

Funding Your Graduate Education

*Elly Van Mil, Ph.D.
Director of Extramural Funding
MU Graduate School*

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As you make the decision to enter graduate studies at the University of Missouri–Columbia, it is likely that among your first questions is how to fund your studies and cover the costs of your living expenses. This handbook is designed to assist you with information about nearly all options you should investigate and pursue. It includes detailed information about how to identify programs and prepare proposals for funding from extramural sources if you choose this route.

Options for funding

Among the frustrations in seeking funding is to not know whether you have all the requisite information at hand so you can make an informed decision about which funding options you will pursue. The following list essentially identifies nearly all sources. Additional information will be provided in the pages that follow.

- ♦ Personal Funds -- yours, your family's, or a benefactor's.
- ♦ Loans -- credit union, bank, federal student loan programs
- ♦ Fellowships from MU sources: Graduate School, Department, College, Financial Aid
- ♦ Teaching Assistantship
- ♦ Research Assistantship
- ♦ Graduate Assistantship
- ♦ Employment on Campus
- ♦ Employment off Campus
- ♦ Self-employed Services
- ♦ Awards from Extramural Funding Sources
- ♦ Conference Travel Funds
- ♦ Dissertation Research Travel Funds

Benefits of some funding options

Additional financial benefits accompany several of these funding options, such as receiving an educational fee waiver and having part or all of the premiums for accident and sickness insurance paid for you as the student, and the option to pay the premium for your dependents, plus discounts at MU bookstores and other campus shops. These benefits are not available to you when you use personal funds, loans, self-employment funds, or for some positions on campus. More details are provided in the following pages.

If you receive an award from an extramural funding source, this provides significant advantages. It will have an impact when you submit funding proposals in the future and ultimately in your job search, especially if you are likely to seek employment at an educational institution, a public service organization, or a non-profit agency.

Strategies that Promote Success

Strategies that will promote your success in affording your graduate education, without relying on loans, are the following:

- ♦ Take an active role in securing funds for graduate school. Investigate all options thoroughly and, if possible, set aside time to apply when you are not in the midst of completing a semester. Be creative and persistent in obtaining information and identifying sources of funding.
- ♦ Apply early and apply for all sources of support simultaneously, not merely in the order of your preference. If you delay, you may not meet a deadline or get your first choice. You cannot win an award or be appointed to an assistantship if you don't apply.
- ♦ Don't overlook small funding (\$200 to \$1000) options. All award amounts provide funds that will help to cover the cost of supplies and books and an opportunity to learn how to prepare proposals and to develop a credible record of funding proposal successes.
- ♦ Keep copies of everything you submit in applying for funding or positions. There is always the possibility that something can be lost.
- ♦ Consider on-campus graduate housing. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages: situated close to libraries, classrooms and labs; meals are provided so you do not need cooking supplies or having to cook and clean up; and you are housed with other graduate and professional students who, like you, have a serious attitude toward completing their degree program.
- ♦ Apply for Missouri residency through the Residency Office after you have lived in Missouri for one year. This will reduce your educational fees by approximately two-thirds.
- ♦ Take advantage of special discounts offered to students such as the 10 percent discount at the University Bookstore for students with teaching or research assistantships, or discount tickets for students for concert series tickets or for other campus events, and discounts offered to MU students by various local businesses.

Obtaining need-based financial aid loans

This option initially requires less effort and initiative, but eventually is more painful. When you have completed your degree program, or if you choose not to continue your education, you will be obligated to begin repaying your loans. In addition, there is a maximum amount that you can obtain from any source. So, it is important that you exercise caution so you will not have an excessive amount of loans to repay. However, many graduate students find it necessary to secure low-interest federal loans or bank loans to pay for their educational expenses. On average in the past few years, more than 1,300 graduate students at MU obtained federal loans exceeding \$13 million, for an average amount of more than \$10,000 per year per student.

Before you make a decision about obtaining a loan, it is important that you consult with your financial aid advisor in the Student Financial Aid Office, 11 Jesse Hall, to obtain all the information about this option and the process. Be sure to indicate that you are seeking funding for graduate education. In order for you to have your money available by the start of the fall semester, be sure to mail your FAFSA by March 1, and read the instructions carefully. To calculate the amount you are qualified to receive, a formula established by Congress is used to determine how much you and your family are expected to contribute toward the cost of your education. This is called your expected family contribution (EFC). This amount is the same no matter where you attend college. In making a decision about how much of the amount that you are allowed to receive, it is important for you to realize that if you receive funding from other sources, this will directly affect the amount of loan funds you can obtain.

Who is eligible to apply for federal financial aid funds?

To qualify for financial aid, a student must meet the following criteria:

- ♦ Be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or an eligible noncitizen.
- ♦ Enrolled at MU in a degree-seeking program. The only non-degree graduate students who can receive federal loans are those who are pursuing a teaching certificate.
- ♦ Making satisfactory progress in completing a degree program, according to U.S. standards.
- ♦ Enrollment is required, and the loan amount available depends on whether it is full time or part time.
- ♦ Not be in default on any federal educational loan.
- ♦ Not owe a refund on any federal educational grant.
- ♦ Attend an entrance counseling session.

Financial aid loan programs

Some programs such as the Pell Grant and MU Student Grants, which support undergraduate students, are not accessible to graduate students. The options for graduate students and specific criteria for eligibility are outlined below. If you are an international graduate student, you cannot receive support from federal loan programs, but you do qualify for some Graduate School fellowships and for many extramural funding programs, and you should check with the International Center to identify other sources of funding reserved for international students. For any of the following options, graduate students must complete the FAFSA Form to determine how much they can receive.

William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program—Subsidized (FFDL-S)

- ♦ Eligibility for borrowing from this program is determined by the results of the FAFSA.
- ♦ The yearly maximum you can borrow is \$8,500, and the cumulative maximum is \$65,500.
- ♦ The interest rate is variable with an 8.25% cap, and the federal government pays the interest as long as you are enrolled at least half-time and during the 6 month grace period.

William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program—Unsubsidized (FFDL-U)

- ♦ The amount you can borrow is determined by the results of the FAFSA and the cost of education minus other financial aid or support.
- ♦ The yearly maximum is \$10,000 plus any yearly amount not borrowed on the FFDL-S, but not to exceed \$18,500 for the two programs.
- ♦ The interest rate is variable with an 8.25% cap.
- ♦ Students are responsible for the interest while enrolled and it allows a 6 month grace period that can be deferred.

Federal Perkins Loan Program

- ♦ This program is restricted to out-of-state students.
- ♦ Eligibility is determined from the FAFSA and the availability of federal funds at the university, after FFDL-S/FFDL-U has been used. Funds are borrowed from (and repaid to) the university.
- ♦ Yearly maximums are set by the Financial Aid Office, but not to exceed the \$6,000 federal maximum.
- ♦ The interest rate is 5%, but it is interest free while enrolled and during the 9 month grace period.

Obtaining need-based financial aid loans

Federal Work Study

- ♦ Eligibility is determined by the FAFSA, but cannot be offered to teaching or research assistants, and only after FFDDL-S/FFDDL-U eligibility has been used.
- ♦ MU has only a small number of work study opportunities for graduate students.

Caution: Any additional support you receive from other sources will affect how much financial aid you are entitled

to receive for a specific academic year. For example, if your allowable amount for loans at the beginning of the academic year is set at \$8,000, and you subsequently are awarded a fellowship or assistantship, this can create a situation in which you have used your federal loan funds for needed expenses but that, with the additional award, you will be required to return some of those funds. It is important to communicate with your financial aid adviser about the potential for having this happen to you.

MU fellowships and scholarships

The primary advantages of receiving a fellowship or scholarship award are that you do not need to repay the stipend, it may enable you to concentrate on your studies without being employed, and you receive a fee waiver and medical insurance coverage as well. There are fellowship opportunities from various sources, and you should investigate the options from all sources:

- ♦ Some departments have fellowship opportunities available for students. Check with the Director of Graduate Studies or the departmental administrative assistant.
- ♦ Student Financial Aid administers a variety of fellowship programs, many of which are designated for specific fields or for students who are from specific locations.
- ♦ Graduate School Fellowship Program: The Graduate School administers ten fellowship programs: six for doctoral-level students, two for doctoral- and master's level students, and two for master's level students.

Awards for doctoral level students are for five years, with support annually of at least \$13,500. Master's level awards are \$5,000 for one year from the Graduate School, plus at least an equal amount from the department during the first or second year. The departmental contribution is often an appointment as a teaching or research assistantship. All fellowship recipients also receive a fee waiver (both in-state and out-of-state) and coverage of medical insurance. The process for considering candidates for fellowships begins with the department submitting nomination materials to the Graduate School. Students cannot apply directly to the Graduate School. Guidelines that describe eligibility criteria and the process, and nomination forms are on the web at: <http://www.missouri.edu/~gradschl/financial/fellowships/mufellschol.htm>

Assistantships

Teaching assistantships (TA) and research assistantships (RA) are arranged only through departments, so it is important to investigate the availability of these positions by inquiring about opportunities of the director of graduate studies, department chair or department staff. In most departments the decisions about TA positions are made early in the spring for the following academic year. RA positions are often made available during late spring to commence during the summer.

The potential advantages of being assigned an assistantship that qualifies include receiving a waiver of educational fees (both resident and nonresident, but not incidental fees), receiving coverage of insurance for yourself (with the option of obtaining coverage for your dependents), being integrated into the department's teaching and research community, and obtaining valuable experience with teaching college courses in your field, a valuable

apprenticeship if a college teaching career is your goal. The various options that departments offer for these kinds of appointments are established within the department, and can include the following:

- ♦ **Graduate Instructor (GI)** —This title is offered in very few departments, but designates advanced graduate students with experience teaching sections of the courses they are assigned as a GI, with various levels of independence and indirect faculty supervision.
- ♦ **Teaching Assistant (TA)** —This is a title that is more predominant and designates two kinds of assignments. A TA can be responsible for teaching sections of courses with a level of independence and indirect supervision of a faculty member, or assist faculty with teaching undergraduate courses and/or to grade papers or examinations.

- ♦ **Research Assistant (RA)**—This is a title designating an appointment to assist a faculty member with a research project. The primary advantages of such positions are that the RA has an opportunity to develop a valuable mentoring relationship with the faculty member, and to work directly on ongoing research that may offer exciting topics for thesis or dissertation research.
- ♦ **Graduate Assistantships (GA)** are another option especially for graduate students who are not appointed to a TA or RA position, or if they are in a department that does not offer TA or RA appointments. Graduate student assistants normally work 10-20 hours per week

and often can work on a flexible schedule that allows for ample time to meet their course requirements. Opportunities for GA positions can be identified by inquiring in your department and at the Career Center, which collects information from departments campus-wide about needs for part-time assistance, and by checking bulletin board notices on campus, such as at the Graduate School and various divisional deans' offices. In order to qualify for a fee waiver or the insurance coverage, it is necessary that the specific position that you are considering meets the criteria for these programs. To confirm whether it does, check with the Coordinator of the GSSP (Graduate Student Support Program) in the Graduate School.

Other employment options

Additional employment options exist both on campus and off campus. On campus, the Career Center and bulletin boards are useful sources for identifying opportunities. Another option to consider is to serve as a community adviser for a residential hall or student organization, and for these you should contact the Office of Residential Life in Brady Commons. Or, if you have advanced computing skills, especially web-based design capabilities, these are frequently needed in various departments and administrative offices.

However, it is important to remember that if you are considering a benefit-eligible position (3/4 time or more), that you will not be eligible to receive or continue to receive a fellowship or a fee waiver or the insurance coverage.

Self-employment is also an option that many gradu-

ate students choose, primarily because it allows flexibility in their schedules. There is a great demand for educational support services such as tutoring undergraduates in critical courses (mathematics, statistics, chemistry, etc.) or assisting with typing or desktop publishing services. The Campus Writing Program is an excellent source of employment for students who wish to work in their own fields, by serving as a resource for students in writing intensive courses.

Other creative options for self-employment are house-sitting or pet-sitting for faculty or staff, providing transportation, translating documents from a foreign language that you are fluent in to English or vice versa, reading documents onto tapes for disabled students (Access Office), etc. Referrals for additional services frequently follow and provide ample income for students to support themselves.

Funding from extramural sources

The rumors are correct: There are hundreds of funding sources from external organizations that support graduate students in completing their advanced education. But what is not so commonly known is how to identify those sources, nor how to prepare proposals, nor the tremendous advantages that are gained if you submit a proposal and especially if you receive an award.

Advantages of submitting proposals and obtaining extramural funding

When you begin your search for a position, you will have a tremendous advantage if you can demonstrate that

you have experience with submitting funding proposals to external sources. Increasingly today, position descriptions appear to slip in the words "grant-writing experience" as either a required or preferred skill. In addition, if you have received an award from a nationally-competitive program, your subsequent proposals will be considered more favorably than if your credentials don't include this. While you are a graduate student, you are in an optimal position to learn the process of writing funding proposals, a position that it is unlikely you will ever experience again. Not only do you have faculty and staff to assist and advise you, but you have peers who are more favorably disposed to review your proposals and to cheer you on in your endeavor.

Funding from extramural sources

An additional advantage if you are funded and qualify for the Graduate School Incentive Fellowship Program, and you have submitted the short form at the time that you apply, is provided through the Graduate School: 10 percent of the funding amount you receive each year for you, and 10 percent to your department in the first year! Be sure to check this out on our web site at <http://www.missouri.edu/~gradschl/financial/extramural/gsefip.html>.

Caution: It is important to know that you should limit the amount of time you spend on preparing a proposal, not neglecting your studies or other obligations. A good approach to avoiding this is to identify and consult with knowledgeable staff and faculty as much as you can in completing the forms that some programs require and submitting the proposal in time. In addition, if you are not funded you are entitled to receive the reviewers' comments, so ask for them and then resubmit your proposal with revisions that are recommended. Do not translate a rejection as a 'grade'—there are many unknown variables involved in the decisions that reviewers make about proposals.

Steps toward obtaining funding from extramural sources

I. Go to the Graduate School extramural funding web site: <http://web.missouri.edu/~gradschl/financial/extramural/extramural.htm>.

- ♦ Check the electronic Bulletin Board.
- ♦ Conduct a search of IRIS and COS – databases with hundreds of opportunities (you must use an MU server to gain access, and consult the instructions)
 - ♦ Check these databases periodically because new opportunities are added regularly.
 - ♦ Consider your project broadly, using key words that may overlap with other fields.
- ♦ Results of Bulletin Board, IRIS and COS sites: Click on the web sites of identified options.
 - ♦ Review the guidelines, and plan to apply (see tips below).
 - ♦ Do not be misled by "only educational institutions can apply." It means the university must submit your application for you.
 - ♦ Do not be misled by the deadline stated – nearly all have annual recurrent cycle of deadlines
 - ♦ Do not be dissuaded entirely if a foundation will fund projects only for a certain locale— they have exceptions.
- ♦ To receive regular notices of new opportunities and updates that are sent to directors of graduate studies and department contact persons, request that they forward these to you.

2. Check with faculty or graduate student peers who were funded to get their advice

- ♦ Get tips from them for preparing proposals.
- ♦ Ask if they will review drafts of your proposal.

3. Preparing a Proposal for an Established Funding Program

- ♦ Read the Guidelines, Read the guidelines ... read the guidelines.
 - ♦ Obtain assistance with meeting the requirements for submitting proposals for complex federal programs from a faculty advisor or from the Grants & Contracts Administrators or advisers in your college or department.
- ♦ Contact the Program Manager - if one is listed about your proposed research project.
- ♦ Items that will likely be required:
 - ♦ Application Form
 - ♦ Vita / Resume - have a 'working vita' and tailor the 1-2 page proposal vita to the project
 - ♦ Proposal:
 - ♦ Put yourself in the funder's 'shoes.' It should not be written like a master's or doctoral proposal.
 - ♦ Consider the likelihood that your reviewers will have various levels of expertise, from being very knowledgeable to having little knowledge about your research project or your degree program.
 - ♦ What you will do, and how does it fit their objectives?
 - ♦ Why: What significance to your field, to this topic, in light of research already done?
 - ♦ How: activities.
 - ♦ When: time frame.
 - ♦ Where: location and why there.
 - ♦ Who are you: Why are you interested in this topic and what qualifications/energy do you bring to it?
 - ♦ Who will "supervise" (faculty advisors, mentors, etc.)?
 - ♦ What are the benefits for the funding organization, your field, and your career development?
 - ♦ Institutional Review Board Approvals for research projects that involve research with human or animal subjects. Note that even research through interviews and surveys require IRB approval. Check with the Campus IRB Office to obtain guidelines and forms.
 - ♦ Detailed Budget and budget justification. Budget categories can include only those items the guidelines allow, and must be within the

Funding from extramural sources

funding limits. These may include salary or stipend, consultants, travel (includes hotel, meals, and air and ground travel), equipment (\$5,000 +), supplies, and other (telephone, copying, etc.)

- ♦ Letters of Reference should provide information about you that you can't say as convincingly:
 - ♦ Your ability to do this project.
 - ♦ Future prospects for having an impact on your field.
 - ♦ Significance of the project to your field.
 - ♦ Your enthusiasm for the project.
 - ♦ The referees' role in your conducting and completing the project.
- ♦ Transcript(s): Ordinarily a copy is sufficient but be prepared to submit an official copy.

4. Create your own options

- ♦ If you are currently employed and your additional education will enhance your skills for continued employment with this organization, it is likely the company has a fund to help support your endeavor. Also, in these situations there are potential tax advantages.
- ♦ Consider who might be interested in your scholarly research:
 - ♦ Location.
 - ♦ Organizations - public and private.
 - ♦ Individuals.
 - ♦ Publishers - large and small.
- ♦ Research what kinds of projects your potential supporter has funded.
 - ♦ Annual Reports.
 - ♦ Ask. Call a program manager; ask about the fit of your project.
- ♦ Prepare a Letter of Inquiry with the following sections (no more than 2-3 pages):
 - ♦ Why you are writing.
 - ♦ Why they may be interested in providing support -- how your project relates to their interests.
 - ♦ Briefly describe your project -- what you have already completed, what remains to be done.
 - ♦ Briefly describe your qualifications, and resources (faculty mentors, documents, etc.) to show that you are capable of accomplishing what you propose.
 - ♦ Indicate a time-line for completion.
 - ♦ Indicate that a budget is attached.
 - ♦ Propose what you will do for them/what you offer in return for support:
 - ♦ Presentation on site.
 - ♦ Acknowledging their support in all future works related to this project.
 - ♦ Publication of a summary of the project, etc.

- ♦ State that you will be glad to provide a more detailed proposal if they wish.
- ♦ Summary Budget - no more than 1 page long, as an attachment for the letter of inquiry:
 - ♦ Outline your complete budget, indicating other sources of support, actual and proposed, for specific budget items.
 - ♦ Be sure to be frugal; even if an organization found your project appealing, an excessive budget could cause rejection.
 - ♦ Indicate clearly which budget items are crucial to enable you to complete the project.
 - ♦ Provide both a list of budget items, and a budget justification.
 - ♦ Budget categories that you may wish to include are salary or stipend, consultants, travel (hotel, meals, and air and ground travel), equipment (\$5,000 +), supplies, and other (telephone, copying, etc.)

Features of a Winning Proposal

- ♦ Persuasive, interestingly written.
- ♦ Clear and concise.
- ♦ Written in a traditional grammatical style, in an easy-to-read font.
- ♦ Indicates that the project will be diminished if not funded.
- ♦ Suits the Program's stated and/or unstated purposes.
- ♦ Includes all items and addresses all issues that are requested in the guidelines.
- ♦ Reference letters mesh well with supporting proposal and are from different perspectives for your project.
- ♦ Budget is reasonable, almost frugal, well-justified and within the maximum allowed.
- ♦ Reviewed by faculty and peers.
- ♦ Submitted, even if not "perfect." Remember: No proposal that is not submitted is ever funded.
- ♦ Sent on time: Be sure to use an official postmark from a Post Office, not a grocery store outlet.
- ♦ If not funded, obtain reviewers' comments, rewrite and submit again.
- ♦ If this is a re-submission, be sure you have addressed all reviewers' comments.

Travel funding sources at MU

Additional sources of funding that are available at MU are travel funding programs for conference presentations and dissertation research travel. These programs basically cover only the costs of travel – air and ground transportation, hotel and meals. Other costs can be requested but these are not ordinarily covered by these programs. Some departments also provide travel funds for attending and presenting research results at conferences and it is recommended that you check with your department. There are no known extramural sources of funding for merely attending a conference.

1. Dissertation research travel fund – Graduate School

This program is for graduate students who have passed their comprehensive examinations and need funds for travel to conduct research essential for their dissertation. The maximum that can be requested one time only is \$400. The annual deadlines are the 2nd Mondays of March, September and November. Please contact the Graduate School for additional information and forms.

2. Conference travel fund—Graduate School

This program is for graduate students who have passed their comprehensive examinations and need funds for travel to present research results at a professional conference. The maximum that can be requested one time only is \$250. The annual deadlines are the 2nd Mondays of March, September and November. Please contact the Graduate School for additional information and forms.

3. Humanities Graduate Student Travel Award Program

Initially endowed by Dr. Mary Lago, this program is for graduate students in the humanities who have passed their comprehensive examinations and need to conduct dissertation research at special library collections. The maximum that can be requested one time only is \$250. Annual deadlines are the 2nd Mondays of March and September. Please contact the Graduate School for additional information and forms.

4. Graduate Professional Council Travel Scholarship Program

This program is for all graduate and professional students at MU, to present research papers, posters or creative work at a conference or symposium, but not for research travel. Applications are due each year on October 16 and March 12. For more details and forms, check the web site: <http://students.missouri.edu/~gpc/Travel.html>.

5. Graduate Student Association Conference Scholarship Program

This program is for graduate students at the master's and doctoral pre-comps levels, who will present a paper or poster at a professional conference. The maximum that can be requested is \$100. For details and forms, check the web site <http://web.missouri.edu/~gsawww/confguide.html>.

A final tip

Be persistent. If you have questions, be sure to ask someone and if this individual doesn't have an answer, ask who might know. Every department has a staff member who is responsible for budget issues—a likely source of information about budgets. Each college has professional staff assigned to them who are familiar with grants and contracts, associated with the Office of Research. Make an

appointment to consult with one of these individuals. When you meet, be sure to have read the guidelines and have a list of questions prepared so you can have a productive session that answers all if not nearly all of your questions. Last but not least, Best wishes. And happy (successful) hunting for funding.