

Fulbright Scholar Grant: How to Get It and Make It Successful?

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Dr. Wyne has secured several grants, including Full Bright, and has served on numerous international Ph.D. thesis committees. He is also a member of the editorial boards for 8 international journals, has served as Chair and Co-Chair for 20 international conferences, and has served on more than 240 international conference program committees. He has been invited to a number of international conferences as an Invited Speaker and has chaired panel discussions and numerous international conference sessions. Dr. Wyne is a member of ACM, ASEE, ASEE/PSW, and CSAB.

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Abstract

The Fulbright program, managed by the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), is an international exchange program. It advertises hundreds of awards, many of these awards offer the opportunity for teaching and research outside the United States for U.S. scholars, or to carry out research and teach in the United States for people from non-U.S. institutions. The Fulbright program offers over 800 awards in more than 135 countries for faculty from colleges and universities, and professionals from the industry. This award enables the Fulbright scholar to develop a deeper appreciation of other countries' working conditions and hardships and feel better prepared to work in a highly diverse environment, thus can be an exceptional experience that can be used as a ladder for professional development. These awards are very competitive, so the application process is typically long consisting of several stages. Decisions on applications are made at several stages and it is important to note that even if one has passed the first stage, the application may not be selected at the second stage. It is important to state that Fulbright is a great opportunity for professionals to share their expertise and learn from the faculty in a foreign country with a different culture. In 2015 the author was awarded Fulbright Scholar Award and was placed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to teach and conduct research in Computer Science at Umm Al Qura University. The author spent 10 months in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and considers this a most rewarding experience. This paper focuses on the Fulbright Scholar Award only and describes the process of applying for the Fulbright Scholar Grant, provides information about the application process, and explores what it means to be admitted to and participate in the program. Most importantly, experience-based tips are offered for applying for the grant, country choice, the level of details provided in the application, and preparing for work abroad if selected. The paper also presents information related to the completion of the Fulbright Scholar grant as well as a reflection during the application process and completion of this grant. The author hopes that readers of this paper will be inspired to apply for Fulbright Scholar Award since it provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration with faculty and improvement of curriculum and research in academic institutes of other member countries.

Keywords: Fulbright, Fulbright Scholar Award, Council for the International Exchange of Scholars.

INTRODUCTION

US Congress in 1946 approved the Fulbright program, which later proved to be a beacon for international understanding and collaboration [1]. The Fulbright Scholar Program was administered by the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) a non-profit organization that was founded in 1947. Later in 1996, the Fulbright Scholar Program administration transferred to the Institute of International Education (IIE). The Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program offers over 800 awards for US citizens to teach, conduct research and carry out professional projects in more than 135 countries around the world. These awards are open to faculty, artists, and professionals from a wide range of fields. Once an awardee completes their grant, they can remain connected with other Fulbrighters and any past US government-sponsored exchange program recipient through an online platform [2]. There are over 0.4 million Fulbright

alumni who have availed themselves of this opportunity to enhance their skills and make new collaborations.

The Fulbright U.S. Scholar program includes Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award, Fulbright International Education Administrator Award, Fulbright Postdoctoral Award, and Fulbright Scholar Award. The Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award is considered the most prestigious award in the Fulbright Program. Scholars who have spent more than seven years in their area of expertise or discipline are eligible to apply for this award, although some additional conditions may exist in some cases. Awardees of such awards are supposed to actively engage host institutions. The Fulbright International Education Administrator Award provides an opportunity for professionals and seniors in higher education. The awardees are expected to participate in two weeks-long seminars that are designed to enable U.S. higher education administrators in consultation with other country's higher education and research systems thus establishing networks between U.S. and international colleagues.

The bulk of awards offered are for Fulbright Scholar Awards. These awards are offered to professionals, artists, and people from academics at any career level. However, some awards may be for certain types of scholars and are limited to specific career levels. In general, some awards allow you to select the country and/or host institution while others do not permit that. Similarly, some awards require you to have a letter of support from the host institution at the time of application. For the Fulbright Scholar award, there are three different categories: Teaching, Research, and Teaching-Research. The research award consists of activities related to research that includes scientific research, practice-based research, etc. The research work can be applied and can take place in a laboratory, field, or an artist residency depending on the type of research. The research outcome may include publications, presentations at conferences or workshops, musical composition, exhibitions, etc. The teaching award includes activities like giving guest lectures and teaching a class) at the undergraduate and graduate levels), conducting workshops, seminars, and similar activities. The courses may be designed by the scholar or provided by the host institution. It is also possible that the courses are co-taught with the faculty from the host institution. The number of courses that a scholar is supposed to teach is decided between the scholar and the host institution. This award may also include advising graduate students and thesis/dissertation. Finally, the Teaching-Research award is a combination of activities listed under teaching and research awards. The actual percentage of activities devoted to teaching and research can be decided between the scholar and the host institution based on the host institution's needs. Since the focus of this paper is the Fulbright Scholar Award, most of the details in the paper are associated with this type of award.

The Fulbright also offers a program for students. The program is a good opportunity for students who have the desire to understand the cultures of other countries and also want to be United States ambassadors and share their United States experience with students of other countries. In addition, having Fulbright Scholarship on their resume can give them a competitive advantage while seeking a job [3].

The Fulbright website announces numerous awards for conducting research and teaching in countries other than the USA for U.S. scholars. The funding provided for these awards generally covers airfare and living expenses in the host country, whereas providing accommodation, health

coverage, and research facility is the responsibility of the host institution. In some cases, the award may also provide additional support for transportation and family members joining the awardee. Sabbatical leave, post-tenure, and/or prepromotion, from the home institution, can be a good way to go since it can provide additional funding [1].

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

One of the important points that one needs to keep in mind is that the success of the Fulbrighter not only depends on the qualification and ability of the grantee but also on meeting the needs and expectations of the host institution [4]. A positive step in the right direction would be to spend time researching awards on the Fulbright website, contact the host institution as well as get in touch with a previous grantee for any recommendations and suggestions. One must also remember that the program is not only about what you can provide to the host institution but also about what you can bring back to the home institution and the United States. For the first-time applicant, it is important to be mindful of the fact that the entire Fulbright application process is long at times [1]. Decisions may take weeks for each stage since external reviewers as well as the in-country consulate (Embassy) are involved in the decision-making process. The application for Fulbright, no matter which program requires that you justify your selection of the country. Selecting your host country needs some research to realize your competition since some countries like Western Europe and English-speaking countries may be more competitive than other countries. Finally, talking to Fulbrighter and asking about their experience during the visit and getting some guidance for the application can also be very beneficial.

One needs to be flexible in listing dates for the travel, keeping in mind host institutions' academic year and local holidays. Preference should be given to the dates or time frame that will benefit the host institution the most. This means that the applicant needs to get involved in discussion and negotiation about the visit dates so that the visit is beneficial for the host institution. It is always beneficial if you have any prior contact and understanding with the Dean and/or Department chair of the host institution, if they are familiar with your work, work ethic, and capabilities then agreeing on the visit dates, and project details is easy step and can be very productive. This initial contact can also help you discuss specific activities that you might be interested in conducting during your visit to the host institution.

In your application, you need to explain how relevant or beneficial your work will be for the host institution. You may also be asked to write details about your research project. It will be a good idea to have a collaborator for your research at the host institution and to have a detailed discussion before finalizing your project proposal details. It is better to be very specific about the research project with the understanding that some of the minor details may change due to the limitations and interests of the colleagues at the host institution during your stay. If you are required to share course material such as syllabi or course outline, in this case, it is a good idea to look at the courses that the host institution offer so that the material you present is relevant and shows how your teaching experience of these courses will be beneficial for them. The earlier you establish contact with the faculty and the administration of the host institution to develop an understanding of how to make your visit successful will be to your benefit.

An invitation letter in some cases may not be required but will certainly make your case stronger. The reference letters you submit with the application must present a strong case of your achievements and capabilities to prove that whatever you are proposing in your project you are capable of achieving your targets. Another important aspect of the visit is the cultural difference at the host institution regarding long-term planning, punctuality, work ethics, communication ethics, etc. So, it is a good idea to conduct thorough research and maybe talk to someone who is familiar with the culture otherwise you may be in for a big shock that will result in frustration and disappointment during your stay.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The entire process of application from open to final approval takes around 18 months so plan your activities accordingly such as requesting for sabbatical leave from your home institution, reference letter, working with the host institution for the invitation letter, and possible activities. Figure #1 (<https://fulbrightscholars.org/us-scholar-awards>) shows various stages of the application process, in February the application process opens, September IIE reviews the application for program eligibility and technical completeness, and applications are forwarded for peer review. October-November time frame the peer review committees evaluate applications and decide which applications be recommended for further consideration. Applicants are notified whether or not their application has been recommended for further consideration in December. The public affairs sections of U.S. Embassies review applications and nominate candidates for selection during the December-May period. By the month of June, all recommended candidates are forwarded to the Fulbright scholarship board for approval and IIE notifies candidates whether they have been selected to receive a Fulbright award. Grant details are finalized, and grants begin per the start date proposed in the application after the month of June.

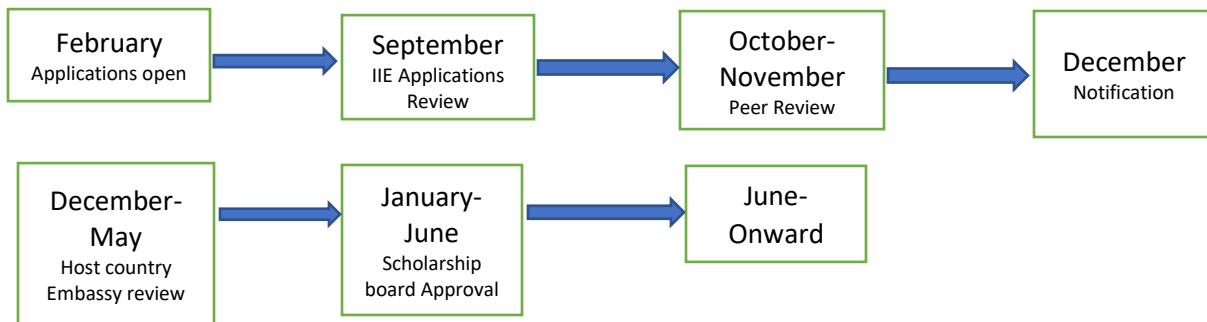


Figure #1: Application Stages

MY EXPERIENCE

In my case, the program, Fulbright Scholar award, I applied to was for Research and Scholarship, so the project statement included various aspects of the proposed activities such as Teaching, Curriculum Design, and Development as well as research. The statement also included immediate benefits for me, the host institution, and the home institution. In order to finalize visit dates, before starting the formal application process, I worked with the host institution to be aware of their semester start, semester end, holiday periods, etc. to ensure that my visit dates do not coincide with the dates when the host institution faculty and students are on a break.

During my stay, my 32-plus years of academic experience, teaching in five different countries including the USA, came in handy and gave me the opportunity to assume the mentoring role for not only faculty but college administration as well. My experience was perceived as something that can benefit college faculty, administration, and students. Therefore, I had a very light teaching load but was heavily involved in other activities. I used to advise relatively younger college administration on routine academic and administrative matters. In addition, I also provided mentoring to faculty on how to be successful in academia including discussions on how to get involved in activities related to professional development and scholarship. These additional activities would help them to be successful in securing promotions and better job opportunities.

My teaching load included teaching two upper-division courses for the BS in Computer Science program in my area of research and expertise, both courses were taught in English to female student sections via Audio-Video link. The language barrier and cultural norms were my main concerns like any faculty visiting a foreign academic institution on a teaching assignment. The cultural norms of the country did not allow male faculty to teach female students face-to-face which is why classes were taught via the Audio-Video link. However, each male faculty teaching female students were assigned a female Teaching Assistant to help faculty proctor exams, conduct labs, and other related activities. Although I had prior experience teaching undergraduate students in the same region for four years, it was, at times, difficult to maintain rigor and quality and challenge students to make them learn the new concepts. Since the mode of instruction was English, I had to repeat myself sometimes and speak slowly and avoid using difficult words. There were issues at times since students were not very fluent in English so I would ask the teaching assistant for help translating English words into Arabic. However, later the situation was much better, and I was able to connect with several students and provide them with information on their options for completing graduate study as well as employment opportunities in the United States.

I also had mentoring sessions with students after the class to provide them with relevant information and guidance for their professional development and skills that are needed for employment in the global market. Some of the issues were like those listed in [5] such as a lack of reliable technology for Audio-Video link, inconsistent Wi-Fi, and use of WhatsApp application rather than email to name a few. I also served as an examiner to evaluate final projects for MS in Computer Science program. I also evaluated project reports for these projects and suggested changes to projects and reports to improve their quality. I also conducted student advising that was both formal and informal. This advising was sometimes as faculty teaching courses and at times as examiner of the capstone projects.

During my Fulbright grant at the host institution, because of my vast academic experience, I was asked to provide my services on committees at various levels. At the college level, I served on committees like the College Council, Faculty Hire Committee, Employer Survey Design Committee, Master Program Revision Committee, and ABET Accreditation (for BS in Computer Engineering and BS in Computer Science programs). Since I have been involved with the program and course design for many years, so I was also asked to be part of the design and revision activities for the MS in Computer Science program and the Information System Engineering programs as well as BSCS Big Data Analytics, Database I, and Database II and MSCS Software Architecture, Software Engineering, Advanced Database Systems, Advanced Database Programming, Database Management Systems, and Database Management and Security courses.

I have extensive program accreditation experience due to my association with ABET, USA. I served as an advisor to the Managing Director of, the International Center for Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation (ICQAAA), Saudi Arabia. I was able to make recommendations to ICQAAA regarding changes to the standards, policies, and procedures after reviewing several documents related to their existing standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation.

I have also been able to advance my scholarship activities by collaborating with colleagues at the host institution. The research was carried out in the broader area of mobile technology. Since advances in mobile technology have a positive impact on the fast, real-time availability and storage of data and media. The research examined the changes in the methodology and some of the approaches used for the storage and management of backend data related to mobile applications used by the current industry solutions adopted for data storage in response to new and advanced applications. We also addressed these challenges as well as highlighted subjects that are either under or over-emphasized around Next Generation Mobile Technologies and Applications. The result was one journal and two conference publications. I was able to attend three international conferences during which I made presentations in my research area, one of the presentations was as a Keynote speaker and the other two were as an Invited Speaker. I also served as a judge for the Best IT Innovation Awards (BITA) which was part of one of the conferences.

It is my strong belief that because of my Fulbright experience, I am better equipped to advise and deal with international students. After spending 10 months in a country where I could not speak their language, and could not read any flyers, food labels, notices, and other communications I now sympathize with international students studying in the USA. Now I can relate to their experience, so I am willing to help them to overcome any of these hurdles. Finally, I would like to state that this was a very valuable experience that helped me advance my teaching experiences and amalgamate multi-cultural lessons from both countries and cultures to foster novel learning environments, centered around student success. Through this opportunity, I was able to share my teaching and management experience to mentor faculty at UQU in the art of academic program development, with the goal to achieve rigorous and highly sought-after accreditation for these programs. These valuable experiences gained in an international setting helped me to better structure programs and curricula for our multicultural international student body at National University, my home institute.

REFLECTIONS

My academic experience and passion in addition to my understanding and sensitivity to cultural diversity were the motivation to travel to the middle east and help their students and faculty grow. I believe the quality of education in computer science and related fields is a critical aspect of developing countries becoming developed countries. It is my understanding and firm belief that my contribution to an academic institution will have a positive impact on improving the quality of its curriculum and student learning.

When one travels outside the U.S. there are always cultural differences, no matter how large, or small. Therefore, the most important thing that I would like to emphasize is that one needs to go to Fulbright abroad with an open mind and be prepared to learn. In addition to cultural

challenges, there may be additional issues such as finding housing, which at times could be the biggest task and challenge, schools for accompanying children, transportation, and its associated issues like getting a driving license or purchasing of vehicle, etc. Fulbright office offers some pointers and country guidelines [1]. However, colleagues at the host institution will be the best resource and go-to person for these and any day-to-day issues. In my personal experience, I had a couple of colleagues from the department who were the best help available in making any day-to-day decisions during my stay. They used to drive me around and translate all official documents and communications as well as great help and guidance in getting driving licenses, internet connection, cell phone plans, opening bank accounts, etc.

Although I had many years of experience working as faculty in one of the universities in the region my Fulbright experience still enriched my experience that is beyond classroom teaching. It is important to keep in mind to be flexible, no matter what professional activities are agreed upon before the start of the visit one needs to be mentally prepared for changes in these plans to meet the needs of the host institution's administration, faculty, and students. Teaching assignments is one of the critical activities, the faculty needs to know his/her students, making sure not to teach them below or above their level of knowledge, experience, and learning capabilities, this becomes even more important if English is not their first language. In such a situation, it is best to consult with the faculty from the host institution and understand the teaching culture and then adjust your teaching style accordingly to prevent any future disaster. It may also be important to have an understanding and sensitivity to the local culture in case you want to share any personal experiences, stories, and jokes. At the end of the Fulbright, it will be a learning experience for both you and the people at the host institution [6].

During Fulbright orientation, we were told that "Once a Fulbrighter Always a Fulbrighter". Once a Fulbright grant/scholar is completed there are opportunities offered by the Fulbright Association established on February 27, 1977 (<https://fulbright.org/about/>), to stay involved and develop one's career [7]. This association is an online community hub for Fulbright alumni to be able to connect in meaningful ways and connects alumni and friends of the Fulbright program through collaboration, networking, and projects within and outside the USA. The Fulbright Association supports a flourishing Fulbright alumni community that helps increase the visibility of Fulbright for future generations. The Fulbright Association also hosts more than 230 regional and national programs each year for visiting Fulbrighters and alumni throughout the United States through 54 local chapters. Programs include educational events, career development seminars, music and art presentations, networking events, volunteer activities, and more.

CONCLUSION

The Fulbright program facilitates the Fulbright scholar to gain a deeper understanding of working conditions and difficulties that faculty face in other countries. This experience also prepares them to work in an environment that is highly diverse. I strongly believe that Fulbright is an excellent opportunity, especially for faculty, since, generally speaking, the professional development opportunities and funds are limited at academic institutions. There are many activities in the field of teaching, research, and professional development that are common in an academic institution in the USA but can be of great value to other countries where a Fulbright scholar is placed. It is also important to state that Fulbright is a great opportunity for professionals to share

their expertise and learn from the faculty in a foreign country with a different culture. However, one should also be open to ideas used by other countries and cultures that can be beneficial to the home institution as well as the USA.

It was certainly an honor to be selected as a Fulbright Scholar and I am thankful to the Fulbright program for its consistent support before, during, and after the completion of the Fulbright program. A big thank you is also due to the host institution because of their warm hospitality and support during my 10-month stay. It is the hope of the author of this paper to motivate readers of this paper to apply for Fulbright Scholar or other similar programs. Finally, it is important to encourage all future applicant who is contemplating applying for the Fulbright program to consider this as one of the opportunities for scholars to achieve their dreams. Needless to say that Fulbright experience provides exceptional career development opportunities as well.

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