External Fellowship Application Clinic

September 10, 2019
PANELISTS

Steve Bucher
Professor of Technical Communication Practice and Engineering Writing Program Director

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Chelsea Appleget
Aerospace Engineering PhD
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Jeffrey Santoso
Biomedical Engineering PhD
NSF Graduate Research Fellow

Emily Anne Vargas
Materials Science PhD
NSF Graduate Research Fellow
GEM National Consortium Fellow
WHY FELLOWSHIPS?

• **Flexibility**
  - Advisor & topic
  - Less dependent on an advisor’s grant funding

• **Money**
  - Fellowship stipends tend to be larger than RA stipends
  - Graduate School provides additional top-off stipend

• **Prestige**
  - Future opportunities
OPPORTUNITIES

NSF, NDSEG, Hertz, DoE
DoD, NIH, Soros, URM

USC Awards and Fellowship Database
http://awardsdatabase.usc.edu/

Other Fellowship and Scholarship Resources
https://viterbigrad.usc.edu/tuition-and-funding/doctoral-funding-2/
WEBSITES & ESTIMATED DEADLINES

NSFGRFP Deadline: October 22, 2019
http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=6201&org=NSF&sel_org=ENG&from=fund

Hertz Deadline: October 23, 2019
http://hertzfoundation.org/dx/fellowships/application.aspx

Soros Deadline: November 1, 2019
http://www.pdsoros.org

Department of Energy, CSGF: TBA
The 2018-2019 application will be available late October 2019.
https://www.krellinst.org/doecsgf/application/
WEBSITES & ESTIMATED DEADLINES

NIH Predoctoral Deadline: September – December 2019
http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/submissionschedule.htm

GEM Deadline: November 12, 2019
http://www.gemfellowship.org/gem-fellowship

NDSEG Deadline: TBA
https://www.ndsegfellowships.org/

Ford Predoctoral Deadline: December 17, 2019
http://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/fordfellowships/index.htm

NASA Space Technology Deadline: TBA
https://www.nasa.gov/strg/nstrf
STRUCTURE OF MOST APPLICATIONS

- Forms
- Transcripts
- Essays
- Letters of Reference
- (GRE scores)

- Similar, but different from grad school applications
APPLICATION CONTENT

NSF FastLane

• Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement (3 pages)
• Graduate Research Statement (2 pages)
• Transcripts, uploaded into FastLane
• Three letters of reference required

• Additional information required for some candidates  See Solicitation for eligibility requirements (available on www.nsfgrp.org)
Goal: Convince the agency that you will make an excellent researcher

• Describe a research problem
• Pose some ideas/solutions about the problem
• You do not need to solve the problem
• You can change your mind afterwards

Differentiate yourself from the other applicants

• We (faculty) can look over your essays and give suggestions
• Write an early draft and refine/polish based on feedback
Present an original research topic that you would like to pursue in graduate school.

Describe the research idea, your general approach, as well as any unique resources that may be needed for accomplishing the research goal (i.e., access to national facilities or collections, collaborations, overseas work, etc.)

You may choose to include important literature citations. Address the potential of the research to advance knowledge and understanding within science as well as the potential for broader impacts on society. The research discussed must be in a field listed in the Solicitation (Section X, Fields of Study).

• https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components
Important questions to ask yourself before writing the statement:

• What issues in the scientific community are you most passionate about?

• Do you possess the technical knowledge and skills necessary for conducting this work, or will you have sufficient mentoring and training to complete the study?

• Is this plan feasible for the allotted time and institutional resources?

• How will your research contribute to the "big picture" outside the academic context?

• How can you draft a plan using the guidelines presented in the essay instructions?

• How does your proposed research address the Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts criteria?
Proposed Research Plan:

- Clearly defined research question or hypothesis
- Show plan of research for time on fellowship
- Reflect your understanding of good research design and methodology, including literature references (space allowing)
- Show any connection to your previous research
- Must reflect both criteria
- Solid anchoring in previous work
  - Innovative and ambitious step forward
HOW DO I PICK A PROBLEM?

- Read Tutorial / Survey / Review Papers
- Talk to Faculty / Senior Grad Students
- Attend Group Meetings
- Do Directed Research

What being a Ph.D. Researcher is all about

*Being pro-active will make you a more successful researcher*
How do you envision graduate school preparing you for a career that allows you to contribute to expanding scientific understanding as well as broadly benefit society?

Describe your personal, educational and/or professional experiences that motivate your decision to pursue advanced study in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM).

Include specific examples of any research and/or professional activities in which you have participated.

Present a concise description of the activities, highlight the results and discuss how these activities have prepared you to seek a graduate degree.

Specify your role in the activity including the extent to which you worked independently and/or as part of a team.

Describe the contributions of your activity to advancing knowledge in STEM fields as well as the potential for broader societal impacts (See Solicitation, Section VI, for more information about Broader Impacts) https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components
NSF Fellows are expected to become globally engaged knowledge experts and leaders who can contribute significantly to research, education, and innovations in science and engineering. The purpose of this statement is to demonstrate your potential to satisfy this requirement. Your ideas and examples do not have to be confined necessarily to the discipline that you have chosen to pursue.

If you have completed more than 12 months of graduate or post-baccalaureate study or a professional degree and an interruption of at least two consecutive years (fourth option under Completed Study in the NSF GRFP Program Information section), please address the reasons for the interruption in graduate study here. Please refer back to that section for details.
Important questions to ask yourself before writing the statement:

- Why are you fascinated by your research area?
- What examples of leadership skills and unique characteristics do you bring to your chosen field?
- What personal and individual strengths do you have that make you a qualified applicant?
- How will receiving the fellowship contribute to your career goals?
- What are all of your applicable experiences?
- For each experience, what were the key questions, methodology, findings, and conclusions?
- Did you work in a team and/or independently?
- How did you assist in the analysis of results?
- How did your activities address the Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts criteria?
PERSONAL, RELEVANT BACKGROUND AND FUTURE GOALS STATEMENT (3 PAGES)

• Show skills, potential, and interest in:
  • Research
  • Education
  • Innovations

• Don’t limit your descriptions to engineering-related efforts only

• What’s made you interested in research?

• What are your strengths?

• How have you shown leadership?

• Reflect both main criteria
Intellectual Merit: this criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge

Broader Impacts: this criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes
REVIEW CRITERIA

The following elements should be considered in the review for both criteria:

1. What is the potential for the proposed activity to
   A. Advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields (Intellectual Merit); and
   B. Benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes (Broader Impacts)?

2. To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?

3. Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? Does the plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success?

4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or organization to conduct the proposed activities?

5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI (either at the home organization or through collaborations) to carry out the proposed activities?

https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components
REQUIRED ESSAYS - CRITERIA

Intellectual Merit:

• Reflects your intellect
• Demonstrates education
• Shows experience with and potential for research
• Shows you can work in a team
• Shows you can work independently
• Shows you can communicate your findings
• Shows you can be a leader
Broader Impacts:

• Benefits society
• Contributes to the larger canon of work
• Reflects well on your discipline
• Shows your excitement
• Can be understood by broad audience
REFERENCE LETTERS

Who can best speak to your abilities as a researcher?
- Self-starter/independent
- Creative
- Hardworking/diligent
- Raw smarts

Who should write these letters?
- Faculty at USC
- Faculty from your undergraduate institution
- Summer employers (PhDs?)
- Have faculty help you choose your set of referees

Help referees write their letters
- If at USC, get to know them well beyond “XYZ did great in my class”

Provide
- Transcripts
- Drafts of essays
- List of deadlines
- Addressed envelopes (if letters are to be mailed)
- Reminders (send e-mails)
PREPARING A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION

Reference Letters

• Choose at least three reference writers

• Give them ample time to prepare their letters

• They should know you as a scientist and personally

• Share your application materials and the merit review criteria (good letters address Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts)

• Track letter submission using FastLane; you must have 3 letters for a complete application

  • https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components
EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

- Panelists are academic and research experts in general discipline, not necessarily in your research topic
- Panelists rate your application using the two Merit Review Criteria, Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts
- NSF requests panelists to provide constructive comments (applicants receive anonymous copies of the reviews)
- Panels make recommendations to NSF
- NSF awards fellowships and honorable mentions
TIPS FROM Awardees

• Start early, taking significant time to compose essays, and rewrite.
• Demonstrate your personal motivation and excitement for research.
• Spend time to thoroughly research your topic.
• Integrate essays to create singular theme, link the content together.
• Keep essays clear and simple to read.
• Give essays to many people for review.
• Get input from professors or university administration.
• Get input from previous applicants or winners.
• Thoroughly address both Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts.
• Be sure you adequately address the Broader Impacts criterion.
TIPS FROM Awardees

- Be sure to include all volunteer, leadership, and extracurricular activities.
- Highlight the significance of your research and how it will impact society.
- Pay close attention to language in the Program Solicitation.
- Focus on getting strong recommendation letters.
- Mention what sets you apart from a typical applicant - be unique!

https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/tips_for_applying
TIPS FROM REVIEWERS

• Gain research experience, especially at the undergrad level (for example, see NSF’s REU program).
• Become involved in leadership roles and community service.
• Write clear and scientifically-sound essays.
• Strive for scientific publications and presentations.
• Have a strong academic record.
• Be sure to demonstrate the Broader Impacts criteria well.
• Select strong recommenders.
• Link your teaching and research experiences.
• Ensure you display a history of accomplishments.
• Thoroughly address both Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts.
TIPS FROM REVIEWERS

• Highlight any international experience you may have.
• Display your passion and motivation in the essays.
• Be knowledgeable of your research topic.
• Demonstrate the significance of your proposed work.
• Make sure the proposed research is realistic.

https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/tips_for_applying
CONTACT RESOURCES

Your Advisor

Steve Bucher, Director of the Engineering Writing Program – sbucher@usc.edu

Jennifer Gerson, Director of Doctoral Programs – jgerson@usc.edu


VASE website - Other Fellowship and Scholarship Resources
https://viterbigrad.usc.edu/tuition-and-funding/doctoral-funding-2/