



INFORMATION FOR
NATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP
CANDIDATES

1851

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Overview of the Application Process

Although each scholarship, fellowship, grant and award has its own specific application requirements, the general process is much the same for all.

One rule holds true for every step in the process: **START EARLY!**

It is never too early to begin considering the role nationally-competitive scholarships may play in your future. The earlier in your academic career you begin considering the possibility of competing, the sooner you can begin taking advantage of opportunities that will make you a more competitive candidate. Members of the National Scholarship Team are delighted to meet with first-year students to discuss how they can begin preparing themselves to compete for major awards.

Step One: Find the Scholarship Program that Fits You.

Explore the “Scholarship Profiles” on this web site and consult with a member of the National Scholarship Team to determine which scholarships are a good fit for you. Consider both your past experiences (do you have the credentials they require? or will you, by the time you plan to apply?) and your future goals (do you really aspire to participate in the kind of project the award will fund?)

Step Two: Meet with the Resident Faculty Advisor

Once you have identified a scholarship, meet with the resident faculty advisor for that program. See “National Scholarship Team” or “Scholarship Profiles” for a listing of advisors. If you plan to apply for a nationally-competitive scholarship for which there is no designated faculty advisor on campus, please contact Jody Roy, Assistant Dean of Faculty, who will arrange an advisor for you.

At this stage, the faculty advisor will help you obtain copies of the formal application documents. Together, you will create a plan for your application process, complete with

interim deadlines. The advisor also will notify the National Scholarship Team of your intentions and insure that a variety of campus resources are available to support your efforts.

Step Three: Gathering and Preparing Materials

Depending on the scholarship, you may need to submit any or all of the following:

Completed Application Form

Follow directions! If the instructions say “use black ink,” then use black ink!

- **Answer all questions.** An incomplete application normally will be disqualified.
- **For scholarships that fund graduate school or semesters at an international university, indicate the specific program you hope to attend.**
Work closely with the resident faculty advisor for the scholarship to insure not only that the specific academic program meets your goals, but also that you meet its admission criteria and that it is eligible for scholarship funding.
- **Be honest and don't over-state your credentials.** Remember, a good application may result in a face-to-face interview. If your application claims, “Fluent in German,” don't be surprised if a scholarship interviewer asks you questions in German!
- **The Type-Writer Challenge.** A few prestigious scholarships still require typed applications, a real challenge for students who've never actually touched a typewriter. Fear not: if you need to submit a typed form (that cannot be downloaded and prepared on a computer) a member of the college's secretarial staff will be made available to assist you.

Official Transcript

Official transcripts are issued only by the Office of the Registrar. Read application requirements carefully to determine if you are to send a transcript stamped “official” by the Registrar with your application package or if you are to request that the Registrar mail the transcript separately to the scholarship program. Allow the Registrar’s office at least two weeks to process your transcript.

Letters of Reference

Cultivating References

All nationally-competitive scholarships require detailed letters of reference from faculty. Of course, faculty can only provide details if they know you very well. Consider the following ideas to cultivate the kinds of relationships that foster high-quality letters of reference.

Get to know all of the faculty members in your major field(s), not simply your academic advisor

Discuss your research, interests, and outside activities with faculty during office hours.

Attend department events. Receptions for guest speakers, even your department’s annual picnic or softball game, provide great opportunities for you to interact with faculty.

You may need at least one reference letter that speaks to the diversity of your academic interests and the breadth of your abilities. The best way to cultivate a quality reference for that purpose is to enroll in two or more classes with one faculty member outside your major field(s).

Take at least one class with a faculty member who advises a group, club, or team to which you belong. By letting that faculty member observe you both inside and outside the classroom, you are cultivating a reference who can speak to the diversity of your skills and interests.

Far in advance of your application deadline, ask particular professors if they will be willing and able to write a letter of reference for you. Understand that sometimes the answer may be “no.” A faculty member might decline your request if they do not believe they know you well enough to write an effective letter on your behalf; in other cases, pre-existing commitments may make it impossible for them to write for you (i.e. they may already be writing for another candidate for the same award and, thus, have a conflict of interest).

At least a month prior to your application deadline, provide the faculty members who have agreed to write your letters of reference with 1) a description of the scholarship program and its specific selection criteria, 2) a copy of your completed application including your personal statement, 3) a current copy of your resume or curriculum vitae, 4) a copy of your transcript, 5) a statement of your short- and long-term career aspirations (may be part of your personal statement), and 6) explicit written instructions for how they are to submit the letter of reference.

Make yourself available to faculty who are writing your reference letters. Offer to meet to answer questions they may have. Be prepared to provide additional information quickly if requested.

Most faculty will greatly appreciate a deadline-reminder (or two) as the date approaches.

Once a faculty member has submitted a letter of reference on your behalf, it is courteous to send a thank-you note acknowledging the time the professor devoted to helping you achieve your goals.

Resume or Curriculum Vitae

Some scholarship programs ask that you submit a formal resume or curriculum vitae as part of your application materials. The Office of Career Development will be happy to assist you in constructing your resume or c.v.

A few general tips to keep in mind:

Proof-read, proof-read, proof-read! Whether it is going to a scholarship committee or a prospective employer, resumes must be error-free.

Organize the main categories on your resume in order of importance to the person who will be reading it. For scholarship applications, structure your resume to mirror the order in which the scholarship program lists its selection criteria. For example, if they publish selection criteria in the order academic merit, community involvement, and leadership potential, organize your resume with Education as the first section, Volunteer Activity second, and Leadership Experience third, with other categories following. Also, consider where you place particular experiences. An internship with a non-profit might be located under Education (if you received credit), under Volunteer Activity (if it was unpaid and for a non-profit), or under Leadership Experience (if you had some managerial duties.) Where you place that internship on your resume should be a strategic choice based on the scholarship's criteria.

Design your resume to speak in terms of skills-developed and goals-achieved, rather than just listing roles or duties you've been assigned. For example, under your involvement with a living group, instead of simply listing "Community Service Chair, 20012-2013," try:

Community Service Chair, 2012-2013

Organized seven service projects, which involved a total of 32 students in community outreach

Wrote press releases; secured local media coverage for four events

Met with United Way representatives to discuss future collaborations

Created and maintained a service calendar for group members

Be selective. You do not need to include every experience you've ever had on your resume. Highlight those that speak to the criteria on which you'll be evaluated by the scholarship's selection committee. In doing so, though, be careful to avoid creating significant gaps in chronology. The summer job you took waiting tables last year should not be listed amid the research assistantships you held before and after it, but it should be noted somewhere (perhaps in a brief "General Work History" section toward the end) so that the committee isn't left wondering why you seemingly "disappeared" for three months.

Generally, only national honors or achievements you earned in high school should appear on your resume.

Think very carefully about the contact information you put on your resume (and on all scholarship application materials.) If you have a roommate, can that person be trusted to convey messages accurately and immediately? Will you still have a campus phone number or an active Ripon email address by the time you learn the results of a graduate scholarship decision? Do you really want the Rhodes Scholarship representative to email you at your "goofyboy3000" account?

Personal Statement

One of the most important parts of any nationally-competitive scholarship application is your personal statement. Keep these general principles in mind as you develop a draft:

Go into the process knowing that you will develop many drafts of your personal statement. The resident faculty advisor for the program, other members of the National Scholarship Team, your academic advisor and even your friends and family members can give you valuable feedback as you work to strengthen your personal statement. Ask different people to read your statement with an eye toward particular issues: your academic advisor is likely the best person to assess how well you are voicing your specific plans for research while in graduate school, but your parents may be able to provide the most useful feedback on a section that details how your interests in a subject developed in the first place.

Show your passion for your area of study. Discuss both your track-record and your future goals related to the proposed course of study or project. Let the reader share in the excitement you derive from your work.

Do not simply repeat in essay-format the content of your application form and/or resume.

If the application materials indicate that you should answer a specific question or take a particular focus in your statement, do so!

Select two or three of your strongest qualifications for the scholarship to feature throughout your personal essay. Resist the urge to discuss all of your amazing qualities: focus on those few qualities that truly demonstrate your fit with the scholarship program's mission.

Be specific. Don't make general claims about yourself, your research, or your future without backing them carefully with concrete evidence. Specific examples are persuasive; a laundry-list of unsubstantiated claims is not.

Your personal statement should display your personality as much as it details your qualifications for an award. Although the essay must conform to standards for formal writing, it should also make the readers feel as if they know you, as if they are listening to you speak directly to them, from your heart, about your academic goals and career ambitions. Remember, it's a personal statement, not just a statement.

Avoid jargon or vocabulary that might be field-specific unless you know, for certain, that all members of the selection committee are experts in your specific academic sub-field. If in doubt, err on the side of common terms rather than specialized vocabulary.

Write to engage, not to impress. Your personal statement should leave readers wanting to meet you, wanting to learn even more about your work, and wanting to help you fulfill your dreams. Effective personal statements are confident, not cocky, in tone.

Project Proposal

If a scholarship, fellowship or grant will fund your pursuit of a specialized course of study, particular research or community-service project, its application procedures likely will require you to detail not only your fitness for such work but also the work itself.

Funding For Courses of Study

Most scholarship applications require you to identify the particular program of study you will pursue if you win. Unfortunately, scholarship committees and admission committees do not always follow the same calendars. You may have to prove you will be admitted to an academic program before you actually are able to apply for admission!

If this rather confusing situation arises during your application process, the National Scholarship Team can help you navigate your way to a solution. In some cases, you may need to take the GRE or other placement examinations earlier than usual so that you may submit scores as part of your scholarship application. You, or your advisor may need to contact the admission office of the university you hope attend and ask if they might be able to provide a non-binding letter of provisional acceptance based on analysis of your transcript and test scores.

Funding for Research Projects

Fellowships and grants designed to fund specific research projects normally will require that you submit a detailed project proposal as part of your application. Work with both the resident faculty advisor for the program and with your academic advisor to develop this proposal. Generally speaking, such proposals will require the following information:

- a detailed description of the work you plan to do
- an explanation of the significance of that work both to your academic field and to your development as a scholar
- a time-line for completion of the work
- an itemized budget
- assurance that the project can be completed successfully with the resources you will have available
- proof that you have the necessary qualifications and skills to accomplish the project

Funding for Community-Service Projects

Nationally-competitive grant and scholarship programs that fund specialized community-service projects usually require proposals similar to those for research grants (see above). A primary difference involves community affidavits. Be prepared to gather letters of support for your proposal from any government officials, community leaders, and/or non-profit organization executives whose cooperation you will need to bring your project to life. As far in advance of your application deadline as possible, arrange meetings with the various officials, provide them with a copy of your proposal, and clearly explain how your work will benefit the constituents they serve. Understand that they may need to seek out several levels of authorization within their organization before endorsing your project.

Step Four: Submitting Materials

Deadlines are absolute in the world of nationally-competitive scholarships. There are no extensions and no exceptions. Be certain you know the deadline and its details. Specifically, if your application is to be submitted in hard-copy, must it be post-marked by a particular date or received by that date? With so much at stake, if you are dealing with a “received by” deadline, it is wise to ship your materials early via certified mail.

Each year, more and more scholarship programs are moving to electronic applications, which can pose unique challenges in terms of deadlines. Allow yourself plenty of lead time just in case, for example, an up-load fails to load because of systems incompatibilities. Do not assume your electronic application has been received, or is complete, until you receive formal confirmation from the scholarship program.

Step Five: Interviewing

The most competitive scholarship programs require face-to-face interviews. If you are a candidate for one of those scholarships, the National Scholarship Team will help you prepare. Also, take advantage of National Scholarship Program events designed to groom you for just such interviews, like the annual Board of Trustees Reception.

Step Six: Notification

You will be notified by telephone and/or in writing of the scholarship committee’s decision on your application. If you receive the award, meet with the resident faculty advisor as soon as possible to discuss your next steps. Be forewarned: for some nationally-competitive scholarships, the application process pales in comparison to the paperwork and planning you must do after you win! Depending on the program, you may need to arrange travel visas, register for coursework at a graduate school, or actually begin work on the research or community-service project you proposed in your application. The resident faculty advisor will help you map out a plan for success.

If you are notified that you did not win the scholarship for which you applied, do not despair! Meet with the faculty advisor to discuss how you might use the experience (and even some of the materials you prepared) to apply for a different scholarship or grant.

Building Award-Winning Transcripts

Grades do count. Virtually all nationally-competitive scholarships consider GPA as a first-level criterion.

Grades aren't everything. It's not just how well you do in classes, but also what classes you take that selection committees evaluate. Scholarship winners' transcripts reflect not simply excellence within a major field, but also a diverse array of challenging electives. When selecting courses, consider what those classes say about your level of curiosity, your willingness to take risks, to challenge yourself in new ways. Enroll in courses outside your "academic comfort zone." Pursue electives above the 100-level in a variety of disciplines.

- Opt for research-intensive courses. Both within your major(s) and in electives, seek opportunities to conduct research and to learn the processes of academic writing and presentation. Work with faculty members to prepare class papers for submission to academic conferences.
- Spend a semester off campus. Many national scholarship and fellowship programs enable you to travel, whether to spend a year or more at a university in another country or to engage in research at a laboratory or library somewhere in the United States. Students who already have spent time away from campus—and have succeeded in an academic program while away—have a proven track-record when it comes to adapting to new circumstances. As a member of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM), Ripon College provides students with a variety of fully-accredited off-campus semester opportunities. Contact the Office of the Registrar for more information.
- Study a foreign language. Many scholarships and academic honors require coursework in a foreign language. Even those that do not require foreign language courses look very favorably on candidates who have pursued language studies beyond graduation requirements. Elective enrollment in foreign language studies demonstrates a student's appreciation for other cultures.*
- Continue in mathematics. Even if it is not required for your major, a semester, or more, of college-level math says a lot about your level of intellectual discipline.*

*Most students who demonstrate potential to compete for national scholarships have the grades to be considered for election to national honor societies. Significantly, though, grades alone are not enough to guarantee admission to such groups. For example, Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest and most prestigious undergraduate honor society in America, places heavy emphasis on studies of mathematics and foreign language in its wide-

ranging liberal arts requirements. A 4.0 student who chooses not to study a foreign language will not be admitted to Phi Beta Kappa.

Developing a Research Agenda

Most nationally-competitive scholarships, fellowships and grants exist for the purpose of encouraging and enabling student research. As such, selection committees are looking for candidates who have developed a clear research agenda and who have consistently pursued that agenda throughout their undergraduate career.

That said, what is a “research agenda?” A research agenda is simply an over-arching question that drives your intellectual work. Whether you are conducting original research in your major field or writing an essay in an elective course, that question informs most of your studies.

For example, a biology major’s research agenda may center on the question: “Can environmental influences over-ride genetic traits?” Within her major, she may conduct a variety of laboratory experiments related to that question; some may consider the influence of the physical environment, some the social environment, but all ultimately relate in some way to the question, “can environmental influences over-ride genetic traits.” In elective coursework, the student brings the liberal arts approach to her research agenda. In a philosophy course, she might write an essay about the ethical implications of genetic testing. In a sociology course, she might conduct survey-research about family and peer influences on decision-making. In a politics course, she may author a paper about federal restrictions on particular types of genetic research.

As a student at a liberal arts college, you have an incredible advantage when it comes to developing a research agenda: you will be encouraged to pursue answers to your question not only within your major, but across a variety of academic fields!

As a student at a college that only serves undergraduates, you have another important advantage: the opportunity actually to engage in research independently and in collaboration with faculty members. At most universities, only graduate students have those opportunities. At Ripon, you have those opportunities. Here are some ways you can make the most of them:

When you write a paper or prepare a scientific poster presentation that receives very positive feedback from faculty, inquire about the possibility of submitting your work to an academic conference.

Participate in summer research opportunities. Ripon College has several programs in place that fund student-faculty summer research collaborations. Some faculty members have grant funding to hire student research assistants. The Associated Colleges of the Midwest and other academic groups also support student research. Talk to your academic advisor, the Director of Career Development, and the Dean of Faculty to learn more about opportunities that may be available to you.

Become a Departmental Assistant. Work-study students assigned to academic departments often get an “insider” view of faculty research. Watch how faculty members pursue their own professional research agendas.

Attend Faculty Scholarship Series presentations and even Brown Bag Lunches to see how faculty construct research projects and disseminate their results.

Take advantage of every opportunity to learn about the protocols of academic research in your field of study. Read the leading scholarly journals in your field with an eye toward both content and form: what topics and methodologies are emerging on the cutting-edge of the field? what stylistic and structural conventions of writing do published authors follow? Attend research conferences; observe how scholars in your field present the findings of their research to their colleagues. If undergraduate memberships are available and affordable, join one of your field’s state, regional or national professional organization. Sign up for listservs in your area of study, in particular those that post “calls” (for publication and conference opportunities) and “RFPs,” or requests for proposals for research grants. Study RFPs and work with faculty at Ripon who are writing grants to familiarize yourself with the process.

Demonstrating Leadership

Leaders win nationally-competitive scholarships. Some students lead by holding elected offices on campus. Some lead by forming new student organizations. Some lead by taking action, on their own, to solve a community problem. Some lead by conducting innovative research.

Most scholarship selection committees take a broad approach in how they define leadership. But no matter how it is defined, leadership always involves having a vision and taking action. You can display leadership in a variety of ways.

- Become a mentor for the Collaborative Learning Center
- Hold an elected office in a living group or student organization
- Serve as captain of an athletic team
- Become a peer-contact through Student Support Services
- Organize a new club on campus to get other students involved
- Tutor or coach K-12 students
- Represent the student body on a faculty committee or on the Alumni Board
- Run for Student Senate
- Become a Resident Assistant
- Find a summer job or internship that includes some managerial responsibilities
- Volunteer with community organizations that will allow you to take lead on a project

No matter what kinds of groups and activities you involve yourself with, the key to real leadership is using your role to make a difference. How can you use your skills and talents to make the group better, to serve the community, to improve the world?

Set ambitious goals for yourself and document your progress toward achieving them. That record of success will be powerful evidence of your leadership skills when presented as part of a scholarship application.

Making a Difference

Scholarship selection committees look for candidates who have exceptional minds and also exceptional hearts. Students who engage themselves in volunteer activities, community activism and outreach display the sort of character deserving of national recognition.

Ripon College is a great place to develop your volunteer spirit! The opportunities for community engagement are almost unlimited here.

- Contact the Office of Community Engagement to sign up for on-going volunteer events
- Participate in an “Alternative Spring Break”
- Enroll in courses that use service-learning pedagogies
- Lead your living group, club or team in a new philanthropy project
- Join a civic organization in the City of Ripon or in your hometown
- Become an advocate for a non-profit organization by joining the Ripon Speakers Bureau
- Become a mentor to a child, through an after-school program like BRAVE or through Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Take the initiative to organize a food or clothing drive on campus
- Raise awareness for a cause you believe in by hosting an informational event on campus
- Spend a Maymester in Jamaica with the Blue Mountain Project
- Intern with a not-for-profit organization
- Whether you someday win a national scholarship or not, volunteering will enrich your life!

Diversifying your Activities

Well-rounded students win nationally-competitive scholarships. Selection committees reward candidates who maintain excellent grades in challenging courses of study while, at the same time, excelling in a variety of activities outside the classroom.

To enhance your chances of receiving a prestigious scholarship, it is critically important that you participate in a diverse array of activities that reflect your many interests. However, do not simply join every club on campus! Selection committees want to see that you are significantly involved in activities that really mean something to you.

A good way to approach this, without overwhelming yourself with commitments, is to select one activity in four different areas - academic, social, community and physical - and then give those four specific activities your full attention. For example, you might participate in Ethics Bowl (academic), join a living group (social), volunteer at the Ripon Food Pantry (community), and play varsity or even intramural basketball (physical).

The key to grooming yourself for nationally-competitive scholarships and preparing yourself to lead a balanced and fulfilling life is to identify a few very different activities you really enjoy and give them your all!

Preparing for Scholarship Interviews

Some scholarship selection committees conduct face-to-face interviews with finalists. If you are pursuing a scholarship that requires interviews, the resident faculty advisor for that program will help you prepare with a series of practice interviews. Additionally, some National Scholarship Program events, like the annual Board of Trustees reception, are designed to let you practice the kind of informal, social-hour interviewing that often takes place the night before your formal interview.

However, there are many things you can and should do to prepare yourself for interviews long before you even apply for a major scholarship.

Read! Some scholarship selection committees have been known to ask candidates, “what is the last book you read that was not assigned for a class?” Some college students get so caught up in required reading that they forget to read simply for the joy of losing themselves in a novel or to learn about a subject unrelated to their coursework. Don’t make that mistake—read, read, read.

Keep current. You’ll likely be asked to share your opinions about national or world events, in particular those that relate to your major area of study or research agenda. What are your opinions on current events? Why do you feel that way? Scholarship interviewers want to meet candidates who have their own well-reasoned opinions; they are not looking for a student who simply gives pat-answers he believes will please the interviewers.

Reflect on why you’ve made particular decisions—to go to Ripon? to major in one field and minor in another? to play a varsity sport? to volunteer for a certain cause? Remember, scholarship interviewers already know what you have done from your application; when they meet with you, they want to hear why you have made the decisions that have shaped your life.

Know the history and purpose of the scholarship for which you are interviewing. Be prepared to seat your academic and career goals into the specific aims of the scholarship program.

Really think about your future. Where do you see yourself in five, ten, forty years? Why do you want to achieve those goals? How will your success benefit others? your academic

field? your community? the world? Exactly how will receiving this scholarship help you meet your goals? What will this scholarship allow you to do in service of your goals that you would not likely be able to do otherwise?