



MAJOR SCHOLARSHIPS: GUIDE FOR PFW FACULTY AND ADVISORS

**PFW Office of
Major
Scholarship
Advising**

**Major Scholarships:
Guide for PFW Faculty and Advisors (2024)
By Noor Borbieva O'Neill, Ph.D.
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A Letter to Colleagues

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Dear Colleague,

The Office of Major Scholarship Advising (OMSA) at PFW provides intensive, one-on-one advising to ambitious and high-achieving PFW and IUFW students and alumni and IPFW alumni as they apply for highly competitive external scholarships and internships.

Faculty and advisors play a key role in the success of these applicants. Even the best PFW students often do not see themselves as worthy of applying for a major scholarship. OMSA relies on faculty and advisors to identify these students. Behind every PFW student who has won a major scholarship is at least one academic mentor who encouraged them.

I have written this guide to provide information about how you can work with OMSA to help deserving students. The guide includes information about the most popular scholarships, how to identify potential applicants, and how to support students who apply.

Please contact me with any questions you have about major scholarship advising. I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Noor Borbieva O'Neill, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Major Scholarship Advising
IIE Fulbright recipient (Kyrgyzstan)
Professor of Anthropology, Purdue Fort Wayne

OMSA's Mission



1. Provide information about major scholarship competitions to the PFW community; publicize deadlines for major scholarship competitions.
2. Work with students and alumni to identify scholarship opportunities that are appropriate for them.
3. Work with applicants to improve their application materials.
4. Provide institutional nomination or endorsement where competitions require it.
5. Provide advising to help students meet their long-term professional and educational goals.

What is a Major Scholarship?



- **Highly competitive.** Most award rates are below 30%. Many are below 10%.
- **National/international.** Applicants come from all over the country or all over the world.
- Supports outstanding **educational and professional opportunities**, including travel, language learning, and Ph.D. study.
- Many have **high name recognition**. E.g.: Fulbright, Rhodes, Gates, Marshall.
- Major scholarships rarely support professional degrees (e.g., in law, medicine, business) or Master's degrees.

The OMSA Top Ten

Most popular Scholarships with PFW Students

INTERNATIONAL

- [Boren Scholarship](#): Supports a semester or full year of undergraduate study abroad, including language study, in a State Department-designated “strategic” region. Deadline: January.
- [Critical Language Scholarship](#): Supports a summer intensive language program abroad. “Spark” scholarship supports an online summer intensive language program to study Arabic, Chinese, or Russian. Deadline: November.
- [I.I.E. Fulbright Student Grant](#): Supports a year of graduate-level study, independent research, or teaching abroad. Deadline: October.
- [Gilman International Scholarship](#): Awards up to \$5,000 to support undergraduate study abroad. Deadline for spring start: October. Deadline for fall start: March.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND TEACHING

- [Carnegie Endowment Junior Fellows Program](#): Supports a one-year, post-graduate internship at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington DC. Deadline: January.
- [Truman Scholarship](#): Supports graduate work in a public service field. Deadline: February.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MATH

- [DAAD Rise](#). Summer internship in a STEM field in Germany (German language not required) for undergraduate and graduate students. Deadline: December.
- [Goldwater Scholarship](#): Up to two years of tuition support for STEM undergraduate students who intend to pursue a graduate research degree. Deadline: January.
- [Hertz Foundation Scholarship](#): Funding to support a Ph.D. in a STEM field. Deadline: October.
- [NSF Fellowships](#): A variety of opportunities available to support students in STEM fields. Deadline: Varies.

Qualities of a Competitive Applicant

AMBITION

- Has expressed a desire to excel professionally.
- Has expressed an interest in graduate school, especially Ph.D. study.
- Has a strong work ethic; is willing to set goals and dedicate time and effort to achieving them.
- Displays a growth mindset; takes criticism well, is committed to self-improvement, and is not easily discouraged.

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE

- Has expressed an interest in travel, including study abroad and language study.
- Has some background studying foreign languages.

A RECORD OF SUCCESS

- Has a high GPA (preferably over 3.75).
- Has worked with a faculty mentor on research.
- Has written exemplary research papers, whether for a class or independently.
- Has presented or published their research.
- Has a record of leadership.

Identifying Potential Applicants

Faculty and advisors should discuss the following with prospective applicants to identify those with the most potential:

1. The student's record of academic, extra-curricular, and professional accomplishments.
2. The student's intellectual and professional interests and goals, both short-term and long-term.
3. The student's interest in receiving a scholarship or funded internship.
4. A potential timeline: Is the student ready to apply right away? Is it better to wait a few years so that they can get more experience and clarify their goals?
5. Collaborative projects faculty and the student could work on and that would give the student research experience.
6. The student's motivation, recognizing that applying for a major scholarship is a LOT of work.

Referring Students to OMSA

STEP 1: Review the list of popular major scholarships (pg. 4-5) to identify opportunities that are appropriate for your students.

STEP 2: Identify students who exhibit qualities that make them competitive (pg. 6). Not every student will have every quality, but students who exhibit several are a good fit for major scholarships advising.

STEP 3: Have one-on-one conversations with selected students to discuss their interests and goals (pg. 7).

STEP 4: Encourage promising students to connect with OMSA and/or refer students using the online [survey](#) or by contacting the director (pg. 9-10).

How students can contact OMSA



- Schedule a meeting with the OMSA director using the online [scheduler](#) (link on OMSA website).
- Submit a request to be contacted using the online [survey](#) (link on OMSA website).
- Email the director: omsa@pfw.edu
- Call the director: 260-481-6266.

Students can find more information about OMSA, including the four-part webinar, “Introducing OMSA,” on the OMSA web site:

<https://www.pfw.edu/omsa/>

How faculty and advisors can contact OMSA



- Take the faculty and advisors [survey](#) to submit student referrals (link on OMSA website).
- Schedule a meeting with the director using the online [scheduler](#) (link on OMSA website).
- Email the director: omsa@pfw.edu
- Call the director: 260-481-6266.

The Application Process



The application process for any major scholarship is a lot of work. It takes patience, determination, and commitment. Applications are submitted online, and every major scholarship has a different system with different deadlines.

Students should start preparing an application three months ahead of the earliest deadline. This gives the student time to identify and secure letter writers, order transcripts, and work through several drafts of their essays.

The director of OMSA helps students prepare competitive applications. Within the application, the most time-consuming component is the essay(s). This component usually includes a statement of purpose and may include a project proposal. Students must explain why they want the scholarship and how the scholarship will help them professionally.

Award Rates (selected)



- Carnegie: 5%
- Critical Languages: 10%
- Fulbright: 20%
- Gilman: 25%
- Goldwater: 32%
- Hertz: 2%
- Truman: 8%

Past Winners (selected)



2021

Fulbright—Chelsea Bihlmeyer

2018

Fulbright—Kyler Hudson

2017

Fulbright—Nathan Brophy, Cody Fuelling

2016

Fulbright—Alexander Allison

2014

Carnegie—Chayenne Polimedio

Goldwater—Micah Rapp

2013

Gilman—Sadie King-Hoffmann

2012

Phi Kappa Phi—Hiu (Alan) Tse

2011

USA Academic Team—Jennika Laird

Suggestions for Reference Letter Writers

Faculty are often asked to write reference letters for students they have mentored. OMSA recommends that mentors only agree to write letters when they know a student well and believe the student is deserving. It's easy to spot lack of enthusiasm in a letter, and it will hurt the student's chance of winning.

A strong letter does the following:

- Explains how the writer knows the applicant and for how long. (Did the applicant take a course with you? Help you with research?)
- Identifies the applicant's strengths in clear terms.
- Provides examples from the writer's experience that illustrate these strengths.
- Explains why the opportunity is important to the applicant given their professional and intellectual goals.
- If the competition supports research or research degrees: Explains the significance of the applicant's proposed project in the relevant field.
- (Optional) Provides information about unique challenges or experiences the applicant has faced that might not be appropriate coming from the applicant but that reflect positively on the applicant.

FAQs

Q: Can non-PFW students work with OMSA?

A: OMSA is funded by PFW's Office of Academic Affairs to work with PFW students and alumni, IUPUI students and alumni, and IPFW alumni. PFW applicants are not eligible for advising until they matriculate. Students and alumni of other Purdue campuses are not eligible for advising from OMSA unless they enter a degree program at PFW. Purdue West Lafayette students should seek advising from their campus's scholarship advising office.

Q: Can OMSA help PFW students fund their PFW studies?

A: Some study abroad scholarships (one is the [Gilman](#)) can be used to pay for credits students will use toward their PFW degrees. Only one of the Top Ten scholarships provides tuition support to students while studying at PFW (the [Goldwater](#), a STEM scholarship for undergraduates interested in research). Students looking for financial support for their studies at PFW should contact the Office of Financial Aid and work with their advisors. Students should also set up and monitor an account on [Scholarship Universe](#).

Q: Can international students apply for major scholarships?

A: International students (students without US citizenship or permanent residency) will be eligible for only a few major scholarships. This is because many major scholarships are funded by the U.S. government. Please encourage your international student who wants to apply for scholarships to communicate their immigration status to me (the OMSA director). Note that a few scholarships are geared toward students who face challenges related to immigration status (e.g., DACA students).

Q: Can I give this guide to students who I think are a good fit for a major scholarship?

A: OMSA publishes a Student Guide and will provide it to any student you refer. A four-part webinar covers the same information as the Student Guide. It is available on the [OMSA website](#).

Q: What if none of the Top Ten scholarships is a good fit for students I know?

A: The Top Ten scholarships listed in this guide are the most popular scholarships with PFW students. If students have identified other scholarship competitions that they would like to participate in, OMSA may be able to advise them, depending on the nature of the competition. OMSA also helps students use major funding databases to identify appropriate opportunities.

Q: Does OMSA submit students' applications for them?

A: Some scholarship competitions require institutional nomination, and in these cases, the director of OMSA will finalize students' applications and when needed submit an institutional recommendation letter or endorsement.

Otherwise, students are responsible for submitting their applications on time and correctly.

Q: What should I tell students who have doubts about applying because they fear they won't win?

A: Students gain much from the process of putting together an application, even if they don't win, including clarifying intellectual interests and professional goals and improving writing skills. Students can use what they learned throughout their lives. As director, I am motivated as much by a desire to develop students' professional potential as by a desire to win any individual competition.

Students should understand that it is extremely difficult to predict individual applicants' chances. Selectivity for most awards varies from year to year, and evaluators' experience and subjective judgement can play a large role in selection. I let students know if I have any doubts that their application will be competitive or if they are behind in the preparation. Students should always have alternative plans set up in case they don't win.

Students should also understand that putting together a competitive application takes a lot of time. PFW students often juggle many commitments, and many of them won't have time to put together a competitive application.

Note that some competitions require institutional nomination. Occasionally, I have had to inform students that an application is not competitive enough to merit institutional endorsement.

Q: How often do applicants meet with the director of OMSA?

A: Ideally, applicants start working with me about 3 months before a deadline. Initially, we meet every few weeks. About one and a half months before a deadline, meetings will be more frequent (once a week to once every other week). Students who start later should anticipate more frequent meetings.

Q: What other expectations do you have of the students you work with?

A: Students should demonstrate professionalism throughout the preparation process. This includes but is not limited to:

- Undergraduates should address me using my professional titles.
- Students should drive the application process, including requesting appointments with me. Other than occasional nudges, I do not chase students down or try to convince them to apply for scholarships.
- Students should be spending time on applications between meetings. This work might include editing essays, communicating with letter writers and host institutions, ordering transcripts, and completing online forms.
- Students should follow up with me after competition results have been announced. Often students do not want to communicate disappointing results, but the mission of OMSA is to help students achieve their professional goals whether or not one individual opportunity works out. A debrief and discussion of next steps are recommended.



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