General tips for application prep.

and

Perspectives from UCalgary Graduate Leader

- General Award Evaluation Criteria
- General Application Tips
- Overview of the Selection Procedure
- Question Period
Graduate Scholarship Officers:

- Erin O’Toole (erin.otoole@ucalgary.ca) – NSERC
- Erin Coburn (ecoburn@ucalgary.ca) – SSHRC
- Jamie Pryde (jpryde@ucalgary.ca) – CIHR
Graduate Leader’s Circle (GLC)

- Group of students who have been awarded Vanier or Killam scholarships

- Scholarship mentoring:
  - Scholarship Cafes
  - Vanier application mentorship

Contact Kyle and Leigh:

Gradlead@ucalgary.ca
Top Reasons to Apply for Scholarships

- It creates a culture of applying for funding and experience in scholarly writing (esp. proposals)
- You don’t want to wait until the first time you think you have a legitimate shot at a scholarship to try preparing an application
- It creates an ongoing desire to disseminate research.
- Added prestige of awards - NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR are federal
- Your success helps the university/program distribute funding to others
- Tricouncil success is a broad metric for the university
QEII Awards and the Tricouncil Competitions

- QEII funding available to the top ranked students in:
  - NSERC (M & D)
  - SSHRC (M & D)
  - CIHR M competitions

- The Faculty of Graduate Studies will be directly awarding a portion of the QEII awards based on ranking in the university competition

- Your program will still receive a quota of QEIIIs to distribute in addition to any success in the Tricouncil based competition

*Apply to the Tricouncil and you have two chances at QEII awards, otherwise only one*
Evaluation Criteria

Multidisciplinary selection committees evaluate applicants based on a variety of measures as indicated within the application, transcripts and reference letters.
Selection Criteria

1. Academic Excellence
   - Transcripts
   - Awards
   - Reference letters (x2)

2. Research Potential
   - Research proposal
   - Common CV
   - Reference letters (x2)

3. Personal Characteristics and Interpersonal Skills
   - Common CV
   - Reference letters (x2)
Academic Excellence
Evaluated by:

- **Academic record (first class average)**
  - Transcripts
    - Note: the past 2 years are used for eligibility, but they may look back as far as 1st year undergrad
    - Bad first year, but compensated by outstanding remaining years

- **Scholarships and awards held**
  - Application form (Awards), reference letters

- **Duration of previous studies**
  - If this is a potential weakness in your application you may want to ask a referee to mention it in their letter
Type of program and courses pursued
Course load
Relative standing (if available)

Do everything you can to ensure you address each of the selection criteria:

— Reference letters
— Address potential weaknesses head-on
Research Potential
Evaluated by:

- Quality and originality of contributions to research and development
- Relevance of work experience and academic training to field of proposed research
- Significance, feasibility, and merit of proposed research
- Judgement and ability to think critically
- Ability to apply skills and knowledge
- Initiative, autonomy and independence
- Research experience and achievements relative to expectations of someone with the candidate’s academic experience
Personal Characteristics and Interpersonal Skills
Personal Characteristics & Interpersonal Skills

Evaluated by:

- Work experience
  - CCV
- Leadership experience
  - CCV, reference letters
- Project management incl. organizing conferences and meetings
  - CCV, reference letters
- The ability or potential to communicate theoretical, technical and/or scientific concepts clearly in written and oral formats
  - Research proposal, references, awards, CCV
- Involvement in academic life
  - references, CCV
- Volunteerism/community outreach
  - references, CCV
What is “leadership”? 

- **Personal achievement:**
  - professional involvement in dance, arts, music, etc.;
  - significant artistic achievement;
  - recognized athletic achievement, especially in a leadership role;
  - entrepreneurial achievement (startup company); and/or
  - foreign travel and study.

- **Involvement in academic life:**
  - mentoring/teaching;
  - supervisory experience;
  - Involvement in student government and in the university community, including committees, teams, senate, boards, ethics committees, etc.;
  - project management;
  - roles in professional societies; and/or
  - organization of conferences and meetings.

- **Volunteerism/community outreach:**
  - community involvement in charity or not-for-profit organizations.

- **Civic engagement:**
  - parliamentary page positions and internships;
  - political activity; and/or
  - elected positions.
Application Tips
Application Tips

- References
- Research Contributions
- Research Proposal
  - Formatting
  - Audience
  - What to include
  - Get feedback
- The Selection Procedure
It is expected that Reference letters come from the following:

— Currently in MA program:
  ▪ One letter from MA supervisor

— Currently in PhD program:
  ▪ One letter from PhD supervisor (if assigned) and one from MA supervisor

— Other letter should be from an expert in your field who know you and your work

— All else being equal, ask senior, tenured faculty
Be sure to give reference ample time to complete the evaluation

Send references:
- Reference form or access instructions
- Copy of your Research Proposal
- List of publications
- Addressed (stamped) envelope to return the letter (remind them to sign over the seal) if hard copy required

For those students who submit an NOI, referees will be provided with the guide on writing a reference.
- This is also available on our website for your information (http://grad.ucalgary.ca/awards/tips_for_success/reference_forms)
Publications, conferences, etc.

Early stages of graduate career (most contributions are helpful):
   - Non-refereed publications (e.g. working papers)
   - Conference presentations – including small local conferences, student conferences, etc.

More advanced students (quality of contribution also taken into consideration)
   - Refereed journals are most highly valued
   - International conference venues
- Purpose is twofold:
  - demonstrates your research potential
  - demonstrates your communication skills

- Goal: Convince committee members that
  - You can successfully complete a doctoral program
  - You will make a contribution to your field
Follow the instructions!

- Do not be tempted to decrease the font size or to increase the margins

- Respect the page limit

- Print application single-side. This is not the time to save paper.
- Don’t cram as much text as possible into the document

- Consider using some of the following:
  - Space between paragraphs
  - Indentation
  - Headings
Consider your audience
  — The committee will (likely) include non-specialists

Avoid jargon

Limit abbreviations (or avoid them altogether)

Explain technical terms
What should I include?

- Lay abstracts correlate with success
  - Readability
  - Create interest in the proposal

- First paragraph:
  - Your proposed research in a nutshell
  - Capture the audience’s attention: show that you are passionate about your research
  - What is new and important about your proposed research?
  - Key questions to be addressed and an indication of the methodology you will use
What should I include?

- What is/are the research question(s)?
  - Be specific

- How is it relevant to your field?
  - Provide a clear literature review

- How will I conduct my research?
  - Explain and justify research methodology

- Is it feasible? (Give a timeline)
  - Don’t take on too much
  - What are the stages of your research? (Progress to date)
What should I include?

- What is new and exciting about your research?
  - Establish that you are making a novel contribution
  - Highlight how your field (and beyond) will be advanced

- What is the broader relevance of your research?
  - To other fields?
  - To the Tri-council (SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR) mandate?

- Why me? Why here?
  - Relevant background, why you are qualified to undertake this project
  - Why the proposed university is a good place
  - Why the proposed supervisor is a good fit for the project

- If possible, find ways to connect proposed work to your previous research experience
Finally...

- Make sure your writing is grammatical and that you have proofread for spelling errors
  - Find someone to proofread!
- Get feedback, revise, repeat
  - People in your field:
    - Specific content, general readability
  - Outside your discipline:
    - Is the content accessible to a non-specialist
Remember

- This is not an easy task... get organized early, break it down into steps, read the instructions carefully, and get as much feedback as possible.

- Think about it this way... if you are putting 100 hours into this process and you get the scholarship, that over $1,000/hr... if you don’t get it you still have a good foundation for your proposal for next year.
Selection Procedure
(may vary based on funder)

- **Step One: Departmental Evaluation**
  - Specific to SSHRC, Open and Killam
  - Screening and ranking of applicants by a Departmental Committee
  - People in your discipline who would know the jargon

- **Step Two: University Evaluation**
  - Ranking of applicants by Faculty of Graduate Studies Comm.
  - Faculty members who are peripheral to or even outside your discipline.

The University may have a quota so you need to satisfy this second committee!!!
Step Three: Evaluation by External Funder

- Specific to Vanier, NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR and Trudeau
- Awards based upon votes from a committee of researchers (acad, ind, gov, arts) in the discipline from across the country.
- Each application is pre-reviewed by two members of the committee prior to the meeting in Ottawa (1st and 2nd readers). Each member will have to read ~100 applications and prepare a BRIEF summary.
- Each application is discussed for 4-5 minutes divided into a 2 min summary by the 1st reader, a 1 minute comment by the 2nd reader then 2 min for questions comments by the remainder of the committee (4-6 people).
- Each member votes independently on three criteria and the scores are then weighted by criteria and averaged.
- **Most will have only seen your application for 5 minutes**
- Ultimately, a ranked list is produced and a line is drawn where the budget runs out.
Top things the adjudicator wants to know

- What is this person going to do?

- Is the research feasible?

- What will be the outcomes and their impact? Is it new? Who will care?

- Do I have a picture of who this person is?

- Is this a good investment?
Top Reasons Good Students Don’t Get Funded

- A generic letter of reference. The letter is positive but gives no specifics and does not address criteria.

- Content, context and/or impact of research not clearly stated.

- Not following instructions –i.e. addressing criteria, or stretching rules.

- Frustrating evaluators by making material hard to find.

- Diluting genuinely important/impressive material by describing generic material at length.

- Not addressing possible weaknesses in the application.
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Scholarship Café
Graduate Leaders Circle

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

myGRADskills
Scholarship Café: Individual feedback on one section of your scholarship application.

Sign up for a **15 minute** session to meet with a Graduate Leaders Circle (GLC) member (successful Vanier or Killam scholar).

**CAFÉ DATES:** To be announced

*All Cafés will take place in MT 215.*
Contacts

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  - Jamie Pryde (jpryde@ucalgary.ca) – CIHR

- Graduate Leader’s Circle (Kyle and Leigh)
  - gradlead@ucalgary.ca
Connect and learn more about other workshops!

ucalgary.ca/mygradskills/workshops

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