

Frequently Asked Questions

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Fellowship types

What is a fellowship or scholarship?

A fellowship or scholarship provides a recipient with funds to support academic study or research. Some also cover living expenses, books, and travel related to the fellow's area of interest. Fellowships exist at the undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, and professional level. Many of those listed on the FASA site are aimed at graduating seniors, though some are open to current graduate students or alumni.

Where can I study with these fellowships — U.S. only or abroad?

Both options exist. The NSF GRFP and NDSEG support graduate study within the United States. The Fulbright, Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, Gates Cambridge, Schwarzman, and Watson fellowships fund study or independent exploration abroad. Some, like the American-Scandinavian Foundation grants, are limited to specific regions (Scandinavia). The Bishop Fellowship funds organized summer programs abroad; applicants may not study in a country where they hold citizenship.

What is the Bishop Summer Study Abroad Fellowship and how is it different from the others?

The Amasa Bishop Fellowship is a Caltech-internal award (not a national competition) that funds current freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to study abroad in an organized program for two to ten weeks during the summer. Budgets are capped at \$7,000 and must cover airfare, fees, housing, and all other costs. Unlike research fellowships, it funds structured summer programs run by reputable universities or organizations — not independent research or internships. U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and international students may all apply.

Eligibility

Who can apply — undergraduates, graduates, or both?

It depends on the specific fellowship. Most major awards (NSF GRFP, Fulbright, Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, Watson) target graduating seniors and/or first year graduate students. Some, like the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship, accept college seniors through second-year grad students. The Bishop Summer Study Abroad Fellowship is open to current Caltech freshmen, sophomores, and juniors.

What fields of study are eligible?

Many major fellowships focus on STEM disciplines — particularly the NSF GRFP (natural sciences, math, engineering, behavioral sciences), NDSEG (science and engineering), and NDSEG SMART Scholarship (specific technical fields). Others are much broader: the Fulbright Study-Research grant, Watson Fellowship, Marshall Scholarship, and Rhodes Scholarship support virtually any graduate field. The Ford Foundation Fellowship covers behavioral and social sciences, humanities, biological sciences, math, physical sciences, and engineering — but not professional degrees, fine arts, or education.

Are there inclusive fellowships?

Yes. There are many beyond the list on our site, you are welcome to inquire to our office for additional information.

International students

Do I need to be a U.S. citizen to apply?

Many fellowships — including the NSF GRFP, NDSEG, Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, and Fulbright Study-Research grants — require U.S. citizenship or, in some cases, permanent residency. However, the FASA site maintains a dedicated page for international students listing opportunities that do not require U.S. citizenship, such as the AAUW International Fellowships, A*STAR scholarships, Google PhD Fellowship, and others. The Bishop Fellowship (internal to Caltech) is open to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and international students.

What fellowships are available for international students?

FASA has a dedicated section for international students. Opportunities include the Fulbright Program for Foreign Students (apply through your home country's embassy), AAUW International Fellowships (for women), A*STAR Graduate Academy scholarships, Josephine de Karman Fellowships (open to students at U.S. universities regardless of citizenship), the Meta Research PhD Fellowship, and many others from industry, government labs, and scientific societies.

Funding & awards

What does a fellowship typically cover financially?

Funding packages vary widely. Major graduate fellowships generally cover some combination of: full tuition and fees, a living stipend (ranging from roughly \$24,000–\$40,000 per year depending on the award), health insurance allowances, book allowances, and travel grants. For example, the NSF GRFP provides a \$37,000 stipend plus a \$16,000 annual cost-of-education allowance; the NDSEG covers full tuition, a \$3,200/month stipend, and up to \$1,200 for medical insurance. Caltech-specific awards like the Bishop Fellowship cap budgets at \$7,000 for summer study.

How long do fellowship awards last?

Duration depends on the award. The NSF GRFP and NDSEG each last up to three years; the DOE Computational Science Graduate Fellowship covers up to 48 months; the Hertz Fellowship can extend to five years.

International study fellowships are typically shorter: the Churchill Scholarship funds one year at Cambridge, the Marshall Scholarship funds one to two years in the UK (with a possible third year), and the Watson Fellowship is one year of independent travel and exploration. The Bishop Summer Study Abroad Fellowship covers two to ten weeks.

Are these fellowships based on financial need or academic merit?

Most major fellowships are merit-based, not need-based. The Hertz Fellowship, NSF GRFP, NDSEG, Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, and Watson awards all select on academic achievement, research potential, and personal qualities. A few awards do consider need alongside merit — for example, some Ford Foundation and AAPG Foundation grants factor in financial circumstances.

Deadlines & timing

When are fellowship application deadlines?

Most competitive graduate fellowships have fall deadlines, typically between October and early November — earlier than most graduate school application deadlines. This means applying for fellowships gives you a head start on your graduate school essays.

Institutional deadlines for awards requiring Caltech endorsement (like the Rhodes, Marshall, or Watson) are usually several weeks before the sponsor's national deadline. The Bishop Summer Study Abroad Fellowship deadline for 2026 is March 1. Always verify current deadlines directly on the sponsor's website.

Application process

Which fellowships require institutional endorsement from Caltech?

Several prestigious awards require an institutional endorsement or nomination before you can submit to the national competition. These include the Rhodes Scholarship, Marshall Scholarship, Churchill Scholarship, Watson Fellowship (Caltech nominates up to 3 students per year), Gates Cambridge Scholarship (endorsement recommended), and Knight-Hennessy Scholars. You must apply through FASA's internal process first and meet Caltech's campus deadlines, which are earlier than the national ones.

How competitive are these fellowships?

Highly competitive. The NSF GRFP receives tens of thousands of applications annually. The NDSEG receives over 10,000 applications each year. The Hertz Foundation interviews about 19% of applicants and awards only 10–15 fellowships annually. The Rhodes Scholarship, Marshall, Churchill, and Gates Cambridge programs are similarly selective. That said, even unsuccessful applicants benefit significantly from the application process, which parallels graduate school applications in essay writing and letters of recommendation.

What does the application process typically involve?

Most fellowships require: a personal statement or research proposal essay, letters of recommendation (usually 2–3), academic transcripts, and in some cases, interviews. Awards requiring institutional endorsement also require a Caltech-internal application reviewed by FASA before the campus nomination deadline. Some, like the Churchill, require the fellowship application to be submitted alongside a Cambridge admissions application.

Can I apply for multiple fellowships at the same time?

Yes, and it's encouraged to apply for several. However, some fellowships have rules about coordination or deferral. For example, the Knight-Hennessy Scholars program cannot be deferred or coordinated with other fellowships such as the NSF GRFP, Fulbright, or Marshall. Some fellowships also prohibit holding another named fellowship simultaneously (typically federal fellowships). Check each award's rules carefully.

What resources does FASA provide to help with applications?

FASA offers advising appointments and the FASA Library holds winning essay examples for fellowships like the Hertz, NSF GRFP, and NDSEG. The office also hosts information sessions and budget workshops (e.g., for the Bishop Fellowship).

Is applying for a fellowship a lot of extra work on top of grad school applications?

Less extra work than it might seem. If you're already applying to graduate school, the essays and letters of recommendation required for fellowships are closely related — both ask you to articulate your professional goals and research plans. The main difference is timing: fellowship deadlines are typically in the fall, giving you a head start on the graduate school process. Even if you don't win, the application process is genuinely useful preparation.

Does FASA advise on research grant proposals?

No. FASA advises on graduate fellowship opportunities for undergraduates and early-stage graduate students but does not advise on research grant proposals. For grant proposals, contact your department or division office, your research advisor, the Hixon Writing Center, or the Office of Sponsored Research.