

## Fulbright FAQ sheet for Pre-Professional Advising

### What is a Fulbright Grant?

The Fulbright is an umbrella organization for many programs joined in the goal of promoting cultural exchange. Through the Fulbright US Student Program, you can apply for a grant go abroad and pursue study, research or a creative project, or to teach English.

### Who can apply for a Fulbright?

To apply for a Fulbright Grant, you must be a US citizen and at least a graduating senior at the time of application. Of course, you also need the interests & skills that correspond to the kind of grant you're applying for.

### Where can I apply for a Fulbright at JHU?

Hopkins students apply for a Fulbright through the [National Fellowships Program \(NFP\)](#).

### What is a Fulbright academic grant?

Fulbright academic grants are available to ~140 countries in all academic disciplines and most artistic disciplines. Applicants propose their own study or research projects. Those pursuing research projects must find an affiliate in the host country who agrees to supervise the project or host the applicant in a lab. Alongside their projects, applicants are expected to pursue additional community engagement plans. Recent Hopkins pre-med students have won Fulbright grants to pursue a Masters in Health Economics in the Netherlands, conduct biochemistry research in Spain and Canada, and develop a diagnostic tool for neurocognitive disorders in Malawi.

### What is the Fulbright academic grant experience like?

An exhilarating mix of the familiar and unfamiliar. The familiar part is having an academic anchor to your experience—whether that's through coursework in a defined Masters program or by being engaged in a research project that builds on work you've done as an undergraduate. The unfamiliar part is the immersion in another country, language and university environment. You'll be navigating your academic project within a different academic culture and forging connections to peers from your host community.

### What exactly does 'a Fulbright year' mean?

While grant lengths and dates vary by country, they tend to be for an academic year (between 8-10 months) and correspond to the academic calendars abroad. While in many countries, this mimics our September–June timeframe, in others (particularly in the southern hemisphere and East Asia) the academic calendar runs from late January or February to November or December.

### What is a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) grant?

Fulbright ETA grants are available in ~75 countries. Each ETA program is designed by the host country, so individual elements vary in terms of location and age group (elementary school through university). While

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you choose the country, the ETA program chooses which city and school you'll be placed in. ETAs work to improve their students' language abilities and knowledge of US culture. Most teaching assignments are not full-time. Applicants are allowed to, and expected to, pursue activities in addition to their ETA responsibilities. Additional activities can include participating in or providing extracurricular opportunities for your host community, language study, and service commitments. In recent years, Hopkins students who have prepared to pursue medical study have won Fulbright ETAs to South Korea, Taiwan, and France.

### What is the Fulbright ETA experience like?

Intense and fascinating. Fulbright ETAs aren't studying abroad. They are deeply immersed into their host communities every day by living and working within them. If you're curious for more detail, some Hopkins Fulbrighters have blogged about their ETA experiences to Spain (2015-16), South Africa (2015-16), Malaysia (2015-16), and Vietnam (2014-15). You can find links to their [blogs on the NFP website](#).

### What exactly does 'an ETA Fulbright year' mean?

As with the academic grant, ETA grant lengths and dates vary by country but tend to be for an academic year (8–10 months) and correspond to the academic calendars abroad. While in many countries, this mimics our September–June timeframe, in others (particularly in the southern hemisphere and East Asia) the academic calendar runs from late January or February to November or December.

### Is a Fulbright a 'gap year' plan?

No. While the term 'gap year' is used widely, it has some negative connotations you should be aware of. The Fulbright doesn't want to invest in applicants who think of a Fulbright year as a fun placeholder before they start their 'real' next step. For this reason, both the NFP and the Fulbright discourage applicants from referring to a Fulbright experience as a gap year. From the start, you should consider how the Fulbright experience connects to both what you've done as an undergraduate and what you hope to do in the future. This provides a strong rationale for pursuing a Fulbright.

### What's the best time to apply for a Fulbright?

If you're planning to apply to medical schools, you're dealing with a lot of details and logistical 'what if' scenarios. Applying for a Fulbright is another bundle of details and speculation to manage. In both cases, the pay-off can be enormous: on the one hand, beginning medical study, and on the other, having a formative experience abroad that will frame and sustain your other pursuits.

You can apply for both, but it's key to think through the timing. The Pre-Professional Advising Office identifies different timeframes for applying to medical school:

- Apply junior year and enter medical school the fall after graduation from JHU.
- Apply senior year, take a bridge year, and then enter medical school the following fall.
- Apply after several years of work/other experience.

The NFP advises pre-med students to consider two timeframes for applying for a Fulbright:

- Apply as a rising senior, concurrent with your applications to medical school. If offered a Fulbright, you then defer medical school for a year. For this scenario, if you're submitting your

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HPCA at the end of March, you should begin the Fulbright process in April by attending and NFP info session.

- Apply for the Fulbright as a rising senior, at the end of senior year, or even a few years after graduation. If offered a Fulbright, spend a year abroad and only *after* you return begin applying or medical school. For this scenario your timing is more flexible, but the Fulbright process still begins in April by attending an NFP info session.

What's crucial here is that you don't try to apply for medical schools *during* your Fulbright year abroad. *This is not recommended.* It potentially violates the terms of a Fulbright grant, undercuts your Fulbright experience, and also harms the reputation of Hopkins as a school that fields many successful Fulbright applicants every year.

If you try to apply to medical school during a Fulbright year, you hurt yourself on both accounts—compromising both your Fulbright experience and your commitment to the med school application process.

### **I know someone who applied for medical school during a Fulbright year. Doesn't it just depend on what country you're in?**

The Fulbright has a strict general guideline about the time that you can spend out of country during your Fulbright grant. Grantees may leave the country for *only* 14 days during the entire grant period, without deduction in grant benefits. Such leave must be approved in advance by the Fulbright Commission or U.S. Embassy in the host country as well as the grantee's host institution. Returning to the US for med school interviews poses logistical problems—how likely are you to fit them all within a 10-12 days? and have strong interviews with jet lag?—and additional costs (of international flights) to an already expensive interviewing process.

Some countries have even more specific guidelines that forbid grantees to leave the country for interviews in the US. And Fulbright ETA grantees, working as employees of the school, must be present while school is in session.

### **Can I apply for the Fulbright after I graduate from Hopkins?**

You bet. The NFP works with students up to 5 years after they graduate.

### **Can I apply to medical schools while I'm doing a Fulbright?**

No. The terms of Fulbright grants are designed to prevent this. Remember that you want to enjoy and make good use of your Fulbright experience. You do that best by giving your full attention to it. If you apply for the Fulbright and medical school simultaneously—and are offered both—you can defer medical school and enjoy your Fulbright year abroad, know your next step is lined up. If you apply for medical school after you return to the US from a Fulbright year, you can prepare med school applications and interviews *on the strength* of your Fulbright experience. It builds the personal competencies and cultural skills that med schools seek in top candidates.

### **If I want to do a Fulbright for the year after I graduate from Hopkins, when should I apply to medical school?**

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You have two options: You apply for a Fulbright and medical schools at the same time. Both application processes start in the spring of junior year and continue through the fall of senior year. If you are offered a Fulbright and admission to med school, then accept both and defer the start of medical school for a year. Enjoy giving your full attention to your Fulbright experience, knowing that your subsequent step is already set! Most, if not all, medical school programs list their deferment policies on their websites.

The other option is to apply for a Fulbright as a rising senior. The process starts in the spring of junior year and continues through the fall of senior year. By January of senior year, you'll know if you advance with the Fulbright. By March or April, you usually know if you receive a Fulbright Grant. Enjoy your Fulbright experience! And when it's done, then begin the process of applying to medical schools. This means that you'll need to take at least two years between Hopkins and starting medical school. As the Pre-Professional Advising Office has informed you, taking time between undergrad and medical school is common among Hopkins applicants to MD programs.

More than 80% of Hopkins applicants to MD programs take at least one gap year before matriculating to medical school, and nationally the average age of a first-year applicant to medical school is 24.

### **What do pre-med Fulbrighters do when they return to the US?**

Some go straight to medical school. If they applied for a Fulbright and medical school concurrently and deferred medical school, they return to the US ready to start medical study. Other Fulbrighters, who planned to apply for medical schools after they returned to the US, pursue work or research while going through the med school application process.

### **What are my next steps if I'm interested in the Fulbright?**

Join us on the Homewood campus for a Fulbright info session in April when our annual application cycle opens. You can find the info sessions listed on [the Fulbright pages of the NFP website](#).