

# How One Institution Collaborated Internally to Increase Success with the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship (GRFP)

Presenters:

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**University of  
New Hampshire**



# What is the GRFP? Goals and Key Elements

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- To select, recognize, and financially support individuals early in their careers with the demonstrated potential to be high achieving scientists and engineers
- To broaden participation in science and engineering of underrepresented groups, including women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans

## **Five Year Award to individual students – \$138,000**

- Three years of financial support
  - \$34,000 Stipend per year
  - \$12,000 Educational allowance to institution
- **2010 - 2015:** 2,000 Fellowships each year
  - 2015: 16,000 Applications - ~12.5% success rate





# Why Universities Should care about GRFP

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- High quality graduate students (US citizens, nationals, perm. residents) selected by an independent national competitive process
- Fellows become knowledge experts who contribute significantly to research, teaching and innovations in science and engineering
- Fellowship support gives Fellows greater independence: time and freedom to do their own research (flexible, unrestrictive, portable)

## GRFP Successes

- Higher Ph.D. completion rates
- Greater % of women and URM than national population of PhD completers

## Since 1952

- 50,000 Fellows
- 42 Nobel Laureates
- 450 Members of the National Academy of Sciences





# GRFP Complete Application

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## NSF FastLane

- Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement (3 pages)
- Graduate Research Statement (2 pages)
- Transcripts (uploaded electronically)
- Three letters of reference (received by X Nov 2015, 8 pm EST)

DEADLINES: October/November 2015 (received by 8 pm EST)

See GRFP Solicitation for application details and requirements



## Promoting GRFP on Campus

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- Establish “GRFP champions” at university admin level
- Publicize GRFP on campus: focus on domestic students, undergrads and beginning grad students
- Identify faculty willing to mentor applicants
  - Encourage faculty to register to serve as reviewers for GRFP
- Establish peer mentoring system
  - Formal courses, informal advisement
- Hold workshops
  - Find faculty advisors and Fellows willing to participate
- Utilize GRFP’s web resources



## GRFP on Campus

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- Promote benefits of GRFP to undersubscribed departments
  - Juniors (REU), seniors, beg. grad students
- Partner/engage with Honors College, REU Site Coordinators
- Reach out to GRFP Resource People on [www.nsfgrfp.org](http://www.nsfgrfp.org)
- Engage local/campus GRFP Coordinating Officials  
([www.fastlane.nsf.gov/grfp/](http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/grfp/))
- Support courses on science communication, proposal writing, include peer review



## GRFP Resources

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- NSF GRFP Website ([nsf.gov/grfp](http://nsf.gov/grfp))
  - Solicitation and links
- NSF GRFP FastLane Website ([fastlane.nsf.gov/grfp](http://fastlane.nsf.gov/grfp))
  - Application, guides, announcements
- GRFP Website ([nsfgrfp.org](http://nsfgrfp.org))
- Current & former Fellows
- Phone & e-mail
  - 866-NSF-GRFP (673-4737)
  - [info@nsfgrfp.org](mailto:info@nsfgrfp.org)



# History and Development of UNH program

- Partnership between UNH Graduate School, Office of National Fellowships and Research Office
- Before 2013, grad school was hosting info session with little follow up
- Research Office recognized that a single office did not have the capacity to run a comprehensive GRFP preparation program for students
- Bottom Line – in 3 years our program had helped create a cohort of 10+ NSF Graduate Research Fellows at UNH



# Current Program

- Information Session
- Writing and Application Workshop
- Faculty Reference Letter Session
- Individual Conferences
- Drafting/ Editorial Assistance
- Writing Boot Camp
- Pizza Party
- Celebration of Winners/ Honorable Mentions
- Re-applicant Session
- Broader Impacts Session for Rising Sophomores and Juniors

# Information Session

- Hosted by Grad School, Office of National Fellowships, and Research Office
- Typically ~70 students
- All grad students in eligible disciplines invited
- All seniors with 3.7+ GPA invited
- Other seniors with recognized potential invited
- Play GRFP webinar
- Panel of fellows current as well as a successful advisor
- Distribute brochures

# Writing the Application

- Writing Workshops:
  - Hosted by Jeanne Sokolowski and myself
  - 2 sessions, about 20 students/ session
  - Talk about crafting a personal essay - writing tips
  - In depth explanation of IM/BI
  - Q&A dinner with current fellow
- Individual Conferences with Applicants:
  - Meet one-on-one at least once with each applicant
  - Ask questions about student's background to help them shape personal essay
  - Can be a bit of a therapy session
  - Help students recognize previous BI activities



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# Writing the Application (cont.)

- Drafting Process:
  - Review multiple drafts of both essays
  - Work with RD Grad Interns
    - Have background in English
    - Help with personal essay
- Writing Boot Camp:
  - Get a group of students together on a Saturday to work together
  - Good, collaborative working time
  - Advisors available to answer questions

# Faculty Resources

- Faculty Reference Letter Lunch:
  - Invite all advisors and potential reference letter writers
  - Not all faculty familiar with NSF - focus on IM and BI
  - Share letters from winning applications with letter writers
  - Bring in faculty who have served as GRFP reviewers
  - Encourage faculty to serve as GRFP reviewers
- Letter Review:
  - Provide edits on faculty letters
  - Ensure letters align with student applications – especially important for advisors

# Post Submission

- Pizza Party:
  - After due dates, all applicants and advisors invited
  - Grad School Dean and VPR offer congratulatory remarks
- Celebration of Winners and Honorable Mentions:
  - Ice cream social
  - Press release
- Creating a cohort of UNH NSF Graduate Research Fellows



Email Print Text

## Graduate Students Win Prestigious Fellowships

Year Marks Best Showing Ever in NSF Fellowship Program

Thursday, May 9, 2013



### Headlines

- In the Classroom
- Sneakers to
- A Morning Co

### Editor's Pick

#### CAMPUS LIFE



Research  
Results

#### IN THE COMMUNITY



UNH  
Award  
Psychology

#### CAMPUS LIFE



Accel  
Seth  
Man

# Increase in Applicants/ Winners/ Hon Mentions

- 2010 - 1 awardee (UG) – no info on applicants
- 2011 - 1 awardee (UG) – no info on applicants
- 2012 - 0 awardees – no info on applicants
- 2013 - 20 applicants, 4 awardees (4 Grad), 1 HM
- 2014 - 34 applicants, 5 awardees (3 Grad, 2 UG - 1 now current UNH Grad), 3 HM
- 2015 - 29 applicants, 3 awardees (2 Grad, 1 UG), 3 HM



# Overall goal to make students more competitive in general

- Finding funding for research
- With graduate school applications
- Broader Impacts - giving back to society
- Grant writing class for Grad Students
  - The GRFP shouldn't be the only funding mechanism for which graduate students apply

# Spring Coaching Sessions

- Broader Impacts Session for Rising Sophomores & Juniors
  - Inform them that the opportunity exists
  - Get students to start thinking about BI early
  - Panel of campus BI contacts attends for presentation / Q&A
- Re-applicant Session:
  - Bring potential re-applicants together
  - Discuss reviews/ strategies for next application
  - Talk about how potential BI activities before next application

# Other funding mechanisms for GRFP applicants

- DOE CSGF
- NDSEG (through DoD)
- EPA STAR
- SMART
- Ford Foundation
- Switzer
- Hertz
- Nancy Foster

# Discussion and Questions

Contact for more information: [michael.thompson@unh.edu](mailto:michael.thompson@unh.edu)

