Fellowships Advising

This is the advice I give to first- and second-year students—the kind of thing I wish I had been told as a first-year student.

To be competitive for awards and many other opportunities, you must learn to take advantage of the support available to you at Oberlin. It is abundant. It is brilliant. But it won’t always come looking for you. Learn to use the system! Start with the Career Center in your first year.

Along the way, learn about what other Oberlin Students are doing. The extended Oberlin community is truly inspiring, and learning about what others have done can help you think broadly and ambitiously about what is possible for you. The Career Center is growing a searchable database of summer experiences. Try Oberlin as a search term on Linkedln. Use the Career Center to help connect with Alumni.

And know what it takes to be competitive! Successful applicants for awards need all of the following:

**At least 3 letters of recommendation** (the most competitive programs ask for 5 to 8 letters of recommendation).

- Establish relationships with professors who can speak to the quality of your work, ideally over a period of years, rather than one semester.
- Help your recommenders help you! Give them at least 30 days advance notice of a deadline. Provide a draft of your application materials and your résumé (you need one of those, too.) And save coursework—for example, your best papers and exams—that you can send to professors to remind them of what you did in their classes.

**A personal statement that introduces a focused, aspiring and thoughtful professional.**

- The intuition of 90% of applicants is to write a personal statement as some version of autobiography that begins near childhood and ends last week. 90% of successful applicants cut most of this first draft.
- Successful personal statements present a case for an applicant’s fit with a particular award or program. Rather than discussing how an opportunity will be ideal, they make the case for why the applicant is an excellent fit for the fellowship. Successful applicants make a strong case for how the fellowship will enhance their long-term plans to contribute to society as leaders, policy-makers, researchers, educators, or advocates. Their personal statements start in the recent past and project 5-10 years into the future.

**A project proposal.**

- Strong applications outline clearly delineated, feasible projects. The most successful applications are typically developed in concert with applicants’ faculty advisers. A good project proposal thus requires thoughtful work, months ahead of the deadline.

**Transcripts** (not just good grades, but good courses)
• Academic excellence is required for most fellowships, and the breadth and quality of courses taken is as important as GPA. For instance, the guidelines for acceptance to Phi Beta Kappa, among the most recognized academic honor societies in America, might be a guideline:
  o 85 percent of Oberlin courses taken for a letter grade (rather than P/NP)
  o 3 full credit academic courses in each division taken at Oberlin for a letter grade
  o 1 course in a language other than English at the 200-level or higher, or the equivalent, as a demonstration of intermediate-level competence in the language

**Internships**

• Internships are the most powerful predictor of application success for fellowships, jobs, and graduate school admissions. Use the Career Center to help secure internships and to succeed in them.

• Start looking early for internships appropriate to your intended field.
  o Applications for Winter-term internships open in October
  o Summer funding deadline is Mid-April

**There are TWO CRUCIAL MONTHS:**
Applications for Career Center Winter Term internships are due in **OCTOBER**. (Late October and early November are also among the best times to schedule an appointment with the Fellowships Office.)

Recruiting for summer opportunities peaks in **MARCH**. The deadline for Career Center funding for low-paid or unpaid opportunities is mid-April. Fellowships recruiting for most programs peaks in **March** for application deadlines beginning in September. Nearly all fellowships for seniors are closed by November 1. Most are closed by October 15.

*Everybody* to whom you will apply for awards, jobs, or graduate school wants to see you demonstrate:

• Commitment
• Self-knowledge
• Leadership
• The ability to communicate effectively within an organization

Demonstrating these qualities in the extremely specialized genres of application documents is not intuitive. Know yourself, but do not go it alone. Approach a project like a fellowship application, or a job or internship application as a **team effort**, working early on your application and seeking the advice you need to be the strongest possible candidate.

• Keep a record of your extra-curricular experiences. What did you learn, accomplish, contribute? It is much easier to quote your younger self than to try to remember what you did three years ago!

• Draft a résumé in your first year and add to it. See above about quoting not remembering.

• Establish and manage an online presence. Recruiting is moving online. A LinkedIn profile, or similar, is important. Every Oberlin student, not just those in the arts, should manage an online persona.