Funding your Way through Graduate School

October 9, 2014

Rebecca Haacker, SOARS Director
Today's Webinar

- How do I pay for graduate school?
- What is the difference between departmental research and teaching assistantships?
- Which scholarships and fellowships can I apply to?
- When are the deadlines, how do I apply?
- How do I submit a competitive application?
The good news about student loans!

AGI Geoscience Workforce Program; Data derived from AGI's Geoscience Student Exit Survey; Figure created by Kathleen Cantner

Status of the Geoscience Workforce 2014
No more work study in grad school!

AGI Geoscience Workforce Program; Data derived from AGI's Geoscience Student Exit Survey; Figure created by Kathleen Cantner
What is an RA?

- Research Assistantship
- Being paid to do research
- Usually funded from an advisor’s research grant
- 20 hours a week

Pros:
- Focus on research that leads to your thesis work
- Research experience and (hopefully) publications

(potential) Cons:
- You are tied to a specific research topic (make sure you like it!)
- No teaching experience
And what is a TA?

TA = Teaching Assistantship
• Teaching or assisting professor with a class, grading
• Tutoring, running labs
• Usually funded by department

Pros:
• Gain teaching experience
• Independence from a specific research grant

(potential) Cons:
• Depend financially on the department
• Less research experience
• High workload!
Institutional Scholarships

• In addition to RAs and TAs

• Schools have scholarships and fellowships for graduate students

• Option 1: Apply for these individually

• Option 2: They get awarded as part of the graduate admission process
Negotiating a package

Once you have an offer, things to ask or think about:

✓ Can you live on this stipend?

✓ If not, are you able to accept other awards with this funding?

✓ Are tuition & health care covered?

✓ How is conference travel funded?

✓ Will you have access to the resources you need?
Great external fellowships – but you have to apply!
Portable Fellowships

• Funding can be used at the school of your choice.
• They are usually competitive and require essay applications.
• Many Fellowship applications are due late October or early November!

Some examples:
• National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowships: http://ndseg.asee.org/
• AMS Graduate Fellowships: https://www.ametsoc.org/amsstudentinfo/scholfeldocs/gradfellowshipprogram.html
• DOE Computational Science Fellowship: http://www.krellinst.org/csgf/
• Hertz Foundation Fellowship: http://www.hertzfoundation.org/

Comprehensive list of opportunities at http://www.pathwaystoscience.org/Grad.aspx
NSF Graduate Research Fellowship

- Highly prestigious, only 2000/year across all science disciplines

- 3 years of support, $32K/year + tuition + access to extra resources (e.g. super computers)

- Requires “Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement”, “Graduate Research Plan Statement” + transcripts, letters of references

- Closing dates: October 29 – November 4 depending on discipline

- [www.nsfgrfp.org](http://www.nsfgrfp.org)
Ford Foundation Fellowship

• Aimed at increasing diversity and representation in the nations colleges and universities

• 3 years of support for PhD, $24K/year + funding for attending Conference of Ford Fellows

• Requires statements of previous research, proposed plan of graduate study, personal statement + letters of recommendation and transcripts

• Closing dates: November 19 for pre-doctoral program

http://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/fordfellowships
Writing strong applications

Read the details carefully:
• Are you qualified?
• What do you need to cover in your essays?

Demonstrate your potential as a researcher through:
• Your past experience
• Your plan for graduate research

Your personal background may or may not be relevant.

Some fellowships are looking for ‘broader impact’:
• Demonstrate commitment to diversity/mentoring/outreach.
How to propose a research idea

- Be specific, but not too specific about your interests in your grad school applications
- If the professor you want to work with doesn’t have funding, are your interests too narrow to work with someone else?
- Most fellowships and graduate schools don’t tie you to the research that you propose in your application
- Some movement within the general field is expected as you start your graduate work and become more familiar with the field.
Letters of Recommendation

Good references: Professors in science, computing, engineering & math who know you, employers in research jobs, previous internship mentors

Bad references: Family & friends, academic advisors or counselors, teachers, non-science bosses

- Share your application essays and info about the program with your references
- Give them time to write a good letter
- Remind them of upcoming deadlines
Final words of advice

- If you don’t apply, you can’t win the award
- Start early
- Use your network
- Get paid to do something that you love!

Questions?