

How to Find the “Right” Scholarship, Fellowship or Award for You

A vast array of scholarships, fellowships and awards are available to high-achieving students in almost all disciplines. Identifying which opportunities to apply for can be an overwhelming decision let alone navigating the application process. The scholarship search is a very individualized process which must take into account your current situation and future goals. The information below will assist you in identifying and evaluating options based on your objectives and qualifications.

Types of Awards

There are two overarching types of awards: merit-based and need-based. Merit-based scholarships, fellowships and awards consider academic and extracurricular excellence, whereas need-based awards require that you demonstrate financial need. Some opportunities require a combination of both qualifications.

Within the merit-based and need-based categories, there are numerous specific kinds of awards. Awards are available in the form of post-graduation opportunities, summer programs, study/work abroad, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, research assistance and so on. Before you begin your search, learn the details of each of these types of opportunities.

Play to your strengths

The first and most important step in the award-search process is to perform a self-assessment. Create a realistic portrait of yourself by writing down personal and professional information as well as academic interests, extracurricular involvement and career aspirations. This procedure will help you to better understand yourself and to identify the types of funding opportunities that are appropriate for you. Once you are confident in articulating your qualifications, you should target the opportunities which are suited to those strengths.

For example, if you have a high GPA but lack extracurricular activities, you should concentrate on grants that emphasize academic excellence. On the other hand, if your academic record is good and you have extensive experience in extracurricular activities, you should consider an award that seeks to recognize activities and leadership.

Where can I look?

You may use some or all of the following strategies to explore specific awards depending on the type of award you are seeking:

- Begin with our website at <http://www.binghamton.edu/scholarships/>. There we provide a list of guides to opportunities, discipline-specific awards, awards for certain populations, and more. Use the searchable scholarships database to further refine options according to your unique qualifications.
- Review the Financial Aid Website at <http://www.binghamton.edu/financial-aid/types-of-aid/scholarships/index.html> to identify scholarships specific to Binghamton University students.
- Check the websites of professional organizations in your area of study, as they often provide information on awards for individuals pursuing the profession.
- Ask faculty members in your academic department for their suggestions.
- If you are applying for graduate school programs, review the individual schools' websites for opportunities.
- Explore the websites of organizations and agencies you are interested in for award listings.
- Check with local groups and organizations to identify opportunities specific to your geographical location (i.e. local or state scholarships).
- Review scholarship books and other relevant publications.

-Perform a Google search with numerous key words to narrow down results.

Evaluating the “fit”

Pay little attention to the prestige value of an award when you are considering your options. Instead, focus on identifying an award which matches your background, achievements, experiences and interests. Aim to find an opportunity that aligns closely with your goals. The more your student profile matches the purpose of the award and the mission of the granting organization, the easier it will be for you to develop a strong application.

Competitiveness

Many prestigious scholarships, fellowships and awards are nationally or internationally competitive. As a result, not all qualified students can win an award. To give yourself a competitive advantage, ensure that your qualifications exceed the stated minimum criteria by a comfortable margin. Double check that you meet all of the eligibility requirements so that you do not put valuable time and effort into an opportunity you do not qualify for.

Focusing your options

You may apply for as many scholarships, fellowships and awards as you like, but keep in mind that the application process is time consuming and labor intensive. We recommend concentrating on a limited number of opportunities at once so you can produce the best application(s) possible.

Consider creating a list of opportunities which meet your priorities and for which you qualify. Determine top contenders by using a ranking system.

Seek Out Advice

You are not expected to do all of the work on your own! Professionals are available to assist you in identifying and reviewing funding opportunities. Schedule an appointment with the Office of External Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards, speak with professors and other mentors in your field and talk to other students of high-caliber who are planning to apply for scholarships, fellowships and awards.