the recommender with information on the topics the funding source has asked recommenders to comment upon, but also ask your recommenders what they want to see.
5. Keep your deadlines in mind, for both yourself and your letter writers (if required).
  - For your recommenders, consider asking if they would like a reminder in advance of the deadline, and if so, how far in advance.
6. Show a draft of your application to a trusted reader—a grad-school friend, a mentor, an advisor—at least once.
  - Especially helpful is feedback from people who have received fellowships from the same source in the past.
7. Keep track of the details.
  - Does the application require an official transcript, or is an unofficial one sufficient?
  - Does your proposal or vita have to follow a specific format?
  - Is there a word-count or a page-count for your writing sample?
8. Make sure your application specifically addresses the issues the particular fellowship is geared to, whether it's scholarship in a particular area, or interdisciplinarity, or teaching, or humanistic significance, etc.
  - For library fellowships, explain exactly what library resources you plan to use, and how.
  - For assistantships linked to grad-school admission, explain why this particular program is a good fit for you. This might mean identifying particular professors or local resources that you would like to work with in the future.
  - For research-related fellowships, make your statement of your project and its significance as clear and concrete as possible. This is absolutely essential: a great project with a weak proposal will probably not get funded.
  - Remember that your application may be read by people far outside your field, and even outside your discipline. This is especially true for major grants, but may even apply to small library research grants.
  - If the application contains any elements that seem ambiguous to you—what do they mean by a personal statement? Do they want a character reference or an academic reference? Do they want a scholarly *vita* or a resumé?—ask, don't guess. All major funding institutions will have contact information, either by phone or on the Web, and it's much better to ask than to hazard a guess.

9. Proofread, proofread, proofread.
  - Your application should be free of typographical and grammatical errors. It should also be written in the best prose you can possibly muster. A proposal may be deemed unworthy not because the project is poor but because the application is sloppy and unprofessional.
10. Make sure you leave sufficient time for the application to reach its destination.
  - For mailed applications, use a traceable delivery option.
  - For e-mailed or Internet applications, make sure you leave enough time to allow for Web glitches, and make sure you save any electronic receipts you may receive.
11. Try to keep your application in perspective, especially for in-house competitive opportunities.
  - If you are competing with your friends and colleagues for the same fellowship, watch out for "blurring the lines" between personal and professional relationships. In your career, it's very likely that you will lose out to a friend someday—on the job market, in fellowship competitions, in book prize competitions, and so on—and it doesn't help anyone if you resent their success or feel overly dejected by your "failure." Count yourself lucky if a thick skin comes naturally to you; the rest of us find this a real struggle.

### **Links to fellowship information**

Here is a sampling of some of the fellowship opportunities available for graduate students and newly minted Ph.D.s.

[AHA Prizes and Fellowships](#)

[American Association of University Women](#) (dissertation and post-doctoral fellowships for women)

[American Philosophical Society](#) (library research and residential fellowships)

[Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#)

[The Ford Foundation](#)

[Foreign Language and Area Studies](#) (program of the U.S. Department of Education)

[Bill and Carol Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry Residential Fellowship at Emory University](#)

(pre- and post-doctoral fellowships)

[Fulbright](#)

[Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Dissertation Fellowships in American Art](#)

[H-Net Funding/Fellowships Announcements](#)

[H-Net Job Guide](#) (sometimes lists fellowship positions)

[The Huntington](#) (long- and short-term residential fellowships)

[James Madison Fellowship](#) (geared toward future teachers of American history and especially the U.S. Constitution)

[John Carter Brown Fellowship](#) (Brown University)

[McNeil Center for Early American Studies](#) (residential pre- and post-doctoral fellowships)

[Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowships](#)

[National Science Foundation Fellowship Program on Law and Social Sciences](#)

[New England Regional Fellowship Consortium](#)

[Newberry Library](#) (long- and short-term residential fellowships)

[Omohundro Institute for Early American History & Culture](#) (residential post-doctoral fellowships)

[Social Science Research Council](#) (dissertation and dissertation proposal development fellowships)

[Spencer Foundation](#) (dissertation and post-doctoral fellowships relating to the study of education)

[Tanner Humanities Center at University of Utah](#) (post-doctoral fellowships)

[United Negro College Fund](#) (search “For Students” for multiple scholarship opportunities)

Copyright by Kirsten E. Wood, March 2009.