

Tips to Compete for the Best Opportunities: Prestigious Scholarships, Fellowships, Graduate Schools, Professional Schools

By Dr. Jeanna Mastrodicasa, Associate Director, Honors Program (jmastro@ufl.edu)

1. **Read the criteria** for those that interest you and figure out when you would need to submit your application and what you should be doing to prepare. Good grades are important, but they are only part of the package.

Prestigious Fellowships and Scholarships web site:

<http://www.honors.ufl.edu/scholarships.html>

<http://www.honors.ufl.edu/tips.html>

2. **Get to know your faculty members**, your academic advisors, and other people on campus. If they don't know you well, they can't write you effective letters of recommendation, nor will they be able to share their own experiences and guidance with you.

- Visit office hours of your professors; faculty are required to have set office hours. Establish relationships with your professors as early as possible.
- When you ask someone to write a letter of recommendation, give them your transcript, a resume, and information about the scholarship. Give them plenty of time to write the letter.
- Go to academic advising with prepared questions and issues so your visit is most effective.

3. **Get involved** in interesting extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities within them. Select activities that seem like fun and are interesting to you; be an active participant and contribute. Don't pad your resume by just joining clubs.

- Visit the Student Activities Center on the third floor of the Reitz Union, or view the website at <http://www.union.ufl.edu/sac/> to get ideas of groups to consider joining.
- Get involved in leadership through the residence halls, Greek life, or any other organization in which you participate.
- Read the Alligator, the Wednesday Update, and look for fliers to find out when groups meet and select new members. Ask your friends, professors, or academic advisors for suggestions of organizations in which to get involved.

4. **Consider doing undergraduate research** in your field of study, regardless of which field it is in. Research isn't just for science majors!

- Check out various undergraduate research opportunities: <http://www.honors.ufl.edu/research.html>
- Apply for funded research through the University Scholars Program, in any department. Deadline: March 1, <http://www.scholars.ufl.edu>.
- Consider doing research at another institution during the summer through the Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU), sponsored by the National Science Foundation: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5517&from=fund

5. **Obtain experience in your field** via community service, internships, or work.

- Review the Honors Program listing of highly selective internships around the country: <http://www.honors.ufl.edu/internships.html>.
- Take a tour of the Career Resource Center (first floor, Reitz Union), and look at their web site for opportunities: <http://www.crc.ufl.edu>
- Go to Career Showcase or another Career Fair just to check it out, before you are applying for jobs or internships.
- Get involved in community service: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/cls/service/>
- Visit your department or college advising office and/or website for suggestions about obtaining experience.

6. **Expand your knowledge of the world** by seeking the widest and deepest possible perspective on people, places, and events. Follow the news, read books, travel around the country and overseas, attend events that focus on various cultures or issues, attend lectures, etc.

- International Center/Overseas Studies Services: <http://www.ufic.ufl.edu/>
- Read a newspaper and watch the news, every day: <http://www.cnn.com>, or <http://www.nyt.com>
- Subscribe to the UF News and Events e-mail list: <http://news.ufl.edu/subscribe/> to learn about campus events and lectures; also read the Alligator <http://www.alligator.org> to find even more local events.
- Other great magazines to read (yes, the hard copy!) include *The Economist* and *The New Yorker*; both of them provide insights into current news events.

7. Pursue academic excellence in challenging classes-- don't just take classes that you heard were easy. Take a strong course load, not just the minimum; your transcript is an important reflection of your willingness to challenge yourself. Be a strong student and engage your professors in the classroom. This is a good way to develop relationships with your professors that can lead to good recommendations. Take the classes which can benefit you in applying.

- Enroll in the 1 credit course IDH 4715, "Professional Development Strategies," by contacting Jeanna Mastrodicasa in the Honors Program.
- Don't avoid Gordon Rule writing courses just because you have completed the requirement; not only will they help you to continue to improve your writing skills, but also your faculty members will be able to better evaluate your abilities in letters of recommendation.
- Read the UF catalog, learn to degree shop, and read your degree audit: <http://www.isis.ufl.edu>.
- Visit an academic advisor in your college; consider adding a double major, a minor, or doing a combined degree program. You can get this information from your catalog as well.
- Improve your personal skills as a student and individual; you can review virtual publications on issues such as Time Management, Choosing a Major, etc. from the Counseling Center at <http://www.counsel.ufl.edu/default.asp>

Final Thoughts:

Don't make decisions to look good for scholarships, rather do things to benefit your personal, intellectual, and professional development. You become a strong scholarship candidate by striving for meaningful ends.

Constantly improve your communication skills, both verbal and written. Take any opportunity you get to do so.