Fall 2019 / NSF GRFP workshop on the personal statement / JHU National Fellowships Program

*Official deadlines this year will be from October 21-25, depending on academic field
*Narrated PowerPoint of this workshop available on fellowships.jhu.edu

→ Personal Statement, Relevant Background, and Future Goals (3 pages)
→ Graduate Research Plan Statement (2 pages)

- reviewers focus on the potential of the individual applicant, not on the specific research project proposed
  the program “funds the person, not the research”

- the personal statement prompt focuses applicants on their career goals and how previous experiences
  (undergraduate research or other activities) have influenced their career goals and prepared them for graduate
  school, and how they see advanced study as part of their career development
  orientation to a research question only → orientation to a career path

- the personal statement has a long prompt that breaks down into five basic elements you must address:
  o motivation
  o vision of a career
  o previous research + teaching experience
  o STEM education or relevant outreach
  o broader impacts

The Personal Statement: official guidelines

1. It should respond to the prompt without trying to address it point-for-point.
2. In particular, it should explicitly address the “Intellectual Merit” and “Broader Impacts” criteria (see details on NSF
   website).
3. It should be coordinated with the research essay; you may use cross-referencing; both essays should address the
   “Intellectual Merit” and “Broader Impacts” criteria. Since January 2013 there has been a “greater equivalency” of
   importance of Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts.

The Personal Statement: some suggestions

1. “Personal” = an individualizing description of your academic self and how it has evolved.
2. Practical tip for writing: divide the essay up in to sections, each with a distinct focus and subtitle.
3. Tone of the statement: The selection panel will assess your overall “research maturity,” so don’t make inflated
   statements like "I want to work in environmental engineering and solve the world’s energy problems with my
   research." You should come across as grounded, in personal and intellectual terms, and convey an understanding
   that research is hard, that projects always end up moving in unexpected directions, and that even the best
   researchers work in very small pieces of a broad field.
4. “Broader impacts” tends to mean “diversity,” that is, thinking about how your work can reach a broader audience
   and encourage an interest in science in a diverse audience. The review panel is looking for “broader impacts
   activities” and asks: how well does the proposed activity...
   • advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning?
   • broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.)?
   • enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and
     partnerships?
This comes down to **broadening participation** and **broadening dissemination**.

**Broadening participation – the NSF asks:** Can you include students from underrepresented groups as participants in the proposed research and education activities? Can you establish a collaboration with faculty/students at a community college or undergraduate institution? Can you participate in conferences and field activities where diversity is a priority?

**Broad dissemination – the NSF asks:** Can you involve the public in research and education activities? Can you partner with museums and science centers to develop STEM-field related exhibits? Can you publish in diverse media, participate in multi-disciplinary conferences?

The quality of broader impacts activities is more important than the quantity. Students who have experience with outreach programs should definitely play that up; those that don't should at least be able to write intelligently about it. "Broader impacts" may also be addressed by discussing an applicant’s background, including personal, professional, and educational experiences, to indicate his/her potential to fulfill this criterion.

5. The selection panel takes a **holistic** view of each applicant. Research experience is more heavily weighted than any other non-curricular activity, but don’t expect to cruise through on the basis of transcripts, test scores, and a robust resume. The personal statement is a chance to present yourself holistically – as a student, teacher, aspiring researcher, as someone who is articulate, connected to the world, and passionate about a range of intellectual endeavors. Accordingly make sure to **avoid these common mistakes**: don’t talk only about your research, and don’t write just a “narrative” c.v.

6. **Practical tip for writing:** divide the essay up in to sections, each with a distinct focus and subtitle.

7. **Resources:**

- **Portfolio of previous winning applications** from JHU students (both graduating seniors and current graduate students). There are copies located in the SoM Office of Professional Development (accessible during their regular hours; samples from grad students only) and the Homewood campus Office of Study Abroad (Levering Annex; accessible 2-3:30pm M-F; samples from both grad and undergrad applicants).
- The **National Fellowships Program offers feedback** on overall organization & content of the personal statement. Please submit your draft to nfp@jhu.edu for one of the two following deadlines (meeting the earlier deadline will give you more time to revise):
  - **Deadline 1:** September 25th at 9am
  - **Deadline 2:** October 7th at 9am
- **For general feedback & proofreading,** Homewood campus students should contact the Writing Center at writingcenter@jhu.edu or 410.516.4258.
- **JHU Data Services** ([http://dms.data.jhu.edu](http://dms.data.jhu.edu)) works with graduate students on a number of aspects of data management and sharing, such as data management plans, collaboration tools and data access/discovery. They also have specialists in geospatial analysis, human subjects data protection, and other topics. A series of training workshops related to various topics of data are offered regularly throughout the year. Please do reach out to them via dataservices@jhu.edu if you’re interested.
- **Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning** ([http://www.cirtl.net](http://www.cirtl.net)), the official STEM outreach arm of the NSF; JHU is a member; see the CIRTL core ideas, especially learning-through-diversity:
  - develop your vocabulary for discussing diversity
  - know if the school you came from/are at/are headed to is a CIRTL member
  - mention CIRTL in your statement but do more than drop a name