WRITING FELLOWSHIP PROPOSALS

THE PREDISSERTATION STAGE PROPOSAL

There are fellowships, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Fellowships, which are intended for students at or near the beginning of their graduate study. At this early stage, fellowship application materials — letters of recommendation, transcripts, and Graduate Record Examination scores — will closely overlap those used for graduate admission. Writing the NSF Proposed Research Project or the Javits Proposed Plan of Study and/or Research, however, can be a more challenging task. First-year graduate students generally are not yet ready to write a detailed research proposal, and yet they must be prepared to write an informative and focused essay about their research and study plans and future goals. The question is how to do so — sounding focused and professional, conveying interests in a concrete way — while still having perhaps only tentative ideas.

Much of your knowledge at this early stage may still be related to undergraduate research, or other research experiences in between college and the graduate program. It is considerably easier to present a focused and well-informed discussion on what you have already done, than on what you are about to do (a condition common to all proposal writers). In using past experiences in a Proposed Research Project, however, it is essential to present them in terms of their impact on your future direction. A discussion of your senior thesis or major seminar paper, for example, should not focus on the procedures or findings, (which in the NSF application are already discussed in the essay on past research), but on what you learned from them that influenced or shaped your future goals for graduate study. The impact may have directed you towards new methodologies and issues; or, alternatively, it may have encouraged you to continue working on similar issues, using your graduate training to expand your expertise. Using concrete examples from the past is primarily of value in allowing you to talk about future plans with greater assurance and precision. As noted above, the NSF application has a separate question on past research experience. You should of course answer that question by discussing your most important research experiences, but do not hesitate to cite them again in your Personal Statement or Proposed Research Project. The main point is to discuss them in a new way in the Proposed Research essay — once again, focusing on how this past research determined your future plans.

Each essay should be self-contained; you should not count on the reader to remember what you said in response to the research question when you are answering the question on your study plans.

In organizing the essay on Proposed Research, if you are one of the many people who are still uncertain about your precise research plans, the best strategy for writing a focused essay is to organize it around two or three major research experiences from the past (perhaps an important seminar paper, a research project where you assisted a faculty member, your senior thesis) and show how they led to two or three areas that you wish to explore in your graduate program. Even the most undecided people can name three potential areas of interest that they can then use to write a focused essay. If you choose this strategy, it is usually more effective to start with your most important experiences and then proceed backwards — a principal that works effectively in preparing a curriculum vitae. If, on the other hand, you already have a fairly precise idea of what your research future plans are, you may choose to organize your essay around a single culminating research project from the past (in many cases, that is the senior thesis). Whether you decide on a single project or a cumulative series of events, it is important to organize the material tightly and not to get too bogged down in descriptive detail. Each sentence or paragraph about
past experiences should help to advance the single theme — your future goals and how they took shape.

A final point about the essay is that it is also an important display of your writing skills. You should be sure that it is a highly polished piece of work. When you have completed a draft, read it over and have others read it. With a final draft, be sure to have someone else read it for typographical errors. (See the end of this chapter for sample pre-dissertation proposals and accompanying NSF essays.)

WRITING THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

(see samples of winning dissertation proposals at the end of this chapter)

Learning to write an effective fellowship proposal at the dissertation stage has implications that go well beyond the process itself; it is a skill that is essential to a scholar throughout his or her career. (Ordinarily, students in the science fields are commonly asked to submit an original research proposal for their qualifying exam, which then serves as the basis for the dissertation. Typically, the science dissertation is a series of papers or write-ups of lab result; it grows directly out of research done in the lab or on the research team.)

The Nature of a Proposal: How a Dissertation Fellowship Proposal Differs from a Dissertation Prospectus

A fellowship proposal is essentially a persuasive argument for why your project deserves to be funded. Most dissertation fellowships — and fellowships in general — involve a highly competitive contest, judged by an anonymous fellowship committee. This is in contrast to a dissertation prospectus, where you are simply asking your own department to decide whether your project is acceptable or not; this is normally an easier task, more like “preaching to the converted.” Many departments have their own rules as to what a prospectus should be — how long, what to include, what format to use, and other requirements — but in general the prospectus is a fairly detailed explanation of your project.

In a fellowship competition you are asking an anonymous fellowship committee to decide that you deserve to win and — yes — that you are one of the more deserving applicants. In this situation, it will not do simply to describe a project that is acceptable; instead, you must develop a highly persuasive and polished argument that will convince the reader that your proposed project will make an important contribution to the field, that it will change the way people think about the topic, and thus deserves to be funded. The argument should be constructed so carefully that each sentence and each paragraph advances your contribution argument in the most tightly knit and logically coherent fashion. If there are sentences that do not advance your contribution argument, then you should consider tightening your presentation even further.

Constructing a Polished Argument for How Your Project Will Contribute to the Field: Three Possible Paradigms

Before you can construct a tightly knit argument, you must first decide what your contribution argument will be. There are three possible paradigms — or three logical possibilities — for defining how a study will contribute to the field
Paradigm One: The project is a research topic that never has been done before. Almost by definition it will contribute to the field. The burden in this argument, however, is to show that the topic is indeed significant despite its neglect by scholars. Perhaps it has only recently acquired significance through scholarly developments, or perhaps there are other factors that that you have discovered that explain its importance. The main point in this paradigm is to show that the topic no longer should be neglected.

Sample Argument, Paradigm One:
“While thirteenth-century Venetian art has been studied in depth, the story of the fourteenth century remains to be written. Not only was this a period of extraordinary political and economic expansion and turning westward, but it was also a period matched by artistic transition, moving away from the prevalent use of Byzantine cultural models — once again in the direction of the West.”

Paradigm Two: (This argument is the opposite of Paradigm One.) The project will study well-known material that has been examined many times before, but you are making a reassessment of that material by looking at it in a new way, which will be your contribution. The challenge in this paradigm is to make a strong argument for the need for reassessment without denigrating all previous work. (The selection committee may well include an author of one of those previous works.) The wisest approach is to stress that you are adding a new dimension, thanks to the work that has already been done.

Sample Argument, Paradigm Two:
“The rapid turnover in population in nineteenth-century cities and the chaotic ordering of their neighborhoods has led many historians to focus almost exclusively on the social dislocation and uprootedness that they felt urban life brought. This dissertation seeks to re-examine these assumptions . . .”

Paradigm Three: (This argument logically falls between Paradigms One and Two; it is where most research projects fall as well.) In this case, the project will contribute by exposing some new material, which in turn will call for some reassessment of what has already been done.

Sample Argument, Paradigm Three:
“While there have been some studies done on the Alliance’s activities in North Africa, there have been none on its work in the Ottoman Empire where most of its schools were located . . . By studying the activities of an organization which channeled Western values directly to a broad mass of young students, I hope to shed some new light on the process of Westernization at the local level.”

Writing a Concise Introduction to the Proposal, Incorporating the Contribution Argument

As early as your introduction, you should present a concise statement of your contribution argument, setting the stage for a more elaborate presentation of this argument in a subsequent paragraph. However, before you can present the contribution argument, your introduction must first give a brief description of the overall purpose of your project, which typically includes your central question or hypothesis, as well as such vital information as the time and place covered, noting as well any distinctive features of your research method or sources. In presenting this overall view, make sure that you are really identifying your central question, which can be hard to do, since it is often surrounded by many related but subsidiary questions. Once you have done this, you can swing into your contribution argument, selecting from the three paradigms presented above. To put this another way, your introduction should provide a clear and concise statement
of all the major points of the project as a whole, stating the points in hierarchic order, with the most important ones first, making sure to highlight your central argument and how it contributes to the field, how it may even change the way people think about the issues. If you choose and organize your points thoughtfully in the introduction, then the rest of the proposal almost writes itself, with the introduction serving as an outline for the follow-up paragraphs which elaborate on the opening points. Sometimes your project description requires a lead-in sentence or two that provides essential background information; this is particularly helpful when dealing with a fairly obscure subject matter. As you present your major points in the introduction, it is important **to make sure that your project is feasible.** If you state too many objectives or hypotheses or are overly ambitious, then you risk sounding less convincing about feasibility.

The following two examples extracted from opening paragraphs illustrate the value of concise statements that drive home the significance of the project. Note in both cases, the use of active words, stating the potential significance in terms of expected or predicted outcomes (“The study will contribute . . .” or “must provide a significant test case”). Note as well how the contribution argument relates the specific project to broader themes:

- “My work on the state of Veracruz, the first properly historical study of Mexican agriculture after 1940, will test the explanatory possibilities of this novel perspective, and will contribute new sources and fresh approaches to the fields of modern agrarian history and rural development.”

- “I could say, then, that my project is justified in that working out the intricacies of the Old Norse verbal system constitutes a formidable intellectual challenge. But I feel that much more is at stake than that. First, if the facts are as intractable as they seem . . . then they must provide a significant test case for the descriptive and explanatory power of current linguistic theory, and bring issues into clear view which have hitherto lurked in the background.”

### Discussion of the Scholarly Literature and Incorporating It into Your Contribution Argument: Should You Include Footnotes and a Bibliography?

You will note that all three paradigms have the advantage of allowing you to discuss the scholarly literature in the field, which is an essential part of a fellowship proposal. However, they avoid the potential monotony of simply describing a long list of works; instead they make the discussion of literature an integral part of your contribution argument. While your introduction, of necessity, deals with the scholarly dialogue as briefly and concisely as possible, a more thorough coverage is essential in a follow-up paragraph. However, even when you get to the the more thorough discussion, it is important to organize this discussion tightly, concentrating it within a paragraph or two devoted to how your project relates to the scholarly dialogue (or your project may relate to a few different scholarly dialogues that need to be covered). All too often, the applicant tends to scatter citations throughout the essay, which only makes it harder for the reader to locate the exact nature of the contribution and how your original ideas fit within the field or fields. Keeping the literature all together helps to assure that your contribution argument is strong and clear, while dispersal weakens the presentation. In this more detailed paragraph where you cite specific works or authors, the general and recommended practice is to present them in abbreviated form — author’s last name and date of publication — and placed within the text in parentheses, rather than in footnotes. This is especially recommended when only a brief fellowship statement is required (of no more than six double-spaced pages).

In some competitions, usually when a longer and more elaborate proposal is required (around ten double-spaced pages), you will be expected to have references and a bibliography. Cited works
can still be presented in abbreviated form within the text, or you may use footnotes. In either case, this type of proposal should be accompanied by a bibliography, even if not specifically required. Even here, the bibliography should be limited to selected works that are central to the proposal.

Further Organization of the Proposal

In organizing the proposal beyond the introductory paragraphs, you should treat the introduction as an outline, and then devote each new paragraph to elaborating on a major point of the introduction. This approach will assure that each paragraph in your essay has a clear purpose or point to make, which in turn will help to advance your contribution argument. It can also help to assure that your paragraphs are tightly organized, and that they do in fact stick to a particular point. You can also help the reader to get the point of the paragraph by providing an opening sentence to the paragraph that tells the reader what to expect in the paragraph: “More needs to be said about the existing literature . . . .” (The logic for having a clear opening sentence for the paragraph is the same as having a clear opening introduction for the proposal as a whole: a good clear opening takes care of what happens next).

Developing Specific Objectives

In the follow-up paragraphs, especially in dealing with objectives on a more detailed level, an essential step is to translate your major goals into a series of well-defined specific objectives, making sure that these are a logical outgrowth of the major goals stated at the start. For this reason, it’s a good idea to keep re-reading and returning to your opening statement to make sure your follow-ups are indeed further elaborations of opening points: If you find you are making an important new point in your follow-up, then you probably need to insert it into your introduction. For each stated major goal, there should be at least one corresponding specific objective or elaboration. Similarly, it is important to state all of your specific objectives in a single place in an orderly fashion. If they are scattered (and there is a common tendency for writers to pile up new questions on almost every page of a proposal), then it is impossible for the reader to know exactly what is being proposed, and how or why it fits with the major goals or contribution paradigm.

Research Design

Closely related to specific objectives is the methodology or research design of your project, and especially how closely it mirrors both your major goals and your more specific set of objectives. There is a tendency at times for the methodology discussion to veer off course, so that it does not closely match the stated objectives. (In extreme cases, the methodology discussion is so disconnected from stated goals that it sounds like it is describing a completely different project.) Again, it is important to keep checking back to your stated goals, making adjustments as necessary, so that the WHAT you are doing and HOW you are doing it are perfectly matched. Once you have ascertained that your methodology and objectives are a perfect fit, the methodology discussion should include the following:

- Overall plan and why it has been adopted — once again, with an emphasis on how closely the plan reflects the stated major and specific objectives (your method may be comparative, longitudinal, qualitative, quantitative, participant observer, sample survey, a case study, an experiment, or some combination of these methods).
- Type of data to be used
- How data will be collected
- How data will be analyzed
- Timetable for implementation
Available resources for implementation

Candidate’s Relevant Background or Qualifications: The Biographical Essay

Often the application includes instructions for discussing the applicant’s qualifications as part of the proposal, or there is a separate essay question asking for relevant personal background, or a curriculum vitae is required. If there are no specific questions or requirements, it is nevertheless important to include some of your strongest qualifications or preparation for the project in the proposal itself, once you have described the project. This discussion also gives you the opportunity to convey a sense of your commitment and enthusiasm for the project. (Conveying your own enthusiasm may well generate a corresponding enthusiasm from the reader.) If there are no instructions, the following items should be addressed:

• Special background or skills or preparatory work for the project (languages or other skills mastered, prior fieldwork or research related to topic, etc.)
• How the project fits in with your long-term career goals
• Any other evidence of your promise to carry out the project successfully.

Some applications ask for a c.v. or seek a more extended biographical essay — for example, the Fulbright Institute of International Education application includes a c.v. in essay form that asks for such personal history as family background, intellectual influences, enriching experiences and how they have affected you. Whether it is a standard c.v. or a biographical essay, it is important to be selective and to present those aspects of your background that emphasize how well qualified and well suited you are for the particular project and fellowship. The essay is not the occasion to “tell the story of your life.” A good idea in preparing to write the essay or c.v. is to make a list in hierarchic order of what you think are your most outstanding qualifications and then work them into a personal essay or a c.v. In organizing a c.v., it is common to list things in reverse chronological order, since your most impressive qualifications or experiences are probably your most recent ones. For the same reasons you might even want to organize your biographical essay in that fashion: you need not start from the beginning—it is possible to work backwards. (Samples of fellowship c.v.s, as well as biographical essays for fellowship purposes are included at the end of the present chapter; job application c.v.s will be discussed in chapter six.)

Who Serves on Fellowship Selection Committees—Will Your Proposal Be Read by Specialists in the Field, or by Generalists?

Most people want to know the answer to this question so that they can address their proposal to the appropriate audience. The problem is that even in competitions that are judged by people in your own discipline, you cannot or should not assume that they are fully knowledgeable about your own specialized topic. Indeed, even specialists need convincing, and may in fact view your proposal with a more critical eye. The safest course is to provide enough background in making your contribution argument, so that both generalists and specialists will view the background as a necessary and logical part of your contribution argument. It is also wise to avoid jargon or unnecessary technical terms.

Paying Attention to Fellowship Descriptions; Adapting the Proposal When Applying for Several Fellowships
It is wise to apply for as many fellowships as possible, as long as they are appropriate for your project. Most fellowship announcements include a description of the fellowship, stating selection criteria and providing some details about the type of projects that the granting agency seeks to support. You may find that there are a number of fellowships, which are appropriate for your project, but that the fellowship descriptions vary, both in large and small details. While it is important to pay close attention to the wording in the individual fellowship announcements, it is also important to write a fellowship proposal that presents the most persuasive and logical argument in support of your project, following the principles outlined above. How can you write a proposal that does this and at the same time pays close attention to the wording of fellowship descriptions?

We would suggest that you first construct a “generic” proposal that presents your project in the strongest light. You can then adapt it, if necessary, to create individual versions that match individual fellowship announcements as closely as possible. This process involves, above all, careful choice of wording in order to incorporate key terminology from individual fellowship announcements. In some cases, it may also involve adding paragraphs that address specific questions asked by individual granting agencies.

Most projects can be described with a subtly different choice of wording, without distorting the true nature of the project, and without disrupting the basic logic of the contribution argument. The main point is to get your arguments in place. Once that is done, then any tinkering with surface details will not weaken the basic structure of your arguments, which is ultimately what counts.

**How and When to Include Background Information of a More Personal Nature That May Have Affected Your Work**

If some event or circumstance in your personal life has visibly affected the progress of your work, you might want to address that issue directly, rather than leaving it to the reader to speculate (child birth, illness, family needs, etc). One possibility is to ask a recommender to mention it, or you could bring it up yourself. Should you choose the latter, my main suggestion is to keep a clear line of separation between the proposal, which should focus exclusively on explaining the merits of your project, and your inclusion of personal information. You could accomplish this separation between the professional and the personal, either by adding a brief cover note, or by adding at the end of your proposal a transitional sentence that indicates you are shifting gears, such as: “On a more personal note . . .” Whichever you choose, you should try to emphasize that you are now basically back on track, and in fact have acquired considerable expertise at time management, now that it is such a compelling issue.

**Writing an Abstract or Summary of the Proposal**

In addition to the proposal itself, many fellowship competitions also require a brief abstract or summary of the proposal. It varies in length — ranging between 150 and 500 words. Most federal agencies require 200 or 250 words.

Although the abstract appears at the beginning of the proposal, it should be written last, after you have constructed your basic arguments. The abstract should consist of the most salient points in your proposal. Some applicants think they have to make new points, say something different in the abstract, when in fact the abstract is meant to give a snap shot of what is in your proposal, rather than providing an alternative picture. It is important to prepare the abstract carefully, since members of the selection committee typically use the abstract as a reminder of the project after reading a huge pile of proposals. In addition, the abstract, along with the title, may be used in the
various national computerized information systems, so major reference terms should appear in the abstract.

The following items should be included in the abstract, and can also serve as a checklist, to see that the essentials have been covered in the proposal:

- A concise statement of the purpose of the project (much can be drawn from your introduction)
- Reference to the major literature in relation to the basic paradigm of how the project will contribute to the field
- Significance of the project in broader terms
- Objectives and research design — no more than a brief outline
- Personal background of relevance

Writing a Budget

In some fellowships competitions, you will be required to include a budget. This can be thought of as a representation of the project expressed in dollar amounts of estimated expenses. Some government funding agencies have their own budget forms; most foundations do not. In addition to the budget itself, you may want to attach budget-explanation notes. The following are major budget categories for most research projects:

- Personnel costs — technical assistants, translators, etc.
- Travel
- Subsistence or per diem — housing and food
- Supplies and equipment — paper, tapes, notebooks, film, etc.
- Printing, postage

The Final Draft

When you have a draft completed, it is important to seek the advice of faculty advisors and colleagues in the field. Advice is also available from the GSAS director of fellowships (Holyoke Center, third floor, (617) 495-1816). When the time comes for seeking letters of recommendation — most competitions require two or three letters — you should be prepared to show the recommenders a fairly polished draft of the proposal.

Acquiring Letters of Recommendation in Support of the Fellowship Application

A good letter of recommendation not only makes a statement of support about a candidate, but also presents a well-documented and informative evaluation. It also addresses the specific purpose for which it is written. When you seek letters of recommendation for a fellowship application, be sure to provide the letter writers with a close to final draft of the proposal and any other items that might prove helpful — for example, a curriculum vitae or a copy of the fellowship announcement.

Preparing to Conduct Research Abroad

Fortunately, most of the steps or qualifications needed for the effective implementation of research abroad are the same as those for becoming a strong applicant for a traveling fellowship in the first place: thorough knowledge of the country and its culture, the necessary language skills for conducting research, familiarity with the archival holdings or other forms of data that
will be required for your project, as well as having feasible research goals. The following are further considerations or steps that will enhance the research experience abroad:

• **Attitudes and sensitivities that can make a difference**: One attitude that can greatly enhance your research experience abroad is to have a flexible mind set, a readiness to expect the unexpected and to take everything in stride. One speaker at a recent panel went further and suggested taking a creative and even playful approach to the many surprises that are likely to come your way.

• Still another helpful attitude is to recognize that when you go abroad you represent the country and/or institution that sponsors you. The Fulbright and other similar programs make US citizenship a requirement, and consider the program participants as playing an ambassadorial role. However, at a recent panel a speaker gently reminded the students that many who go abroad to do research are non-US citizens. Research universities are increasingly international communities. The issue of representation and identity is thus a complicated one: The best attitude, regardless of citizenship, is to be sensitive to cultural differences and to try to imagine how others may view you and how they may view the research that you seek to do. There are, in addition, some crucial steps that will further facilitate doing research abroad.

• **Procuring a research affiliation or making scholarly research contacts**: For some fellowships a research affiliation is a requirement, and in some cases, the granting agency actually arranges this. But even if an affiliation is not required, it has proven to be so helpful both in making a stronger application and in implementing a research project abroad, that all candidates are urged to start as early as possible in the application process to procure affiliation or at least scholarly research contacts in country. Once you do so, it is important to obtain in writing an invitation or an agreement for scholarly affiliation or participation and to include this invitation as part of your fellowship application even if it is not a requirement. Students often ask how they can go about making these contacts, which leads to the next step.

• **Utilizing the rich resources at Harvard, including the various area research centers and Harvard faculty members who specialize in areas of the world, as well as the many visiting scholars who come from abroad and then return to their own universities**: All of these people are in an ideal position to help arrange an affiliation or to put you in touch with someone who can do so. Students who are specializing in an area, almost by definition, are already working with Harvard scholars who can help with such arrangements, but all students planning research abroad should treat this as an essential step while they are still on campus and still in the application stage, doing so as early as possible. Be sure to make it clear in your communication with scholars abroad that you are not asking for funding, but simply an affiliation or opportunity to participate in scholarly discussions.

• **Procuring research permits and visas, as required**: Here again, students often ask how. Once again, the best course is to consult with those who have recently gone through the permission process for the country that is your destination – either students or faculty. Some fellowships make the necessary arrangements for their fellowship recipients; others do not. Be aware that these steps take time and that you should begin them as early as possible. In most cases, however, and especially in countries that have particularly intrusive bureaucracies, it is impossible to begin the permission process until you have been granted funding and can seek permission under the auspices of a particular granting agency — the Fulbright Program, for example, or other sponsors of fieldwork abroad. So all you can do is wait until the award is official and then proceed immediately in making the necessary
arrangements. A striking example of practical advice given by someone who had recently gone through the permission process for a particularly difficult country was that it was easier to go to New York for the necessary advance paper work, since the Boston office was impossible in its dealings with people! Another crucial step when you get to country — often a requirement — is to touch base with the American embassy or consulate.

• **Getting a thorough up-to-the-minute briefing on political conditions in country:** Conditions change so quickly that last year’s information, or even last month’s or last week’s, might be out-dated. So be sure to use the rich array of research scholars on the Harvard campus and to get a thorough briefing on the current situation. If the political climate in a country is particularly volatile, extra precautions are needed. One area specialist on China, for example, recommends that you write out a summary of your research issues in the country language, being completely forthcoming about the topics of your inquiry, and present them to your potential informant before you ask for a commitment. This will allow the person to evaluate potential risk. Maintaining the anonymity of the informant is essential in writing up research once the interview is conducted.

• **Some smaller details that can make your life in country more comfortable and productive:** One of the best suggestions for productivity came from a student who not only kept in close touch with her dissertation advisor while in the field, but actually used each progress report to the advisor as an embryonic version of a dissertation chapter. *In this manner, she had already started writing her dissertation before she had returned home.* Another valuable suggestion for those doing fieldwork is to be sure to take thorough field notes that are legible, especially in contexts where it is not possible to use a tape recorder or a laptop. A number of miscellaneous suggestions as to what to bring along when doing research abroad include the following possibilities: copies of journal articles that would be of interest to particular scholars whom you plan to contact; Harvard Dean’s letter attesting to your status; letters of introduction from professors that would help you gain access to libraries or collections or other scholarly resources; Harvard fellowship applications for the following year. These are only some possibilities. As you can see from these ideas, people are more than willing to share what they have learned from their research experience abroad. So be sure to take advantage and learn as much as you can about the current situation.

**Project Review for Research on Human Subjects**

Research projects that deal with human subjects, where there might be even a slight element of risk to the subjects, must be reviewed by Harvard’s Committee on the Use of Human Subjects, the Faculty’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The review procedure is kept fairly simple and swift in borderline cases, which would probably apply to most student projects. Information about the committee, its fairly broad definition of “risk,” its meeting schedules, and the committee application form can be found on the Web at [http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research) by following the link on the use of human subjects.

**Some Basics on Taxes and Fellowships**

The information here is only of a general nature; students should seek professional advice from a qualified accountant or attorney if complicated tax situations are involved. (Harvard representatives are not permitted to give individual tax advice.) Generally, most students must file a U.S. return (i.e., their gross income generally meets the specified minimum). Note: The income tax obligations of foreign students differ from those of U.S. citizens and residents; foreign students should contact the Harvard International Office for further information.
The U.S. tax laws divide fellowships to degree candidates into two parts: a) a nontaxable part, which are those amounts used under the terms of the grant to pay for tuition and fees required for enrollment, or for fees, books, supplies, and equipment required for your courses; b) a part that is considered taxable income, which is any additional amount of the fellowship, such as a stipend for room and board or for travel expenses. Note: An IRS publication on Scholarships and Fellowships explains how these items should be reported on your tax form. You should retain any receipts necessary to support your reporting position. Also note: If any portion of your grant represents a payment for teaching, research or other services, that portion will be taxable even if all degree candidates are required to perform such services. This is the case for Teaching Fellows and Research Assistants, who will receive Forms W-2 reflecting the amounts paid as compensation, and will generally have amounts withheld for state and federal income tax purposes.

Federal tax forms can be obtained at the IRS offices in the JFK Federal Building at the Government Center in Boston or by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM. State tax forms can be obtained at the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. The post office also carries the forms during the tax season. A final note: Tax laws can change; be sure to bring yourself up-to-date when filing your income tax returns.

On Fellowship Outcomes: An Important Message

It is important to realize that the line between winner and non-winner in a fellowship competition is often very thin. So the primary message for those who did not receive a fellowship is that there is absolutely no reason to doubt your abilities, no reason for a sense of failure. As an applicant, you have been part of a distinguished group of graduate students, and you have reason to be proud of the efforts that you have made.

Above all, you should not give up — keep working on your project and your proposal, and try again in the next round of fellowship competitions. For most fellowships, it in no way counts against you to be applying for a second time. With further progress on your project, your proposal should improve, and your chances of winning next time should be considerably improved as well — just be sure that you do submit a new proposal. (You may also want to see if the fellowship sponsors will provide you with feedback from their readers; some make this a practice, but others do not.) MANY STUDENTS DO WIN ON A SECOND TRY.

For samples of winning fellowship proposals, see the following link http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/images/stories/pdfs/scholarly_pursuits_ch5_cvs.pdf

For Further Advice on Writing the Fellowship Proposal, see Two Essays on Writing Fellowship Proposals: Social Science Research Council, National Endowment for the Humanities