

Computer Writing and Research Lab

White Paper Series: # 070119-2

Grant Writing: Getting Started

Catherine Bacon, Ingrid Devilliers, Greg Foran, Kay Hetherly, Anna Katsnelson, Lena Khor
cbacon@mail.utexas.edu, ingrid@mail.utexas.edu, gforan@mail.utexas.edu,
khetherly3@austin.rr.com, anna_katsnelson@mail.utexas.edu, lenakhor@mail.utexas.edu

University of Texas, Austin

6 December 2006

Keywords: grants, funding

Abstract: This paper offers advice for graduate students seeking grant funding, specifically in the fields of writing and technology. While the information presented is specifically relevant for University of Texas students, the advice offered by experienced grant seekers applies to anyone who has an interest in learning about the process of grant writing.

Getting Started

Many print and web resources offer advice on the grant writing process. This plethora of information, however, becomes one of the many factors making the grant writing process so daunting. This paper attempts to personalize some of that advice, offering a variety of possible roadmaps for how a UT graduate student can begin the grant-writing and grant-seeking processes. While much of the information provided focuses on writing and technology, many of the resources described would work for those seeking fellowship monies for graduate research in other fields.

The information presented by the authors of this paper evolved from face-to-face conversations with both faculty and graduate students at The University of Texas at Austin who successfully obtained grant monies for recent projects related to technology and pedagogy. We would like to thank the following individuals for taking the time to speak with us: Brian Bremen, Douglas Bruster, Jerome Bump, Davida Charney, John Rumrich, Matthew Russell, and Clay Spinuzzi.

The First Step: A Giant Step

The process of grant seeking begins long before the writing of the actual grant proposal. You'll need to take the first and most significant step by yourself, coming up with a project or a problem that needs addressing and demands a solution. As you develop a proposal for your project,

keep in mind the advice of Dr. Charney, and thoroughly research the field before submitting the proposal. The quickest way to get your proposal rejected is to appear uninformed, offering to solve a problem that either those in the field do not consider an interesting question, or addressing a question that others have previously investigated. It may seem like common sense, but from Charney's experience as a grant committee member, grant writers frequently miss this obvious step: "Any time I see a proposal that looks really uninformed, if it is a make-work thing--'we are supposed to get grants, so I guess I can do this small project'--those are big turn-offs."

Once you have researched the field and decided your project does in fact address new and innovative questions, several of our seasoned grant givers suggest that you actually begin working on the project *before* you seek grant funding. While Dr. Rumrich admits that others might effectively conceive of a project without beginning the work, he (along with many others familiar with the process) suggests starting the project first: "It's difficult for me to imagine conceiving of a project and projecting a description of how it will work in the future without having done anything with it." He finds that having the project significantly underway enables him to write a successful proposal. Dr. Charney agrees and considers this approach one of the "Catch-22s" of grant seeking: "It takes money to make money. You already have to have a good bit of work done before you can propose doing the work." After getting the project going you can more clearly define the scope and articulate its goals more accurately. Of course, once you have a project underway, you need to spend some time figuring out the best possible match between that project and a source of funding.

Internal Funding Sources

The University of Texas (UT) provides an assortment of grants and fellowships to its faculty and graduate student populations. The Office of Graduate Studies lists possible fellowship and grant opportunities from both internal and external sources on their website (<http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/funding/>). This section of our paper, however, focuses on the internal sources which most closely correspond with CWRL related projects: the FAST Tex Grants and those offered by Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS).

FAST Tex is a relatively new program run by the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) that streamlines the grant proposal process for very specific types of projects. The program promotes technology-based teaching at UT and provides grants for projects incorporating technology in the classroom. It matches faculty members with technology-literate undergraduate and graduate student developers who help create instructional technology projects for faculty member classes. UT faculty submit grant proposals through the FAST Tex website in early fall.

Successful proposals receive an award of 100-600 student developer hours, with the CIT paying students' hourly wages and providing managerial, administrative, and technical support. The proposal process is reasonably uncomplicated and you can find more detailed information in the FAST Tex faculty handbook (<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/FASTTex/faculty/handbook.html>). Those interested must remember that the deadline for submitting a proposal comes up early in the fall, generally around October. The guidelines require that the project be completed in the Spring Semester, so the goals need to be reasonable or broken down into semester-long segments. If your project develops into a longer term, you can always re-apply for a grant the following year.

The second source of internal funding of interest to CWRL students is LAITS, which offers funding for instructional technology projects that directly benefit students: course materials, classroom multimedia technology, student computer labs, servers, and network upgrades. The costs covered by the grant include salary support for faculty (one summer session's worth), salary for graduate/undergraduate research assistants, hardware, and software. The call for proposals comes out in the spring, and both departments and individual faculty can apply. The department chair must write a vision statement for each proposal and if more than one proposal comes from the same department, the chair must prioritize them. Dr. Bump advises going through the Division of Rhetoric and Writing (DRW) for projects related to writing and technology.

Dr. Jerome Bump has had great success with FAST Tex grants and believes his *Second Life* project flourished thanks to the dedicated and talented student worker assigned to his project. As the project continued to develop and expand, Bump applied for an LAITS grant. Dr. Bruster also received an LAITS grant for developing multimedia resources for an engaging Shakespeare lecture course, while Dr. Rumrich and Olin Bjork received funding to create a hypertext edition of *Paradise Lost*. Matthew Russell and Jim Brown also received an LAITS grant for redesigning and developing E-files (<http://efiles.cwrl.utexas.edu/>) and Blogging Pedagogy (<http://pedagogy.cwrl.utexas.edu/>).

Dr. Rumrich finds the resources that LAITS provides to be fantastic: "It's a remarkably well-equipped collection of facilities. You have both these whizzy undergraduates, Student Technology Assistants (STAs), as well as useful technology such as audio labs." He considers his STA as a "third collaborator" and credits her with not only aiding in the technological aspects, but really helping to brainstorm innovative aspects of the project as a whole.

When Matthew Russell began planning for an LAITS grant, he thought about how he might bring together a number of different faculty members and programs within the English Department in order to focus

on a pedagogical technology project. His idea involved bringing together different people and programs in order to increase the number of students that the project would affect to give the grant proposal a better shot at success. From first thinking about the project to finally applying for it, the process took about six months to one year. If Russell were to propose other pedagogical projects, he would continue to look for ways that technology and technological projects could have a significant impact on a large number of students.

Outside Funding Sources

Wading through the copious information to find appropriate outside funding sources can seem like a daunting task at first. To help you begin sorting through it all, we recommend a few places to start and point you towards helpful individuals who can provide more specific advice to help you sift through it. Before we get into details about where the funding comes from, we begin with a few things you should keep in mind.

Remember that this process is lengthy. Dr. Bruster suggests you think about it in the long term, rather than as a one-shot deal. He shared with us a story of a woman with whom he attended graduate school; she took a year off from school and spent it researching grants and fellowships. She made a calendar of deadlines of possible funding sources for two to three years out, and after her year of researching funding, she received fellowship after fellowship. Often, organizations like to see that you have already received funding, and so if you can get that first grant, no matter how small, the next one might come a little easier. Now, as busy graduate students, we can't all spare a full year to research our funding options. But anyone interested in seeking external funding must begin with a realistic idea about the time investment involved in figuring out what grants are available and applicable to the project. Dr. Bruster also explains that those seeking funding should not be discouraged by the first or even third rejection. An unsuccessful grant can give you the opportunity to seek feedback on your proposal. Talk to the institution about why your project was not selected. They are often very willing to offer advice on how to reshape the proposal, or even on how to rethink the project itself to better match their goals.

You can start your search using any of the online databases listed in Appendix A. This should give you an idea of the range of possibilities. You may also visit the Hogg Foundation Library (described in Appendix A) in person to sort through the information on various grant foundations. Keep in mind that one of your first goals is to find the best match between what you hope to do with your project, and what grantors are willing to fund. Pay close attention to how the organizations state their mission, and what kinds of proposals have been approved in the past. Whenever possible, try to match your goals to theirs.

When you become overwhelmed, or maybe even before you drown in the sea of government documents, you should contact Joey Walker, Senior Grant Contact Specialist for Liberal Arts (contact information in Appendix B). Her job at UT involves helping graduate students in Liberal Arts navigate the complicated terrain of external funding. She can provide assistance at any and all stages of the process, from helping you narrow down your search of possible funding sources to helping craft the proposal. She also marshals your proposal through the Office of Sponsored Projects. As you might expect, due to the sheer size of our university, you must contend with bureaucratic red tape required of anyone who seeks outside funding. All outside funding must be applied for and received via the Office of Sponsored Projects (<http://www.utexas.edu/research/osp>). Their website hosts several useful pages of grant-seeking advice, as well as an intricate assortment of guidelines and requirements. Before you panic, call Joey Walker and let her handle the red tape so you can focus on your proposal.

Writing the Proposal

Once you have a problem to work on or a project underway and have identified some potential sources of funding (and made note of their deadlines), you need to work on how to best convey the specifics of your project. Dr. Spinuzzi suggests that you clearly and succinctly articulate your project in one sentence, and your method of investigation in one paragraph. He also suggests doing so without relying on theoretical language. Dr. Bruster agrees and believes that the most useful piece of advice he received while working on his proposal came from Dr. Marjorie Woods—use short sentences! "It is so important to write concisely, which is not how we are taught to write our books and articles. Writing with Subject-Verb-Object, almost too simple and short, can help make proposals and letters easier to parse and remember."

You should keep your audience in mind and remember that your proposal is one in a stack of many. You not only need to grab the attention of your audience with a relevant and innovative idea, but you need to be easily understood by those outside of your field. Talking through your proposal with colleagues in and out of your field can help you develop more vivid and concrete ways of describing it. According to Dr. Bruster, those outside your field can help to point out "things you have forgotten you once didn't know." Dr. Spinuzzi and Dr. Rumrich suggest presenting your ideas at conferences as well as writing about them for publication. Rumrich explains: "It's a matter of learning to talk about it, and telling an audience why it is worthwhile. If it's an original idea, I think the presentation is part of the discovery." Don't forget that your proposal is rhetorical! Dr. Charney reminds us that the problem with many of the available books on grant or proposal writing "tend not to see the proposals as rhetorical, making them into a process of fill-in-the-blanks." Much of the advice garnered through our conversations and

interviews with successful grant writers can be summed up quite simply with a familiar remark made by Dr. Bump (a phrase we often use when talking to our students): "Know your audience." You need to research the history of the grant, its sponsor and committee. Knowing details about a particular grant's history and knowing the composition of your audience will help you determine which grants are appropriate for you and your particular project.

Knowing your audience can mean quite literally that you should get to know the people on the grant committee. Learn their names. Ask if you can get feedback on your project before the official deadline. Ask to see successful proposals from the past. According to Dr. Spinuzzi, some grant committees will meet with you to talk about the grant generally and your proposal specifically. Through your research of the grant and its sponsor, as well as through your conversations with the committee members, you should learn to speak *their* language. Spinuzzi advises that you learn to couch your project description in the grant sponsor's language. He explains that sponsors primarily have an interest in inputs and outputs: What resources do you bring and what will you need for the project? What resources will the project create? If the sponsors value your outputs, or if you help them see your outputs in ways they recognize as valuable, your grant application stands a better chance.

Off You Go!

We hope we have offered some friendly words of advice about the challenging process of seeking grant money. While we have offered a variety of tips, perhaps the one you should most keep in mind is the idea that a grant proposal is a rhetorical argument, and the more you know about your audience, the better chance you have of success. If you are looking for internal funding through FAST Tex or LAITS, remember that these programs are interested in making the University of Texas a successful and innovative learning environment; therefore, if you have an idea for how to utilize technology to truly improve a student's education, and for use in writing instruction, these sources are there to make that idea into a reality. Good Luck!

Appendix A

Internal Links

FAST Tex (Faculty and Student Teams for Technology)

([http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/FAST Tex](http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/FAST%20Tex))

FAST Tex is a program that promotes technology-based teaching at UT and provides grants for projects incorporating technology in the classroom. The program, run by the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT), matches faculty members with technology-literate undergrad and grad student developers who help create instructional technology projects for faculty member classes. UT faculty submits grant proposals to the CIT in the fall. Successful proposals become projects that are awarded 100-600 student developer hours with the CIT paying students hourly wages and providing managerial, administrative, and technical support. For details on proposal types, review committee criteria, contact information, and more, go to the following link for the FAST Tex faculty handbook: [http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/FAST Tex/faculty/handbook.html](http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/FAST%20Tex/faculty/handbook.html)

Graduate Studies Funding

(<http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/funding/>)

This website offers lists of links to information on university-wide as well as departmental fellowships and grants. It also offers a list of outside fellowships and links to Financial Aid and student employment information.

Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS)

(<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/its/grantsfunding.html>)

This website offers information about the goals and deadlines of the LAITS grants. Funding is available for instructional technology projects that directly benefit students: course materials, classroom multimedia technology, student computer labs, servers, network upgrades. Costs covered by the grant include salary support for faculty (1 summer session's worth), salary for graduate/undergraduate research assistants, hardware/software. The call for proposals is issued in the spring. Proposals must primarily benefit courses in the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin.

Office of Sponsored Projects

(<http://www.utexas.edu/research/osp/>)

From the website's mission statement: "The Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) serves as the coordinating office for externally funded

research projects submitted by The University of Texas at Austin. The goal of the OSP is to assist faculty and professional research staff in their efforts to secure external funding." This is the gate keeper of all external funding coming into UT. The site offers reams of policies and procedures as well as helpful answers to questions such as "How do I calculate the budget?" or "What if radioactive material is involved?"

External Links

Regional Foundation Library (RFL) at the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

(<http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/RFL/default.html>)

This small library is a goldmine for grant and scholarship seekers. The entire library is devoted to providing resources for both individuals and non-profits, including schools, looking for funds. The two librarians are willing to help grant seekers at any stage of the process, whether it is finding the right grant for a particular project or reviewing your written proposal.

THE COLLECTION: The library contains up-to-date books on grants provided by family/individual foundations and corporations, or as they put it, "We have one of everything that's current." Much of this information is also available in databases that can be accessed both at this library and at the Austin Public Library (but not at UT). They also have books on how to write proposals.

ASSISTANCE: The library welcomes graduate and undergraduate students as well as other grant seekers. Librarians will help you search for funding for anything from tuition to dissertation research to CWRL computer and writing projects. Anyone is welcome to come and browse, but those needing any kind of assistance should make an appointment with one of the librarians first. You should also call beforehand to reserve materials to be used at the library for a specified length of time. The number is 512-471-5041.

LOCATION AND PARKING: This library is located off campus on the 4th floor of the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, a University of Texas affiliate. The Hogg Foundation building is off Mopac on Lake Austin Blvd. You can view a map here:
www.hogg.utexas.edu/RFL/map.html

If you have any kind of UT parking sticker, you may park in the side parking lot. Those without a sticker should park in the 15-minute spaces in front of the building, go to the library on the 4th floor, and ask a

library staff member for a parking permit. You will then need to move your car to the side lot, making the permit visible in the window.

Chronicle of Higher Education: Grants and Fellowships

(<http://chronicle.com/free/grants/>)

The Chronicle of Higher Education: Grants and Fellowships webpage offers a collection of featured awards, online and print resources, and grant or fellowship-related news, jobs and events. The featured awards section keeps you informed of upcoming grants and fellowships, offering pertinent information like deadlines and contacts. This may be the most immediately useful part of the site if you check this page regularly. The online resources feature the usual suspects from government and foundation-sponsored grants and fellowships for the humanities and sciences. Print resources showcase how-to books on winning awards. The Chronicle's sister company, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, runs a searchable database of foundation and corporate grants listed in its publication since 1995. You will need a paid subscription starting at \$29 to access this electronic database.

The Foundation Center

(<http://www.foundationcenter.org/>)

The Foundation Center is an organization that compiles all the private philanthropy sources in the US and allows grant seekers to sign up for newsletters which target their grant-seeking interests. The Web site has tutorials for grant seekers in grant writing, links to a number of funding sources, and news about the field or new grants. A lot of the links on this web site require an additional subscription. These include Foundation Grants to Individuals Online--a monthly e-publication, The Foundation Directory Online which has links to grant-maker web sites, grant makers and grants, and Corporate Giving Online. This web site is useful only in that it places all of the links in one setting, but almost no information on this web site is free. The site also has links to online training courses, such as Proposal Writing, Proposal Budgeting, and How to Approach a Foundation. Most of the online courses are not free.

Grants.gov

(<http://www.grants.gov>)

This web site has a search site for grant opportunities. It lists a basic search which allows one to enter a title for the grant subject, a browse by category, a browse by agency, and an advanced search. All of the searches include closing dates for the grant, the grant title and link, the agency title, as well as the funding number. The web site as well includes training materials such as a user guide and a glossary of terms. There is also a

technical development library which has archived materials, and a number of grant forms online. Finally, the web site provides a number of downloadable programs that help with the grant application process. You can search the site without registering, but in order to apply for any of the grants, you must register with the site. This process takes 3-5 business days.

Appendix B

Contact information for Joey Walker:

Joey S. Walker
walker@mail.utexas.edu
Senior Grants Contracts Specialist
College of Liberal Arts
Phone: 512 232 2142
Fax: 512 232 7360
Office Location: GEB 4.312
The University of Texas at Austin
College of Liberal Arts
1 University Station G6000
Austin, TX 78712
Campus Mail Code: G6000