



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22230

NSF 16-051

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for DCL NSF 16-050, Change in Eligibility to the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP)

1. Why did NSF change the eligibility rules for graduate students, restricting them to a one-time application?

The intent of the fellowship award is both to recruit diverse cohorts to go to graduate school and to retain talented graduate students in the early stages of their graduate education. For this reason, NSF has emphasized early-career applicants. Because the undergraduate population of students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is more diverse than the population of graduate students (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2015/nsf15311/digest/theme3.cfm#mindegrees>), encouraging senior undergraduates to apply should increase the diversity of the applicant pool with respect to women, underrepresented minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans, as well as the breadth of institutions involved.

Over 16,000 applications were submitted to the 2015 competition. In 2015, half of the second-year graduate student applicants (making up one-third of all applicants) had applied the previous year as a first-year graduate student. The new eligibility restriction will: 1) result in a higher success rate for GRFP applicants, 2) increase the diversity of the total pool of individuals and of institutions from which applications may come through an increase in the number of individuals applying before they are admitted into graduate programs, and 3) ease the workload burden for applicants, reference writers, and reviewers.

2. How will this change in eligibility impact the distribution of GRFP fellowship awards to applicants enrolled in graduate school and to those not currently enrolled in graduate school?

Since 2001, when eligibility was extended to all second-year graduate students in addition to undergraduates and first-year graduate students, the proportion of undergraduate senior applicants has fallen from 41% to 25% of the applicant pool, leading to a corresponding drop in the number of awards to individuals not currently enrolled in graduate school. The change in eligibility for graduate students should result in an increase in the proportion of fellowship awards offered to applicants before they decide to go to graduate school and before they choose a graduate program and institution, allowing fellowship awardees to take full advantage of the program's benefits. The benefits include the portability of the award to be used for graduate education in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) at any institution in the U.S. to which they have been accepted and the flexibility of using their three years of support over a five-year period.

3. How does the proposed change impact undergraduate applicants?

The change in eligibility rules applies to graduate students only. It does not affect the eligibility of undergraduates or of bachelor's degree holders without any graduate study.

FAQS FOR APPLICANTS

- 4. I applied as a first-year graduate student in fall 2015, before this new eligibility guideline was introduced. Am I eligible to apply in fall 2016 as a second-year graduate student?**

Yes. As the new policy is phased in, first-year graduate students who applied in fall of 2015 and are otherwise eligible to re-apply in fall of 2016 are eligible to apply in fall 2016. All other graduate students are subject to the new eligibility restriction for graduate student applicants.

- 5. I applied for a GRFP fellowship as a graduate student in 2012. I will be a returning graduate student in fall 2016, with a master's degree obtained over two years before the 2016 GRFP application deadline. Does this new eligibility restriction impact me?**

No. The new eligibility restriction will not impact you, as you are currently limited to one application as a returning student with a graduate degree.

- 6. I applied for a GRFP fellowship in fall 2015 as a senior undergraduate student. Does this new eligibility guideline impact my eligibility to apply to future GRFP competitions?**

Yes. As soon as you start graduate school you will be subject to the new eligibility restriction. You will need to be strategic and consult with your graduate program advisors about the timing of your application to a GRFP competition. As a graduate student in your first year, you should consult with your advisors to assess if you have already demonstrated strong evidence of excellent potential through achievements, activities, research experiences, and plans at your current stage, or whether such evidence is likely to be stronger next year.

- 7. I am a senior undergraduate student who did not apply for a GRFP fellowship in fall 2015. I plan to apply as a first-year graduate student in fall 2016. Does this new eligibility guideline impact my eligibility to apply to a GRFP competition?**

Yes. As soon as you start graduate school you will be subject to the new eligibility restriction. You will need to be strategic and consult with your graduate program advisors about the timing of your application to a GRFP competition. As a graduate student in your first year, you should consult with your advisors to assess if you have already demonstrated strong evidence of excellent potential through achievements, activities, research experiences, and plans at your current stage, or whether such evidence is likely to be stronger next year.