Grantsmanship for Graduate Students:
Part I: Overview of types of financial aid
Part II: Faculty Panel
Topics for this brief intro

- Three categories of costs and support
- Types of financial support
- How GSRAs and “hourly” support are obtained, and what faculty are looking for
- How GSIs are obtained, and what faculty are looking for
- Applying for fellowships
Three categories of costs and support

- Tuition
  - Some types of support can cover this; others cannot

- Living expenses
  - Some types of support include a stipend

- Costs of doing research
  - May or may not be relevant, depending on your project, thesis, or dissertation
  - Rackham will provide ~$1,500 (MS/MLA/PreCand), and ~$3,000 (Cand) to you
  - SNRE will provide ~$1,000 (MS/MLA thesis)
  - For large costs, you need a fellowship or a faculty member with funds to do the research
Types of financial support

- Hourly support from a Professor
- GSRA from a Professor
  - (Graduate Student Research Assistantship)
- GSI
  - (Graduate Student Instructorship)
- Fellowships from within UM
- Fellowships from outside UM
- Work-Study
GSRA & HOURLY:
WHAT IT IS
HOW IT IS OBTAINED, AND
WHAT FACULTY ARE LOOKING FOR
GSRA & hourly: What is it?

- A professor obtains a research grant to conduct a specific research project

Funds from:

NSF, EPA, NASA, USDA, etc.

“They're harmless when they're alone, but get a bunch of them together with a research grant and watch out.”
In both cases, a professor hires a graduate student.

- **Hourly:** by the hour
  - 10 hrs/week, for example

- **GSRA:** by the term, as a % of the student’s time all through the term
  - 50% time (approx 20 hrs/wk), for example
“Hourly” research assistant:

- The student works part-time, a set number of hours per week, to help conduct the research outlined in the grant.
- The professor is the supervisor.
- Typically the research tasks are clear and well defined.
- A thesis or dissertation on a related topic is not necessarily expected.
GSRA: The professor’s grant pays:

- A stipend to the student
- Tuition
- Student health insurance (GradCare & Dental Option 1)
- Costs of the research
The student works part-time, during that term, to help conduct the research outlined in the grant. The professor usually is the supervisor. Sometimes specific duties for the student are closely prescribed, other times there is more latitude. But it has to be closely related to the funded grant. A thesis or dissertation is usually required. There will be a required work product. Professors will typically use GSRA support only for students they advise.
What professors are looking for:

- A student who is highly reliable and committed to the work, both intellectually and in their time management
- A student who has a positive attitude about, and the ability to, solve problems that arise in the work

How you can be a good candidate:

- When given opportunities, be a self-starter, be proactive, be reliable, show a commitment to finish what you start
- Communicate well and show that you can solve problems that arise
What professors are looking for:

- A student who understands that **concrete tasks** and **progress** need to be made each week, and **tangible results** must be produced at the end.

- Tangible results might include:
  - Laboratory work or field work
  - Computer work; GIS or modeling
How you can be a good candidate:

- Seek out small, specific opportunities, then show on-task, professional work with concrete progress
- Volunteer to help a professor work on a publication or a grant proposal
- Show that you place the importance of research tasks equal with your classes and extracurricular activities
- Take your writing to the next level
Related comments from faculty:

- The best situation, and sometimes the only really workable situation, is when a GSRA student connects the work closely with his or her own thesis / dissertation research.

- Sometimes if you are supported during the term, faculty expect that you will also work on the research through the summer.
GSI:
HOW OBTAINED AND
WHAT FACULTY ARE LOOKING FOR
How to apply:

1. You must apply for each individual position
2. You may apply to many departments across campus
3. There will be an information session on how to do this on Friday, 27 Sep, 12:00-1:30 in room 1040 Dana
From a faculty perspective, two categories of criteria

1. The specific skills and knowledge to help deliver the course
   - Prior experience with the course
   - Use of specialized computer software (if relevant)

2. Reliability and professionalism
FELLOWSHIPS
Fellowships come in many varieties, shapes, sizes

- Fellowships from within UM
  - Dow Fellows [MS/MLA and PhD]
  - Wyss Scholars [MS/MLA]
  - Many others

- Fellowships from outside UM
  - National Science Foundation (NSF), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), USDA, etc.
Fellowships

- Are typically awarded to the student (not the faculty advisor)
- Some provide a stipend
- Some cover tuition
- Some cover research expenses
Applying for fellowships

- Refer to SNRE e-mail notices and Fin Aid Updates
- For some, students apply directly
  - Could involve a detailed research proposal
  - Could involve an essay about yourself and your career goals
- For others, faculty nominate students
- Applying can take a lot of time and effort, but success is sweet
  - Focus on applying for those that “fit”
  - Read and follow instructions carefully.
  - Think of it like a term paper, but you can get thousands of $$ to finance your graduate program
Expectations of fellowships once you get them

• Expectations vary widely from one type of fellowship to the next
• Generally require academic progress, sometimes no more than that
• Sometimes require specific research to be conducted and an expectation of concrete results, publication
OBTAINING STRONG LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION: Do’s and Don’ts
- **DO:**
  - Make the request at least 2-3 weeks ahead of time
  - Provide the letter writer with all relevant information, such as the description and guidelines of the opportunity, your résumé, and transcript(s)
• **DO:** offer to draft the letter yourself
• You can outline your relevant experience and skills
• It may help you to self-reflect on your own strengths
• You can provide the correct address, salutation, organization, etc.
• The faculty member can then edit the letter (saves faculty time)
DON’T:

• Ask for a letter at the last minute
• Be pushy or rude
• Insist on a letter after the faculty member has made a gentle excuse not to write it
TAKE-HOME MESSAGES
Take-home messages

- Be intellectually engaged and curious
- Lay the groundwork for future GSI and GSRA-ships
- Develop professional, working relationships
- Lead a full, rounded life, but ... manage your time and energy and show a commitment