

Funding for Dissertation Research

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Grants vs. fellowships

Grants fund a specific research project; they primarily provide costs related to the project, but may sometimes include living expenses (e.g., for fieldwork).

Fellowships fund graduate or postdoctoral study (or the writing up of a book/project); they provide a stipend, tuition for study, and, occasionally, minimal research support.

Funding sources: University internal vs. external

External funding comes from sources outside the university, usually from the federal government and private foundations.

Internal funding comes from sources in the university, e.g., a research center, department, school.

Identifying the right funding

Pros and cons of the two funding types:

- Internal grants usually provide smaller amounts of funding than external grants.
- Internal grants often involve simpler, shorter applications than external grants.
- Internal grants usually receive quicker decisions than external grants.
- Internal grants can be good for “seed” projects.

Important: Applications for federal and some foundation grants **must** go through your university’s Office of Sponsored Research; check with your department staff before beginning such a proposal.

Other criteria to consider in choosing grants to apply for

- Restrictions relating to stage in your graduate career: e.g., dissertation grants.
- Citizenship status: Many opportunities are only available to US citizens and permanent residents.
- Limitations on the types of items that the grant/fellowship will fund.
- For fieldwork: Length of field visit may limit options.

How to find out about funding opportunities

- Look for university-internal sources: school, centers, programs.
- Check with a center or archive that you may want to visit.
- Check for foundations/organizations related to the part of the world that your research involves.
- Look at funding databases (see below).
- Ask your professors.

Where to look for funding opportunities

- Searchable databases of grants and fellowships. (e.g., at Columbia, Cornell, Duke, UCLA)
- COS Funding Opportunity database (by subscription)
- Stanford's linguistics-oriented list
Additions welcome!
- UC Irvine list of fellowships in cognitive science

See handout for URLs.

Major funding sources

- AAUW American Dissertation Fellowships
- American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowships
- Fulbright Grants for Study or Research in Academic and Creative and Performing Arts Fields
(Application process involves selection by the university)
- Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad
- National Academy of Education/Spencer Dissertation Fellowships
- National Academies Ford Diversity Dissertation Fellowship
- NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants (DDIG) in Linguistics

When to start looking for funding

The bottom line: Start the application process **early** as the entire process can take many months!

- Most grants/fellowships have only one submission date a year, often in the autumn.

What this means: To get funding for July 2013, you may have to submit your application in early autumn 2012.

- Writing a successful application takes considerable time.

What to do before submitting an application

- Familiarize yourself with the application guidelines.
- Ask whether models of successful applications are available.
- Take advantage of local workshops on grant/fellowship applications.
- Ask for and listen to advice.

What makes a successful proposal

“An outstanding dissertation proposal will clearly specify the leading research questions and hypotheses, the data relevant to answering those research questions, the theoretical framework being used and the methods of analysis. It will provide a brief literature review and a clear workplan. It will also address the NSF review criterion of broader impacts.”

(From the NSF Linguistics DDIG page;
<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/bcs/ling/suppdiss.jsp>)

On writing the proposal

- **Above all:** Start from the research question, not from your perceived needs. (DDIG handout)
- Explain why the project is important.
(This isn't the same as saying it hasn't been done.)
- Make the description accessible to non-linguists.
- Spell everything out.
- Make clear you have the right background and experience.
- Show your dissertation research is well underway.
(See below on timelines)
- Don't make the project too big.
- Be sure to ask for advice and get feedback.

(See handout for list of sources of good advice)

The timeline

- **The bottom line:** Make it realistic!
- **Starting date:** before or at the application deadline.
- **Grain size:** in months, not quarters or semesters!
- **For dissertation year fellowships:**
 - *Before the oral:* Allow for several drafts, comments on the drafts, and pulling entire document together.
 - *After the oral:* Allow for revisions, final reading by committee, proofreading, and formatting.
- If reference letters are requested, be sure you and your references agree about your timeline.

Be persistent!

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