Fulbright U.S. Student Program Overview

What is the Fulbright?
The Fulbright US Student Program is the largest US international exchange program providing opportunities for students to undertake year-long post-graduate advanced research, graduate degrees, arts projects, or teaching in one of 140+ countries around the world. More than 360,000 Fulbrighters from the US and other countries have participated in the program since its inception in 1946.

Am I eligible to apply for a Fulbright?
To be eligible for a Fulbright grant, you must:
- Have a baccalaureate degree by the start of the grant, be a current graduate student or professional degree student (without a PhD), or be an alumni who holds at least a bachelor’s degree but does not have a PhD.
- Be a US citizen at the time of application.
- Possess language skills for the proposed project (see individual country pages for language requirements, which vary considerably by country).

How do I apply for a Fulbright?
The Fulbright application process begins in March each year, with a UT pre-application (which you will find on the ONSF website) due to ONSF in late April, followed by development of and ONSF feedback/revisions on first drafts of materials over the summer, a UT campus deadline in August, an interview and revision period in September, and a final deadline in October. ONSF and its Fulbright campus committee members support UT Fulbright applicants throughout each step of this process.

What support/resources do I have as I develop my application materials?
Plenty! ONSF is here to support/guide you throughout the application process; however, we are not your sole source of support. Check out at least one Fulbright webinar, which is a great way to hear straight from the Fulbright about what makes a competitive application. Refer over and over to the Fulbright’s Application Components and Application Tips. MANY of your questions will be answered there! ONSF’s guide to Personal Statements is also included below. Visit UT’s Writing Center. Finally, work with faculty in your discipline—especially recommenders—on your Statement of Grant Purpose.

What is required for a Fulbright application?
A complete application will consist of the following.
- Biographical Data (resume information and short answers entered into the Embark system)
- Statement of Grant Purpose (1 – 2-page grant proposal)
- Personal Statement (1-page narrative essay)
- Reference Letters for the Study/Research Grant (3); Reference Forms for the ETA (3).
  - NOTE: Reference letters and forms must be uploaded directly to the Embark system by your recommenders. ONSF’s guidance to Fulbright recommenders can be found HERE.
- Academic transcripts from each post-secondary institution from which you received a degree, as well as transcripts for coursework and grades not reflected on degree-granting transcripts.
Depending on the type of grant and the host country requirements, applicants may also need to submit:

- Letter(s) of Affiliation (see below); Foreign Language Evaluation(s) and Language Self-Evaluation(s); Creative & Performing Arts candidates have required supplementary materials

**What are the different types of Fulbright grants?**

Although there are some exceptions, Fulbright grants generally fall into one of two different categories:

1) Study/Research and
2) English Teaching Assistantships (ETAs). Study/Research awards are those in which applicants design their own projects and will typically work with advisers at foreign universities or other institutes of higher education. These projects are often mentored research projects (and can include supplementary university-level coursework), but can in some instances be for graduate degrees. This varies by country. Creative arts projects also fall into this grant category. The English Teaching Assistant (ETA) places Fulbrighters in classrooms abroad to provide assistance to the local English teachers. ETAs help teach English language while serving as cultural ambassadors for the US. The age and academic level of the students varies by country, ranging from kindergarten to university level. ETAs typically also propose to do a small supplementary project in addition to their classroom teaching. In both types of grants, students apply for one particular country.

**Since I have to choose only one, should I apply for a Study/Research grant or an ETA grant?**

A student with a focused interest in the host country that could be pursued through study or research—often that builds on research you’re doing at UT—should consider a Study/Research grant. (Note: Fulbright is unlikely to provide you with your first-ever research experience.) For ETAs, it is not necessary to have a long-term professional aspiration to teach, although that’s certainly OK. But ask yourself: 1) Do you have some teaching/tutoring/mentoring experience (even if it’s not ESL) that has been meaningful to you? 2) Do you have a sincere desire to attend to the needs of English-language learners in the host country? If so, an ETA might be a good fit. ONSF is happy to weigh in on your decision, too.

**How should I decide which country and award to apply to?**

You might begin by perusing the country pages of potential host countries. This will provide basic understanding of what different host countries are looking for in Fulbrighters (and, perhaps as importantly, what they’re not looking for). See what draws your attention. And don’t overlook some of the niche opportunities the Fulbright provides (e.g., Austria’s “Community-Based Combined Award” … there are others!); sometimes these receive relatively few applications but are terrific opportunities. Relatedly, you might also consult the Fulbright’s statistics, but don’t go overboard. This should be only one of your data points in selecting a country and award. Think first about those especially meaningful experiences you’ve had—studying a foreign language, doing research, working/interning, studying abroad, leading a campus or community initiative, doing service work—and how you might build on those experiences in a post-graduate year abroad. ONSF is here to help you think through your options and offer feedback. It is your decision to make, but we are happy to weigh in.

Study/Research projects should be tightly connected to the host country (i.e., Why do you need to do this research, on the ground, in country X?), while ETA applicants should offer a compelling reason for their interest in the host country. In addition, applicants should demonstrate some understanding of the host country’s culture and possess requisite language skills (see individual country pages for language requirements, which vary by country—from no requirement to intermediate/advanced foreign language...
skills required). A “strong desire” to visit the country or a “passion” for the culture or commitment to “broadening your horizons” is great but, unto itself, insufficient; you’ll need to dig deeper than that—into your interests, story/background, trajectory, motivations—to get reviewers’ attention.

What is a Letter of Affiliation, do I need one, and, if so, how do I get one?

Although it varies by country, most students pursuing Study/Research Grants will need a letter of affiliation … or are at least strongly recommended to get one. (ETAs do not need these letters.) Most Fulbrighters undertaking Study/Research grants will affiliate with universities, although in some countries it is possible to affiliate with other types of organizations such as research institutes or NGOs. Some students will even have multiple affiliations. Refer to the country pages to see what types of affiliations are allowed. The Letter of Affiliation should come from the institution/individual in the host country with whom you’re proposing to work. The nature of an affiliation can vary from project to project and from country to country; consequently, the letters can, too. Be sure you are referring to your country page to see what is expected of an affiliate and who can and cannot serve as an affiliation.

These letters needn’t be lengthy and don’t often exceed a page. In general, here are the things you can share with your contact(s) as you work on getting a host country letter of affiliation, which should be:

- printed on institutional letterhead, addressed to The Fulbright Commission, signed by author;
- indicate who your host is, what they do, and where;
- indicate at least basic knowledge of your project and its aims;
- explain the nature of the connection between you and the host—that is, the support being offered (e.g., access to facilities and/or courses at the institution, consulting/advising on research methods, supervision and/or mentorship, help with networking);
  - Note: These are some common examples, but this is negotiable with your host.
- comment on the feasibility of the project (e.g., in terms of resources, your and/or their relevant technical expertise, project timeline, and, if relevant, local political/cultural sensitivities); and
- show enthusiasm for your project and its value, and for the proposed working relationship.

Don’t be afraid to cast a wide net in trying to secure an affiliation; you might be surprised how far a friendly, succinct introductory e-mail will get you. One primary way to find an affiliation is to ask the faculty/advisors whom you know right here on campus, as many of them have contacts and collaborators overseas. In addition, you might try the following:

- Reach out to past Fulbrighters in your country; use the Grantee Directory to help facilitate this.
- Scour the references list of research papers you are reading in your field; it would make for a compelling application if you were affiliating with someone who’s writing what you’re reading!
- Discuss with ONSF. This is not as difficult as it might seem; it just requires some planning.
- Apply for an ONSF Exploration Grant! The Exploration Grant supports current UT undergraduates—with awards of up to $5000—in their efforts to plan for and establish on-the-ground personal and institutional connections for subsequent post-graduate fellowships applications, with particular focus on the Fulbright, which requires a documented overseas affiliate (i.e., a research adviser) for study/research proposals. This is NOT a study abroad grant. Typically, Exploration Grants are for 3 – 4 weeks, during the summer. Exploration Grant applications must be detailed, focused, and well-planned. The Exploration Grant application is due February 12, 2018: https://onsf.utk.edu/exploration-grant/