

# Preparing a Successful Fulbright Scholar Application

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In a piece that appeared in the Winter 2000 issue of the ASIANetwork Exchange, I suggested some reasons why faculty at liberal arts colleges in Asia should consider applying for Fulbright scholar awards for themselves or their institutions. In this article, I would like to share with the members who were not at the annual conference in Cleveland the main points I made in a presentation on how to prepare a competitive application for a lecturing or research award.

Successful applications proceed from a carefully considered strategy. The best place to start is to see the application set as a tool for introducing or presenting yourself to peers who do not know you. Since the average review committee member is likely to spend only about 15-30 minutes reading an application, it is essential to make it as easy as possible for the reviewers to find all pieces of critical information and to make your project statement clear and compelling. There is no set formula for accomplishing this since the statement should reflect your personal style.

As you review the printed or online ([www.cies.org](http://www.cies.org)) Fulbright scholar application materials pay careful attention to the summary of the program for each of the countries in which you are interested as well as to the descriptions of each award. Important information is found in both places. You need to make sure that your discipline or field is included and that the type of award in which you are interested is offered. Also, note the possible length of the awards and the starting and ending dates.

To assist you in using the materials, here is a brief explanation of some of the important terms and distinctions used in them. Awards are either for lecturing, research, or a combination of the two. While lecturing awards focus on classroom teaching, the assignment may also include consulting on curriculum and program development, staff seminars and workshops, and guest lectures. Lecturing/research awards provide some opportunity for research, but in most cases the emphasis is on the teaching portion. Unless otherwise stated in a specific award description, you should assume that the ratio of activity is about 80% lecturing and 20% research. Research awards are for full-time research. Please note that worldwide only about 25% of the awards offered are research only and not all of the countries in South,

Northeast, and Southeast Asia offer them.

Some awards are open to any field or discipline and the country allows the applicant to specify the activity and host institution (e.g., Thailand). At the other end of the spectrum are awards that are for applicants in a particular discipline. In between are awards that are limited to a specific set of disciplines, usually the social sciences and humanities. These awards may also limit the opportunity to applicants proposing to work on a particular set of topics (e.g., Japan). This last type of award is the most typical one in the programs in Asia.

An important first step in preparing your application is to have a conversation with the CIES program officer who is responsible for the country or countries in which you are interested. Their names appear on the application and the website under each country with a phone number and e-mail address. This will help you to make certain that your expertise and proposed project match the award and to get some advice about how to structure your project in a way that will make it fit more closely with the interests of the proposed host country.

This conversation can also help you to determine the level of competitiveness for awards in the countries in which you are interested. Needless to say, it pays to read application guidelines carefully and to follow the instructions closely. They are based upon considerable thought and the insights that CIES programs officers have gained from working with review committees.

As you prepare the application materials, be sure that they present a well-integrated argument for your candidacy. That is, make the parts of your application articulate well with each other. For lecturing awards, the quality and pertinence of the syllabi you submit are important factors in reviewers' determination of your teaching abilities and whether you are well equipped to teach the courses you propose. For research awards, a well-considered bibliography that shows you have a good command of the most current, pertinent scholarship related your topic is very important.

Your choice of references should receive careful consideration. For a lecturing award, you will need a teaching report that comes from the person (most likely the chair of your department or your dean) with the most extensive knowledge of your teaching abilities, who has access to information from teaching evaluations, and who can place your stature as a teacher within a departmental and institutional context. Be sure that at least one of your references comes from outside your institution. This is one way to demonstrate how well known you are among your peers. While it is good to have references from prominent scholars in the field, only ask them if they know you and your work well.

The project statement is probably the most critical part of your application set. You cannot change your record of professional accomplishments at the time of your application, but you can present a compelling proposal. Irrespective of the type of award for which you are applying, a persuasive project statement will make clear

- **What** you propose to do
- **How** you will do it
- **Why** you want to do it and the benefits that will be forthcoming
- **Why** it is important to do it

An excellent proposal will meet what I call the “three C’s test:” complete, clear, and compelling. Reviewers are also influenced by the communication capabilities that are demonstrated as well as by the tone. Applicants who come across as arrogant, opinionated and inflexible or lacking in cultural sensitivity are not likely to get recommended.

Since an important criterion in the review is the match between an applicant’s training and experience and the proposed activities as well as the value of the proposed activities to the host country, your project statement should elaborate on the salient dimensions of your professional life that are outlined in your curriculum vitae or underscore the parts of your CV to which you want reviewers to give particular attention. It is essential to explain why you have chosen a particular host country and to discuss the professional benefits that you anticipate you will gain from your Fulbright experience as well as the potential benefits to your host country and your home institution. Research applicants should also demonstrate how their proposed work will make a contribution to scholarship in his/her field.

For a lecturing award, do some homework and learn something about academic life in your proposed host country as well as the state of your discipline there. You can do this through online research or by seeking out scholars and graduate students from the country who are at your own or nearby institutions. Explain why you are interested in this particular country and what you hope to gain from the Fulbright experience including the impact you anticipate it will have on your professional life and the benefits your new knowledge will bring to your home institution, etc. Demonstrate why your training and experience make you a good match to what the country or host institution has requested or what you are proposing to do. Describe the courses that you would like to teach or list some others that you would be willing to offer as well as other activities such as program and curriculum development, staff seminars, etc.

You should also explain how you will adapt your material and pedagogy for students for whom English is a second or third language and who may not have extensive background in your discipline or much knowledge of the cultural context from which you operate. Committee members access applicants’ sensitivity to these considerations and the feasibility of their proposed approaches and teaching strategies. Keeping in mind that Fulbrighters are ambassadors, you also want to demonstrate your ability to be flexible and adaptable, i.e., how you will cope with cold or hot classrooms that are noisy, where audio-visual facilities are minimal and where libraries are inadequate. Unless applicants are specifically asked not to make contact with a potential host institution, they also look for evidence of host

country interest in the project in the form of an invitation. Since the teaching record of applicants for lecturing and lecturing/research awards is an important area of evaluation, be sure to include information about teaching awards, development of innovative teaching materials, as well as experience in program and curriculum development.

For research awards, the project statement should provide an informative and detailed description of the project, carefully explaining

- **WHAT** you are going to do
- **HOW** you are doing to do it
- **WHY** the research is important

You also need to explain why your research must be done in that particular country and to discuss the adequacy of your proposed time frame. Proposing a scope of work that reviewers do not perceive as commensurate with your timeframe is usually a fatal flaw in a proposal. Show why you believe that your proposed methodology or research strategy is feasible. If you do not know the language of the host country, present a strategy for how you will handle this (e.g., knowledge of the language is not essential since the materials to be used are in English and the people to be consulted speak English, or a host country collaborator will provide assistance with language, etc.). Indicate how you plan to disseminate your findings, i.e., book, articles, conference paper, a video or film, etc.

There are several other things to keep in mind. Make sure to limit the extent of background discussion of the project. Keep it to about one page, so that you have plenty of space for responding to the key questions noted above. One way to present background materials is to use the required bibliography. Both the CIES review committees and reviewers in the host countries find collaborative projects more compelling.

If you are applying for a lecturing/research award, keep in mind my comments above and follow the guidelines in the instructions. It is especially important that the level of attention, space and emphasis you give to the respective activities is compatible with the award description. In most cases, only about 20% of the grantee’s time would be spent on research. This should be reflected in the construction of the project statement.

Regardless of the type of award for which you have applied, reviewers give particular attention to professional achievements in relation to career stage as well as to kind of institution in which an applicant is based. Applicants from research universities are expected to have a larger corpus of published work. While reviewers give a significant amount of weight to published work, they also consider conference papers, development of curricular materials, etc. and take into account professional reputation as well as activity and leadership in professional organizations.

In addition to all of the above considerations, review committees are also required to take into account some non-academic factors such as previous Fulbright scholar grants

(i.e., grants through CIES not student grants or Department of Education grants) as well as recent, extensive international experience, particularly in the host country. Reviewers are also asked to assess an applicant's ability to serve as an ambassador.

Following all of the advice provided here does not guarantee you will win a Fulbright award, but a carefully prepared application maximizes your chances. You will never find out whether you can win an award until you try.

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## National Consortium for Teaching About Asia Presentation

East Asia Centers at five institutions across the country are collaborating on a multi-year initiative called the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), launched to encourage and facilitate teaching and learning about Asia in precollege courses in world history, geography, social studies, and literature. During the past three years, over 1,500 teachers in twenty-eight states have completed an intensive course of instruction sponsored by NCTA with funding from the Freeman Foundation. The five institutions coordinating the NCTA seminar program are the University of Washington, the University of Colorado, Indiana University, Columbia University, and Five Colleges, Incorporated. (The Five Colleges include Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.)

Speaking on behalf of her NCTA colleagues, Mary Hammond Bernson, who directs the NCTA site at the University of Washington, stated, "Those of us at the five institutions coordinating the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia are delighted that funding from the Freeman Foundation is making it possible to have such an impact on teaching about Asia in our schools." Each of the five coordinating sites has established a record of working successfully with schools by offering workshops and institutes and by lending resources to improve the way East Asia is taught in schools. What distinguishes the NCTA model from previous efforts are both its scale and level of coordination as well as the sustained nature of the relationships it creates between colleges and schools.

"NCTA brings college and precollege teachers together," says Lynn Parisi of the Colorado coordinating site. "The NCTA seminar has an impact different from a workshop or even a two-week institute because there is more opportunity for *significant* reading and discussion, time for taking things back into the classroom and trying them out, space for reflection, and a chance to network with colleagues in the vicinity of the seminar. The seminar creates a community of inquiry," she explained.

Each year NCTA supports seminars for a minimum of 500 teachers of history, geography, social studies, and literature around the country. The focus of the seminars is initially on East Asia, although a seminar program on South-east Asia is being piloted through Five Colleges. All five NCTA sites are responsible for recruiting and supporting local sites and seminar leaders. Seminar leaders include university faculty of Asian studies, Asia outreach specialists, and master teachers working in collaboration with their own institutions and the Consortium.

Faculty from colleges and universities associated with ASIANetwork are invited to contact site coordinators if the faculty member is interested in leading a seminar or the institution is willing to host a seminar. Each seminar leader or team facilitates a thirty-hour seminar on East Asian history and culture that incorporates primary-source selections from the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean traditions. Individual seminars are adapted to the needs and curricula of the participating teachers and school districts in order to promote long-term engagement in Asian studies by core groups of teachers within schools, districts, and school consortia. NCTA seeks to develop a forum for collegial examination and discussion of Asia-related issues and strategies for teaching about Asia.

The selection of participating teachers and school districts is based on their commitment to integrating the study of Asia into their curricula. In joining a local seminar, teachers make a professional commitment to participate in the full thirty hours of instruction on East Asian history and culture. Following the seminar, teachers incorporate new content and materials about Asia into their own courses and school curricula. In addition to assisting in the evaluation of the NCTA program, teachers agree to participate in one or two meetings during the academic year following their seminar instruction.

The benefits of the NCTA program to seminar participants are many. Most sites offer course or recertification credit. All seminars offer quality instruction about Asia from leading experts in the field. Teachers receive an excellent selection of background materials on Asia for their use, and their schools are given a generous donation of exemplary curriculum materials on Asia for their libraries or teacher resource centers. In addition, teachers receive a stipend upon completion of the seminar and after submitting an implementation plan; they receive an additional stipend the following year, once they have integrated Asia into their curricula. Alumni of the program are invited to apply for opportunities for field study in China, Japan, and Korea, also administered by NCTA.

"What some teachers get out of the NCTA program," says Jacques Fuqua of the Indiana University site, "amounts to a life-changing experience, but one with practical benefits, too—thirty contact hours, credit toward a degree or professional development points that may lead to an increase in salary, an opportunity to build relationships with peers as well as with scholars of Asian studies, opportunities for travel and grants to help build school resources—all that goes beyond merely teaching and learning." These were