

## **DEVELOPING A STRONG APPLICATION: A Guide for the Stanford Fulbright Applicant**

This handout is the second of three handouts that are important in the application process for the **Fulbright Scholarships**. The three handouts are:

1. Should I Apply?
2. **Developing a Strong Application – A Guide for the Stanford Fulbright Applicant**
3. The Process of Applying for the Fulbright at Stanford

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### **THE ORC SCHOLARSHIP INTEREST FORM**

The Scholarship Interest Form is a simple online form available on the ORC website. **You should submit a Scholarship Interest Form as soon as you start thinking about applying.** Filling out an interest form is not a commitment to apply, but it will automatically sign you up for a mailing list so that you can begin receiving updates and advice on awards. Don't worry if you are not quite sure about your project (or even country of interest); just fill out as much information as you can. Should you decide you are not going to apply, just let us know. The form is accessible at

[http://web.stanford.edu/dept/icenter/orc/forms/overseas\\_scholarship\\_interest2015.fb](http://web.stanford.edu/dept/icenter/orc/forms/overseas_scholarship_interest2015.fb)

### **NOW THAT YOU'VE DECIDED TO APPLY**

We cannot emphasize enough that you should start your application as far in advance of the deadline as possible. Although we have known a few candidates who have been successful in the competition for these awards after only a limited period of preparation, these students are the exception. Preparing a competitive application takes a great deal of time and effort.

**Complete a Stanford Fulbright Pre-Application Intent to Apply form here:**

[http://web.stanford.edu/dept/icenter/orc/forms/Fulbright\\_Intent\\_Mentor\\_2015.fb](http://web.stanford.edu/dept/icenter/orc/forms/Fulbright_Intent_Mentor_2015.fb)

A strong application is made up of essays, references, a language evaluation, transcripts, and a campus interview. That being said, the most important aspect of your application (by far) is your proposed project. To

be competitive, your project should be original, relevant, feasible, and clearly defined. What makes a project successful varies by country, discipline, and the qualifications of an individual applicant. The reason why you should begin your application so far in advance is partly because it takes time to develop a project with said successful characteristics.

By the time you submit your application, you should be able to both summarize your project in one sentence as well as speak to the project specifics at length. Additionally, you should be able to recognize the larger significance of your project (with regard to the host country *and* the United States) as well as the potential contributions to your academic discipline. More information on the project proposal begins on page 3.

Although a fully realized application may seem daunting in the early stages, you have many resources to help you. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance or advice from your advisor, faculty, staff, family, friends, and the ORC advisors.

One thing to keep in mind: applicants have also told us that the time spent thinking and writing about their future plans—whether, in the end, they were awarded a scholarship or not—was well worth the effort. If you plan to apply to graduate schools or interview with prospective employers, the Fulbright application process can provide you with valuable experience. In the essays, you will have to consider your future plans and goals. In this way, applying for the Fulbright Scholarship can help you to further define your academic and career goals.

## **RESEARCHING YOUR OPTIONS**

Applicants for the Fulbright must determine where and what to study and/or research overseas. Applicants who have familiarized themselves with the educational opportunities in the country of interest will be in a position to prepare stronger applications. Since choosing the appropriate course of study/research and the country of interest will greatly affect the competitiveness of your application, it is important to survey all viable opportunities available in the country of interest before making major decisions. For instance, students who are interested in studying in the UK should investigate other universities in addition to those as well known as Oxford or Cambridge. Also, **please read the country-specific information thoroughly on the Fulbright U.S. Student Program website**, as requirements and restrictions vary country to country. Certain countries may emphasize accompanying university coursework or the importance of in-country affiliations. This may impact the decision about your qualifications for certain countries as well as your competitiveness for selected countries.

**Explore overseas educational opportunities:** It is important for applicants to familiarize themselves with the educational resources (universities, research institutes, faculty, archives, etc.) available in the country of interest. This familiarity will, no doubt, help you with essays and the campus interview. If your proposal includes studying or conducting research at a particular overseas university or institute, it is your responsibility to gain admission or access. As such, Fulbright applicants should try to obtain detailed knowledge of programs, courses, or other educational opportunities (particular faculty members) available at their chosen institution.

**Develop and utilize faculty contacts:** It is important, throughout all levels of the application process, to use faculty members as a source for advising and support. Work closely with a Stanford faculty member to polish your project idea as well as to develop a network of faculty contacts.

**Seek potential affiliations:** If any part of your project includes working closely with or taking classes from a particular overseas faculty member, it is critical that you make contact and develop a relationship with said

faculty member. Email potential contacts with an introduction of yourself and a description of your interests, and (when appropriate) an outline of your research or study proposal. Hopefully, the overseas faculty member will respond positively and “invite” you to study or conduct research at their institution under his/her supervision. If so, ask them if they would be willing to formally invite you by writing a letter of support on your behalf. Such support can greatly bolster the competitiveness of your application. (Note that Fulbright selection committees are forgiving of grammar or spelling errors in these letters, especially if English is not the national language of the host country.)

## **STANFORD FULBRIGHT MENTORING PROGRAM**

Every summer the ORC provides a mentoring matching service for interested applicants. The mentoring program is designed for a Stanford Fulbright alumni to provide one-on-one support to a Fulbright applicant. Before requesting a mentor, you should feel confident you will be applying! Mentors may assist applicants by making suggestions about the application process, providing feedback on written application materials, and discussing the highlights and challenges of living and working abroad.

Mentor matches are arranged in the month of June. Student will need to submit an online mentor request form that will include a description of the proposed project or topic. There will be an **annual deadline of June 15** if you would like to request a mentor. Please email Diane Murk at [dmurk@stanford.edu](mailto:dmurk@stanford.edu) for the link to the mentor request form, if you don’t already have it from a scholarship email update.

## **PUTTING TOGETHER A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION**

### **I. THE ESSAYS<sup>1</sup>**

Your Fulbright application requires two essays: a **Statement of Grant Purpose** (discussed in these guides as “project proposal”) and a **Personal Statement**. The essays are your opportunity to state who you are and what you want to do. Since you will not have any interviews beyond the campus level, you should put as much time and energy into these essays as possible. Writing these essays can be a frustrating, interesting, and revealing experience. Your final essays should produce a picture of you as a person, a student, a potential scholarship winner, and (looking into the future) as a former scholarship recipient.

Think carefully about the approach you should take to each essay—the Project Proposal vs. the Personal Statement—because each will serve a different purpose in your application. Each essay should make a statement about your academic life and plans, as well as your personal goals and beliefs. Your writing should grab the interest of the reader and make him or her want to meet you. Write simply and directly, and do your best to strike that difficult balance between modesty and persuasiveness.

**Read Past Successful Fulbright Essays:** On file at the ORC, you will find several binders, which contain sample project proposals and personal statements written by successful Stanford Fulbright applicants.

The ORC strongly recommends that applicants follow the Fulbright guidelines to have essays be formatted in 12-point font, Times New Roman (or a similar reader-friendly font), with one-inch margins. Although applicants sometimes get away with using smaller fonts and margins, we don’t recommend doing so. Essays

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this section have been modified from the “Fulbright Applicant Newsletter” 7/30/2008

should be single-spaced, and it is not necessary to use spaces between paragraphs. Citations may be omitted. Follow the Fulbright guidelines listed on the website.

**a. STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE (PROJECT PROPOSAL)**

The Statement of Grant Purpose / Project Proposal is limited to two pages in length. Use this space wisely to fully describe your project. You should cover the essential details of your Fulbright project within the first paragraph, if not, then the second.

The project proposal should demonstrate that you are able to plan and implement a successful research project or course of study, and it will be your guide to completing it and meeting your objectives. The project proposal should be as specific as possible, while also being flexible enough to make the best of the reality you will find once you arrive overseas, which will inevitably be a little different than planned. The following are questions you should ask yourself during your writing and editing processes:

- Overall, is the proposal persuasive, direct, concise, and easy to read? Short (three or four-line) paragraphs can be very effective.
- Does it emphasize the relevance and significance of the project from start to finish?
- Does the first paragraph answer who, what, when, where, why, and how?
- Do the next paragraphs detail what you propose to do and how you will do it?
- Is the timeline realistic, specific, acceptable, and appropriate? Does it include any pre- and post-grant plans?
- Are there clearly defined achievable goals, objectives (the activities/steps to reach your goals), concrete outcomes, and measurable results?
- Does the proposal fit within the context of your academic experience and skills?
- Are the methodology and activities comprehensive, relevant, appropriate, feasible, and approved/approvable if necessary?
- Does the proposal include an explanation of your field of study and context of the project?
- Does the proposal describe with whom you will work, the support that they have offered to give you in their letter of support/affiliation/invitation, and the significance of this assistance?
- Does it demonstrate why the project or study needs to be in the country selected, the resources the country provides, and how it will benefit from your work there?
- Does it imply the contribution the project will make in promoting cross-cultural interaction and mutual understanding, including how it will impact the US?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that you have the academic and linguistic background necessary for your project?
- Does it demonstrate an interest to engage with the host country community through volunteer and extracurricular activities? (This is especially important for ETA applicants.)
- Does it clearly explain your future plans (immediate and long-term) and how your work will help further your academic or professional development?
- Does it leave the reader with a sense of why your project should be funded?

- Does the closing paragraph reemphasize what you will achieve and what makes your project exciting, necessary, and unique?

Overall, the project proposal should be compelling and easily understood by both an educated “lay” person and an expert in your field. Since you don’t know exactly who will read your application at the national and international level, write so that your proposal is clear and comprehensible to someone who knows nothing about your subject while also specific and detailed enough to convince an expert. Do not be afraid to use language or concepts specific to your field and to reference the work of other authors. If your project is highly technical, about 75% of your essay should be accessible to all readers.

Given the depth of information applicants must distill into the project proposal, the ORC has developed a generic outline that applicant are welcome to use as a guide. It is not necessary to follow it precisely, though applicants should take care to touch on all the components of this outline:

- Introduction
- Background
- Methodology
- Grant timeline (Get specific! Divide project into 3-4 phases and discuss objectives and tasks of each.)
- Affiliations and support
- Qualifications
- Project’s significance
- Applicant’s future academic and professional goals

### **English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) Proposals<sup>2</sup>**

If you’re applying for an ETA grant, the statement of grant purpose is one page in length. ETA applicants are not expected to present extensive research plans. Rather, you should describe for the selection committees:

- Why you would like to undertake an ETA assignment and why you have chosen the particular country.
- Any specific qualifications, training, experiences you have had that relate to the overseas assignment.
- How you expect to benefit from the assignment and what use you will make of the experience on their return to the US.
- What use they will make of their time outside the classroom. (Most ETAs work no more than 20-30 hours per week.) Note: Different countries have differing philosophies on this, e.g. Argentina expects a developed side project in the proposal, whereas, Taiwan prefers their ETAs to focus solely on teaching. Again, it is crucial to be familiar with the country-specific requirements.

### **b. PERSONAL STATEMENT**

Your personal statement (PS) should narrate your personal and intellectual development. It should illustrate how a Fulbright grant is the next logical and necessary step in your life, and how you are qualified to carry out

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<sup>2</sup> Content in this section is from the 2009-2010 Handbook “Fulbright US Student Program: Grants for Graduate Study, Research, or English Teaching Assistantships Abroad”

your project. It is your opportunity to illustrate what a unique and exceptional individual you are! Here are questions to consider while writing:

- Overall, is your PS interesting and easy to read? Does it show, rather than tell, who you are and make the reader want to know you better?
- Does your PS demonstrate your motivation and ability to work independently?
- Does it show who you are, and make the reader want to know you better?
- Do you demonstrate your experience and interest in intercultural learning and sharing? Will the reader feel confident you would act as an “ambassador” for the US?
- Do you maintain a theme or connecting concept throughout the PS?
- Does your PS explore connections between your academic life and the rest of your life?
- Do you repeat information included in other parts of your application? Omit them unless they are necessary for further explanation or emphasis. Be careful not to turn the PS into an extension of the proposal.

**Mistakes often made by applicants when writing essays:**

- **Turning the essay into an extended version of a resume.** Applicants often ask how they should incorporate activities into their essay when they have already listed them separately on the application. Leave out less important things (or limit them to other portions of your application—there are sections in the Fulbright applications for listing honors, awards, and activities). Also, the personal statement is not simply a list of personal reason you wish to go to the country of application.
- **Exaggerating your histories and situations.** Do not believe that all applicants expand on the truth and that if they do, you may as well expand too. Experienced interviewers often uncover exaggeration during interviews. This can be embarrassing and disastrous for an applicant.
- **Being overly clever or cute in writing the essays.** Selection committees have read quite literally hundreds of essays and they find overly clever essays annoying. This reaction can do nothing but harm the future of your application.

**Many readers contribute to good essays!**

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of having a variety of people read your essays. Readers should be people whose opinions you respect. They also should be people with whom you have already discussed both the scholarship for which you are applying and the course of study you wish to pursue. Ask your advisor, faculty members, classmates, roommates, and friends to read your essay, but explain the essay’s context first.

This process can be incredibly rewarding and yet frustrating. Each time you show your drafts to someone, he/she will suggest changes and you will have to weigh their suggestions against others. It is up to you to decide when you think your essays are ready for submission, but it is important to listen to faculty, staff, and peers as you craft your essays.

**Feedback on Essays from the ORC Staff**

We are available to critique essays throughout the summer. Students may submit essays for review by e-mail to [dmurk@stanford.edu](mailto:dmurk@stanford.edu) who works with a team of advisors. The response time is usually 3-5 working days. If you are applying for the Fulbright to the United Kingdom in addition to other scholarship to the UK, please note the guidelines regarding feedback on the personal statement on the respective websites.

Please attach your essays as a MS Word file in the following format: LastName.FBEssayTypeDraftNumber.doc (where pp=project proposal, ps=personal statement), e.g. Smith.FBpp3.doc.

Note: **after September 9, 2015**, be warned that it may be difficult to schedule an appointment or receive feedback in a timely manner, as the ORC will be inundated with essays. You are strongly encouraged to work with the ORC staff as early as June and July.

**Deadline to submit essays for feedback is Monday, September 14, 2015 at 4pm!**

## II. LETTERS OF REFERENCE

You are asked to submit three academic letters of reference for the Fulbright Scholarship. The Fulbright is primarily an academic scholarship, so the selection committee is looking for honest appraisals of your academic abilities. You should keep the following points in mind when selecting recommenders:

- References should be from faculty members with whom you have worked, had a class, or conducted a research project. At least two of the letters should be from professors in your major or field who are familiar with your abilities and proposed project. With no disrespect intended, references should not be from Teaching Assistants.
- Choose people who know you well: academically, extracurricularly, and personally. A letter of recommendation is most useful when it includes specific comments on the strength of your Fulbright application. Recommenders should be able to comment on your ability to carry out your proposed project and the suitability of the country or institution chosen.
- Identify your recommenders and contact them as early in the process as possible. Brief them on the overall timeline, expectations, and opportunities with regard to the Fulbright Scholarship. If your recommenders are familiar with your plans and the application process, they will be more helpful to you when providing feedback and constructive criticism.
- Give them as much information about yourself as possible. The following is a list of helpful items to give to your selected recommenders:
  - \* Draft essay(s) and application.
  - \* Copy of transcript.
  - \* Background information on the U.S. Student Fulbright Program.
- For ETA applicants, recommenders fill out the provided online reference forms instead of submitting a traditional letter of recommendation.

It is important to show your recommender a copy of the final draft of your proposal; the academic references should be about your proposal and how qualified you are to carry out that proposal, and not just how good a student you are. A good academic reference for a Fulbright puts the faculty member's knowledge of you in the context of your proposal and your future potential.

Please note: Staff at the ORC cannot provide any information as to the relative strengths of confidential references.

### III. FOREIGN LANGUAGE FORMS

The Foreign Language Evaluation (FLE) (Form 8) functions as a reference letter on your language skills. The Language Self Evaluation (Form 7) is completed by the applicant and is a self-assessment on language abilities. This report can state intentions to strength proficiency before the grant and the means of doing so.

The Foreign Language Evaluation, whenever possible, should be from a faculty member (who instructs that particular language). However, in a few cases, the language concerned is not taught by faculty at Stanford. In these cases, only, it is possible to submit a Foreign Language Report from a native speaker. Also, indicate how the reference was completed (e.g., an interview, general conversation, written materials). Such a reference should be completed in a professional manner.

Foreign language forms are NOT necessary for countries where English is a national language or if a foreign language is not required by the country ([see “Country Summaries” on IIE Fulbright website](#)). If your project requires knowledge of another language, you must submit an evaluation and report in that language, *whether or not the Country Summary indicates the language is required for application*. If language forms are not required, but your language skills are strong, it is recommended you submit these forms regardless, as language proficiency can strengthen your application overall. If your project requires skill in more than one language, you may submit a separate language forms for each language needed.

For more details, please visit Foreign Language Evaluation section:  
<http://us.fulbrightonline.org/applicants/application-tips/academic>

### IV. TRANSCRIPTS

Submit official transcript(s) from all institutions you have attended since high school. You are to upload your transcript—either a scanned official copy or an official electronic copy—directly to the online system. You can (and are recommended to) request an official electronic Stanford transcript through Axess; this version is an acceptable format for Fulbright. Please follow the protocol for transcript upload provided on the online application system. **(More information on the online application system and the requirements for the campus deadline is in the next guide, The Process of Applying.)**

### V. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Remember that all of your materials have to be read by the national screening committee. Too much material that is not directly relevant to the application will be discarded.

Relevant Supplemental information would include:

- Letters of support from institutions, overseas researchers, and/or prospective sponsors or mentors.
- Copy or summary of any questionnaire that will be part of your research. Make an effort to limit it to one page.

Material that is questionable would be:

- Papers that you have written that touch on the subject of your proposal.
- Additional references beyond the three required letters. Do not submit four reference letters!



- General letters from the country concerned that do not indicate the possibility, for example, of access to archives, research clearance or acknowledgement of availability of faculty contacts.

### **Supplementary Materials for Candidates in the Arts ONLY**

Candidates in the creative or performing arts are evaluated first and foremost on the basis of their supplementary materials. Therefore, be sure to submit your finest work possible, with the best possible quality of reproduction. Follow the specifications for supplementary materials on the sheet accompanying the application form (Form 11). Don't forget to label every item with your name, country, and field of study.

All arts supplementary materials are submitted online through Decision Desk. See webpage for more details: <http://us.fulbrightonline.org/required-supplementary-materials-for-arts-applicants>

### **LAST THOUGHTS**

- Plan ahead and manage your time well. This process won't seem overwhelming if you stay on top of things.
- Details! Whether it's completing your application or following-up on your references, pay attention to the details! There should be no typos in your entire application. Don't risk looking sloppy or lacking in seriousness of purpose.
- Read the next guide in the series, *The Process of Applying*, which discusses the logistics of the application process.

We close with one last piece from our file of accumulated wisdom:

*“Good luck, and have a good time. If you don't go into it wanting to have a good time, it's not worth it. The application takes a good amount of your and others' time (We would recommend spending a lot of time on the essay) so you should make sure you want to have fun. You should also have a little blind confidence tempered with a very serious consideration of whether or not you have a chance. Chances are you've got a chance.”*