



## How to Prepare for Prestigious National Scholarships

### What Are National Scholarships/Fellowships?

Nationally competitive scholarships (fellowships) are incredible opportunities. These are awards funded by national or international organizations which are given for particular goals. Most will pay for a good portion (if not all) of your graduate program and help in your admittance to top schools. In addition, they are a wonderful honor, even if you are a semi-finalist or campus nominee. Finally, applying helps you clarify your personal and career goals, develop writing and interviewing skills, and the process will create ready materials you can use for job, graduate, or professional school applications.

### What Are They Looking For?

- Academic achievements
- Good writing/communication skills
- Demonstrated leadership
- Active commitment to a community, however defined (e.g., school, city, nation, world)
- Plans for graduate school
- Clear career and personal goals
- Undergraduate research (if applicable)
- Promise for the future

### What Can I Do Now to Prepare?

1. **Start Early!** Even if you are an underclassman, *now is the time* to start thinking about fellowships; applications take a good deal of time and you need to be doing things over the medium term to prepare (see #3-4 below).
2. **Browse and Read:** surf and search our website (<http://scholars.nmsu.edu>) to find fellowships that interest you. Read the criteria for each fellowship and check out the Frequently Asked Questions page. Take note of deadlines.
3. **Get to know your faculty members and advisors.** If they don't know you well, they can't write you effective letters of recommendation, nor will they be able to

share their own experiences and guidance with you (or open up special opportunities, like research projects). Visit office hours and *establish relationships with them early*.

4. Good grades are important, but you need to start building a **competitive resume**. How?

- a. Find **extra-curricular activities** and **leadership** roles within them. This should be more than just volunteering: *dig in and make a commitment*. Find something that interests you or inspires you and stick with it. Check out the student activities office, look for flyers, and ask friends and professors for suggestions on organizations.
- b. Obtain experience in your field via **community service, internships, research, or work**.

There are a number of ways to do this. Numerous agencies and non-profit groups in southern New Mexico welcome volunteers. Consider your interests: are you concerned about poverty? Public health? Violence against women? Whatever your interests, there is likely a local, state, or national organization involved. If not, start your own! For more information about public service, talk to Dr. Ackleson in the Honors College.

**Internships** are often listed in your academic department or the career services office.

If you are keen on doing **research** as an undergraduate, talk to your academic advisor or other faculty in your major about research projects you could work on, either during the semester or during the summer. You can often earn credit and possibly funding for doing so. Each summer, there are many opportunities to work in research projects on campus and around the country. And there are a number of initiatives on campus which can connect you, including the McNair, AMP, NM-AGEP, and RISE programs, as well as in the Honors College.

The **Honors Thesis** option is another excellent way to capture your research, earn a prestigious distinction, and complete the full Honors option at NMSU. Present your thesis research at the Undergraduate Research and Creative Arts Symposium, held each spring.

- c. **In class:** find a class or topic you really love and dig in deeper. Be a strong student and engage your professors. Don't just take classes that you heard were easy—take classes that will benefit you in applying and support your graduate school program.
5. **Take Honors 111 and/or Honors 214/314.** These one credit classes, offered every year, will help you with all these goals and preparing competitive applications.

6. **Sign up for Fellowships Info:** join our email listserv to learn about upcoming opportunities: click on “listserv” on our main webpage.
7. **Expand Your Worldview:** Widen your knowledge of the world by seeking the widest and deepest possible perspective on people, places, and events. Follow the news, read books, travel in the US and abroad if you can, attend special speakers events, and consider studying abroad.
  - a. NMSU study abroad office: <http://studyabroad.nmsu.edu>
  - b. Read a good newspaper, such as *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com>

### **Final Thoughts:**

Don't make decisions to look good for scholarships or graduate school, rather do things to benefit your personal, intellectual, and professional development. You become a strong candidate by striving for meaningful goals and being a leader in some way.

### **How Do I Find Out More?**

Contact our office for additional information:

**NMSU Honors College**

**Office of National Scholarships and International Education**

**204 Conroy Honors Center (SE corner of Espina and University, behind the Music Building)**

**Email:** [jackleso@nmsu.edu](mailto:jackleso@nmsu.edu)

**Website:** <http://scholars.nmsu.edu>