

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What's the difference between grants, scholarship and fellowships?

There is little difference and the terms are often used interchangeably. There are a few minor distinctions:

Grants are the most inclusive, representing any grant of money in exchange for a purpose or project.

Scholarships usually provide support for undergraduate or graduate education. Fellowships often support post-graduate projects which may be pursued outside the normal curriculum. Typically, funding is provided by a foundation, institution or other organization to support academic work, research, independent projects or community service activity. All scholarships, fellowships and grants and all are referred to as national awards.

2. Who should consider applying for fellowships?

National awards cover a broad range of academic, co-curricular and professional interests, including, but not limited to: study abroad, science research, public service interests, graduate school, international research, study or independent projects. It's reasonable for students to explore fellowship and scholarship opportunities as they develop their undergraduate and post-graduate special interests, passions, commitments and plans.

3. Why should I apply for a fellowship?

There are many benefits of applying regardless of whether you receive an award. The process provides:

- an opportunity to define your goals, to narrow or broaden your interests, and to look at yourself realistically while examining your strengths and weaknesses.
- a chance to learn real skills including: learning to write outstanding proposals and personal statements; how to highlight your strengths and talents; how to select and request recommendations; how to research opportunities in your field or in your area of study; and how to organize your time to meet deadlines.
- an understanding of how to connect the dots – to look closely at your interests, skills, passions and commitments and to see how they create the big themes in your life.
- excellent preparation for applications to graduate school, other fellowships and scholarships, and future jobs. You will learn what it takes to organize and coordinate all the pieces of an application and to meet the deadlines.
- an opportunity (for awards requiring campus and national interviews) to develop interview skills and to learn to present your ideas and interests clearly and persuasively.

4. When should I begin thinking about applying for scholarships and fellowships?

Start early! Whether or not you plan to study abroad before or after graduation, or go to graduate school, you should learn about your options as soon as you set foot on campus. Attend information sessions as a first year student. Use your time, at Hamilton and during summer months, wisely to get involved in meaningful activities and pursuits. These experiences often provide excellent preparation for future research or study and strengthen fellowship and scholarship applications. **Note: The reality is that for many post-graduate awards, seniors often return to campus with ideas for projects, research or study, after time away or abroad. There are many examples of student award winners who considered national awards during September of their senior year!**

5. How do I begin researching scholarships or fellowships?

Meet with the Student Fellowships Coordinator to discuss your interests. You don't have to have a clear idea of future plans or ideas for fellowships at this point.

- Review the information on this website. Make note of what piques or ties to your interests.
- Think carefully about your interests, passions, curiosities – the big theme(s) in your life.

6. What is required in fellowship applications?

Every fellowship has its own process and application. Most awards require a traditional application with short essays or a project proposal or plan of study. A college transcript, record of extracurricular activities and two or three or more letters of recommendation are typically required. For some awards campus interviews (Fulbright, Watson, Rhodes, Marshal, Mitchell) and national interviews (Watson, Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell) are required.

7. What are they looking for?

National fellowships are highly competitive and academic excellence is required for many awards. But, for many awards a clear sense of purpose and future promise is essential and is equally as important as grades. Depending on the award, personal qualities and individual merits, notably: • the breadth of your interests • record of leadership • public service • research experience • meaningful participation in extra-curricular activities • demonstrated commitment in a stated area of interest are important.

8. How important are grades?

Grades alone are less important than the overall combination of qualities (which might include research, service, leadership, and so on), but they are still significant. For example, the level of competition for Fulbright Grants will vary from country to country. A well thought out proposal for study, research or independent project combined with the background and skills to carry out the proposal is essential. This is as

important as GPA. The Watson Foundation is looking for students with passion and commitment and the background and skills to carry out the proposed project. The Marshall Scholarship *requires* a GPA of 3.7 or higher, and in practice most fellowships also look for a similar level of academic achievement. Some Truman Scholars have GPAs in the range of 3.5 - 3.6 but have received outstanding grades in upper-division courses in their field of interest along with several years of public service. The average GPA of Udall Scholars is 3.7, but some Udall winners have had GPAs as low as 2.8 or 2.9 combined with exceptional accomplishments related to the environment in other areas. Most Goldwater Scholars have GPAs in the range of 3.9 - 4.0. Most applicants for the NSF Graduate Research Fellowships have GPAs of 3.7 or higher, but applicants with less competitive GPAs have won awards if they show substantial improvement in their grades and a very strong application in other respects, including the proposed plan of research and very supportive letters of reference. Near perfect grades are never, by themselves, enough to win. So many students with excellent grades apply for these awards that other aspects of the application are more decisive.

9. What makes a strong application?

CONNECT THE DOTS! In a strong application, the pieces of the application fit together well, and offer a convincing composite picture of your strengths, commitments and interests. Your application may be compared to hundreds of others. It will likely be read by several groups of people during the selection process. To ensure that you are conveying the impression you intend, utilize the knowledge and experience of others in putting together your application package. The letters of recommendation should offer a portrait of the student that is consistent with the personal statement and other materials submitted by the candidate. A strong application will stand out from the crowd, and will impress a variety of people.

10. How do I make myself competitive for national awards?

Your time at Hamilton is not in preparation for pursuing national awards. It's a time to explore and nurture your interests.

- **Do what comes naturally.** Nurture and cultivate your academic interests, passions and commitments by participating in research and special projects, summer jobs and internships and co-curricular activities.
- Be active and engaged in the life of the college – step up and take on leadership roles. Actively pursuing your interests is the best way to
- **READ!** Read newspapers such as The New York Times and Wall Street Journal to broaden your global knowledge and political spectrum. The Economist is also a recommended source for information on world affairs. Read what you love AND the classics. Conduct a serious review of basic world history. Know your world geography.
- Be up-to-date on political and cultural dimensions of, and ethical issues in your field of study. Read the major journals in your field. (Ask your professors if you don't know which ones are best).

11. What does applying for national awards ask of the student?

Time, energy, creative and critical thinking. Winning national awards is not easy. After advising successful students for many years at Hamilton, I can never predict the results of any national competition. Elation, pleasant surprise, and bitter disappointment go hand in hand in this process. Applying for fellowships and scholarships asks students to dream big • to make sense of and to justify what they do and why • to share their hopes and dreams with others • to persevere • to see a goal through to completion • and, to respect the nature of competition on campus and in the larger national pool.

12. How should I prepare for prestigious fellowships?

First year students:

Develop your curiosity about the world around you. Identify your passions and pursue them energetically.

- Develop strong writing skills so you will be able to present your interests and plans in proposals.
- Practice the art of conversation with everyone – especially professors and friends.
- Learn how to express an opinion and how to listen.

Sophomores:

Concentrate on academic achievement in your chosen discipline and other academic interests.

- Pursue extra-curricular activities and summer jobs and internships that develop your skills and talents, both academic and leadership.
- Meet with the Student Fellowships Coordinator – especially if you plan to study abroad or away for a semester or year as a junior.

Juniors:

Continue to engage in your studies. If studying abroad, use the chance to explore future research, study or independent project.

- Continue to seek out leadership opportunities in those organizations that matter the most to you.
- Pursue opportunities to serve the wider community, too – be creative and use initiative.
- Consider specific post-graduate fellowships that intrigue you.
- Meet with the Student Fellowships Coordinator to explore viable fellowship and scholarship pursuits.

13. How much time do applications take?

This varies with each application. Typically, people who become finalists and advance to the interviews for prestigious fellowships report spending as much or more time completing the application materials and preparing for interviews as they would spend on a regular academic course in one term.

14. What are the benefits for applicants who do not win awards?

Most nominees who make a commitment to the competition and accept guidance from their faculty advisors:

- Clarify their career goals.
- Get a better sense of the most appropriate graduate studies for them.
- Become more aware of their strengths, interests, and ways to prepare for their career.
- Improve their writing skills and, if they become finalists, enhance their interviewing skills.
- Get a head start in preparing applications for graduate education and other scholarship competitions.

15. Can I apply for more than one grant or fellowship?

Yes. You may apply for any of the awards that fit well your academic and other interests.

16. Can I apply after graduation?

Yes. It is possible to apply for some major post-graduate fellowships as a graduating senior or for several years after graduation. Fulbright Grants do not have an age limit. While other awards including the Rhodes, Marshall and Mitchell will have some limitations. Check the eligibility requirements for each award. Some students may put together *stronger* applications after graduation since they have completed a senior project and developed a clearer understanding of their future plans and goals. As a Hamilton graduate you are encouraged (and in some instances required) to work through the Student Fellowship Office. As an alum, you have access to the same guidance and information as undergraduates.

17. Are there awards for international students?

Yes, there are fellowships and scholarships for international students. Please visit the International Student Opportunities section of this website.

18. How can I get experience in research as an undergraduate?

At Hamilton there are many opportunities to conduct research in any discipline through Emerson Grants, Levitt Center Grants and summer science research grants. Consult faculty in your area of interest about research projects which you could work on during the academic year or during the summer. The Hamilton Career Center is a great place to research summer internship and job opportunities. See the Career Center website for Internship Listings and Summer Internship Funding. Away from Hamilton, each summer, there are many opportunities to work in research around the country. The [NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates \(REU\) Program](#) and the [Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education](#) both sponsor many programs nationwide. For a

variety of other opportunities, see some of these websites: [National Summer Research Opportunities](#) (Pitt), [Research Database](#) (UIUC), [Health Related Summer Opportunities](#) (Swarthmore), [Health Professions Internships](#) (CMU), [Internships and Summer Jobs](#) (Colgate), [Extramural Research Opportunities](#) (Yale), [Summer Fellowship Opportunities](#) (Yale), [IT Internships](#) (ACM), and [Summer Internships](#) (NASA).

19. I have an idea for the Watson, Bristol or Fulbright, but I see that a project has already been done on this topic. Does this mean I can't pursue my project?

YOU MAY INDEED PURSUE THE PROJECT OF YOUR CHOOSING. Though topics or ideas may have similar themes to projects conducted in the past, each student will approach and pursue a project in an individual way – experiences and influences are specific to each student.

20. Who is available for help and advice in this process?

The Student Fellowships Coordinator will assist you throughout the process – exploring your interests and ideas, making informed decisions regarding the pursuit of awards and applying for awards. Faculty advisors, professors and others in your field of interest can be helpful in terms of formulating ideas, identifying contacts and reviewing proposals for research or study. Discuss your ideas and plans with your friends, roommates, parents, siblings and anyone else who will listen. The more conversations you have, the better you will be able to articulate your goals and ideas. This is wonderful practice for both writing essays and interviewing with selection committees. Be sure you are able to clearly communicate why you are interested in a particular project, program of study, university or country.