November 3, 2016

Dear Deans, Directors, Chairs, GPCs and GPAs:

The Graduate School's Top Scholar Awards are a significant part of your efforts to recruit outstanding students to the UW. In FY16 alone, we provided more than $3 million in support to departments throughout campus to assist in recruitment efforts, and we are pleased to be able to offer these awards again for the upcoming 2017-2019 biennium. While there are no major changes to previous procedures and policies, there is key information you will need to know:

- The deadline to submit 2017-2019 Top Scholar funding proposals is **NOON, MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2016**. This is a hard deadline; in fairness to all, no late submissions will be considered. We'll remind you of this deadline several times, but remember it is a hard deadline.
- We will offer several webinar meetings to review the procedures and to answer questions.
- We will continue a biennial funding cycle for 2017-2019. While we will still have to be mindful of continuing budget uncertainty, a two-year award cycle is still possible and seems to be beneficial for department planning.

More detailed information about Graduate School Top Scholar awards can be found on our website.

**Purpose of Top Scholar**

To make the best possible use of our recruitment funding, we focus on funding to help you attract the best graduate student you can. We have adapted the highly successful format used by the ARCS (Achievement Rewards for College Scientists) fellowships by focusing not on all prospective students but on just your top one—or at most, two or three—prospects.

**Top Scholar Options**

To provide flexibility in meeting departmental needs, we have four different pools of funding from which we provide awards. However, we limit departmental requests to only one of these pools.

Why just one option? Some faculty and staff have asked us to simply supply a block of money, and let departments do whatever they need to support recruitment. We'd actually like to be able to do that, but our funding sources are multiple and cannot be mixed easily. For instance, research assistantships are from state funds and include benefits and waivers (and this is a specific state budget that only funds RAs, nothing else). Our waiver pool is really a “credit” pool rather than a pot of money, and it cannot be converted to cash or used for anything else. Our fellowships come from endowments, some of which have very specific rules. So, it's a mix of types and sources of funding, rules and restrictions. We have tried through the options listed below to create flexibility within the funding limitations we face.

Your own history in recruitment or desired changes in recruitment should guide your choice of the option that serves you best. As discussed above, our goal is to help you compete effectively for your top prospective graduate students. Please pick the option that you believe best helps you accomplish this goal.

Please note that in most cases Top Scholar funding is not available to help fund students enrolling in fee-based degree programs. The only possibility to use these funds for students in such programs is block grant funding.
Options

Option 1: You may request from three funding types. Request only one of the following three options:

A. RA quarter(s)
   - May request no more than four quarters.
   - Includes tuition and benefits coverage.
   - Are available only for state-supported, tuition-based programs.
   - Must provide student at least two quarters of departmental funding for each one quarter of Top Scholar RA. This departmental match must be an equivalent appointment in terms of salary/benefits/tuition but can be in the form of a TA or fellowship/traineeship instead of an RA.
   - May divide quarters among multiple recipients (e.g., one quarter to four different admits).
   - This is a service appointment.

B. Fellowship quarter(s)
   - May request no more than three quarters.
   - Must be awarded at the standard monthly TA/RA rate of department.
   - Includes tuition and benefits coverage.
   - Are available only for state-supported, tuition-based programs.
   - Must provide student at least two quarters of departmental funding for each one quarter of Top Scholar fellowship. This departmental match must be an equivalent appointment in terms of salary/benefits/tuition but can be in the form of a TA/RA/traineeship instead of a fellowship.
   - May divide quarters among multiple recipients (e.g., one quarter to three different admits).
   - This is a non-service appointment.

C. Block grant (travel and top-off fellowship awards)
   - Top-off award requests are limited to no more than top 10 percent of admission offers using the last three years' historical average.
   - Top-off awards limited to no more than $15,000 in total.
   - Top-off awards (per student) must be for a minimum of $1,000 and a maximum of $5,000.
   - Top-off awards must be paired with departmental funding to student of at least one year (three quarters) at standard departmental TA/RA appointment (including tuition/benefits coverage).
   - Travel award requests are limited to no more than top 25 percent of admission offers using last three years' historical average (at $300/student average).
   - Travel awards are only for airfare or mileage. No hotels or per diem.
   - Your request can be in an amount for both top-off and travel funding.
   - Once this award is made, you can choose to allocate it for travel, top-off fellowships, or a combination, whatever fits your needs at the time of recruitment.
   - These awards can be used for tuition-based and fee-based programs.
   - Historical averages are determined using the information from the Graduate School website: http://www.grad.washington.edu/about/statistics/

Option 2: Instead of one of the options above, you may request tuition waivers to cover quarterly tuition costs for departmentally-funded fellowships. These are available only for state-supported, tuition-based programs.

   - You may request a maximum of nine quarters of tuition waivers.
   - Waivers must supplement departmental non-service awards (e.g., fellowships) paid from departmental resources. Waivers may not be used for RA or TA appointments.
   - Student(s) must receive at least three quarters of funding in their first year, which can be a mix of departmental funding with Top Scholar tuition waiver and RA/TA (from department funds).
   - Departmental funding paired with Top Scholar waiver must be a minimum of $1,000 per month with benefits eligibility. Funding at a RA/TA level will be more competitive.
   - If you plan to pair these tuition waivers with fellowship appointments at the minimum monthly level, please describe in your proposal how that is effective in recruiting the very top applicants to your program.
Top Scholar Proposal Format and Content

Proposals must be submitted electronically through MyGradProgram (MGP) and must follow the outline described below. Although proposals may be typed directly into MGP, best practice is to complete the proposals in MS Word or another word processing program and copy the completed result into MGP.

Proposals should be **no more than two pages** in length and include the following content:

- Briefly describe your recruiting process
- List your requested funding category for TSA and address:
  1. Why this particular type of funding is integral to your successful recruitment efforts
  2. How such funding will be leveraged with departmental funding as required

You may view a sample TSA proposal on our website.

Top Scholar Decision Making

In the last biennial award cycle we were able to meet all the primary requests and we hope to do so again in this cycle. In the event that the 2017-19 requests are greater than available resources, we will use the criteria listed below in making awards. We do not anticipate cuts in the second year, but in the event there are additional cuts in funding, we would potentially need to adjust the second-year awards.

**Award criteria:**

1. Awards will be made on a competitive basis, but we expect to provide all departments with some if not all of the funding requested.
2. We will do our best to fund your chosen option; but given restrictions on funding and expected demand, you may be given funding from a source other than what you requested.
3. In the last biennial round of awards, we were able to provide tuition waivers to those units that requested them as primary and to a few departments who requested waivers in addition to RA/Fellowship/Block Grant awards. Because of cuts to our tuition waiver budget, we are unable to provide these supplementary tuition waivers in this cycle.
4. Evaluation will be done by Graduate School staff along with input from others as needed (school/college deans, Graduate Council members, etc.)
5. Criteria will include:
   - Performance of previous Top Scholar award recipients (GPA, time to graduation, job placement, awards, etc.). We are particularly concerned about degree completion.
   - The kind of support (number of years and amount) that your department is able to provide to students, especially with regard to matching Top Scholar awards.
   - Innovation of your recruitment plan.
   - Assessment of the program by the college dean, as needed.

Information Sessions

Our staff will host online information sessions to review the process, answer your questions and discuss ways you can maximize Top Scholar funds. We invite all interested GPAs, GPCs, chairs and other pertinent department staff to attend. To register for a session, visit our website.

Our goal is that by pooling Top Scholar and departmental resources, you will be able to recruit top students to your programs.

We wish you much success in the upcoming 2017-18 admissions cycle. Although we have information sessions planned, as noted above, please feel free to contact the Fellowships Office at gradappt@uw.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

David L. Eaton
Vice Provost and Dean, UW Graduate School