

**PROPOSAL WRITING:
THE ART OF PERSUASION**

Fulbright, Marshall and Rhodes

At various times in your life you will need to write a **proposal**, a statement or statements relating to a project you would like to accomplish. Such a proposal is an example of persuasive writing. It is addressed to the individual or agency whose resources can allow you to carry out your project. Your task is to convince them that your project deserves their support.

Not all proposals are in written form: you have undoubtedly had an idea, discussed it with someone in a position to help you, and off you went. Even then, though, you must have thought the idea through in enough detail that you could communicate effectively what you had in mind, to elicit the other person's support. A trivial example is a child's asking his or her parents for an increase in allowance. Ordinarily parents will want to know the answers to such questions as why the child needs the money, what it will be budgeted for, how they will know it was spent wisely, and what the child plans to do to earn it. The child is more likely to succeed if he or she has considered answers to these questions in advance. In a similar way, a written proposal works best if it tries to **anticipate the questions that the evaluator is likely to ask**.

How do you discover what those questions are? Most formal proposals are prepared in response to announced opportunities for which you want to be considered. More specifically, various grants, fellowships, and scholarships are awarded in competitions. Applicants are asked to write one or several statements that form the substance of their proposal. You can understand the sorts of questions you should address, even if they are not explicitly stated, by carefully reading published material describing the purpose of the granting agency and the kinds of statements requested. The statements are usually of a prescribed length and format (different for each competition). Frequently they also must fit into one of several categories, for example a personal statement, a project statement, and/or a public policy proposal. Formulating the appropriate response to these requirements can be difficult. The following information is designed to help you through the process. It is organized in terms of [general information](#) on the structure of a formal proposal followed by specific suggestions for the proposals demanded by various [graduate fellowships](#).

Ten easy steps toward a clear and effective proposal

1. Have an idea or a goal that you are excited about. Think about it, discuss it with friends and mentors, and modify your idea if it seems appropriate.
2. Consider alternative ways to accomplish the idea or goal; select several of the best to pursue.
3. Identify sources of support to help you achieve the goal.
4. Investigate in detail the groups granting the support, to see whether their goals match yours.

5. If so, look closely at the requirements for application and the criteria for success. For some organizations, the project proposal is the main thing. For others it is simply one among several attributes of the applicant that are weighed in the balance: proven scholastic ability, attested to by a high academic average; leadership ability; community service; involvement in athletics; geographical origin or ethnicity; the opinion of respected professors expressed in letters of recommendation.
6. Make a list of the components of a complete application so that none is overlooked.
7. Systematically undertake these components, paying close attention to detail at every step.
Neatness counts!
8. Keep your idea or goal at the forefront. Inevitably you will need to select what to include or what to emphasize. Do the selecting in such a way as to shine the most favorable possible light on the goal and on you as the person to accomplish it.
9. Do not hesitate to apply to more than one organization for support of the same idea (unless it is explicitly forbidden), but consider carefully how to tailor each application specifically to the organization.
10. Show your application, especially statements of the proposal, to as many people as possible before you submit it. If there are parts that need work, it is better to have friends point them out rather than selection committees! You do not have to accept their suggestions, but at least you can consider them. They may have arisen from a misreading that you can clarify. Among those who would appreciate seeing your proposal (or at least hearing about it) are those you have asked for letters of recommendation.

The structure of the formal proposal

The formal proposal will have various structures depending on its length and what other supporting material is being requested. At one extreme may be the proposal for a grant in support of scientific research that is submitted to an agency such as the National Institutes of Health. These documents are "limited to" 15 pages, and must follow a very particular order and format, designed for the convenience of the reviewers. I had trouble with this format until I realized that it answers a series of questions:

- What are you going to do?
- Why does it need to be done?
- Why should we think you can do it?
- How are you going to do it?
- Where have you gone for other information?

For most applications you can discover how the review will be carried out by noticing the questions asked. If they are not asked explicitly, you can anticipate them by imagining yourself as a reviewer.

At the other extreme of length is an application requested by the St. Andrews Society of New York for students seeking to spend a year at a Scottish university. A four-page form is filled out listing things like your academic history, honors, extracurricular activities, and in what way you are of Scottish ancestry (a key issue for this organization). You then have 200 words to answer each of two questions:

- Why do you wish to continue your education beyond the present year?
- Why do you wish to study in Scotland?

Naturally, in this case successful students need to make every word count and count toward the obvious goal of the organization: to promote the understanding of Scotland by Americans of Scottish ancestry. An interview is part of the final selection process for this award (as for many others), so the wise applicant will make the responses to the questions open to further conversation in the interview.

While the form and style of proposals vary widely, they all seek to understand what motivates you to undertake the project you are describing. In many cases preparing the proposal will be an occasion to come to self-understanding that will be useful as you pursue future goals, no matter how the particular application is received.

Fulbright grants

These awards offer full support for a year of study or teaching in a foreign country. Research Fulbrights require a plan of study or research; Fulbrights in the creative or performing arts require documented artistic achievement; Fulbright teaching assistantships require an interest and ability in working with adolescent students as well as a project that you could pursue in your free time. The ultimate goal of all three is to introduce American college graduates to the excitement and experience of working and living in another country, an opportunity that is expected to improve the student's understanding of the larger world and to influence the opinion of American youth in other countries. These points should be kept in mind while preparing the application.

The form, among the most complicated of any of the undergraduate awards, is the same for all three kinds of grants. It begins with a four-page form asking for personal information, educational background, honors and extracurricular activities, future plans, work experience, experience living abroad, and an abstract of the proposal. Fill out the entire form, even when the information is duplicated elsewhere, since not all parts of the application end up in the same office. It must be typewritten or printed out from a computer file, provided to applicants on the web.

Then comes the **Statement of Proposed Study or Research**, in which you have two typewritten pages to "describe your study or research plans and your reasons for wishing to undertake them in the country of your choice. Outline a plan that realistically can be completed in one academic year abroad. Graduating seniors ... are not expected to formulate detailed research projects [but they] should describe the study programs they wish to follow in terms as specific as possible." You should include the proposed starting date and the total duration of the project.

Then comes a single-page **Curriculum Vitae**. This is not a resume, but rather a "narrative giving a picture of yourself as an individual. It should deal with your personal history, family background, influences on your intellectual development, the educational and cultural opportunities (or lack of them) to which you have been exposed, and the ways in which these experiences have affected you. Also include your special interests and abilities, career plans, and life goals, etc. It should not be a recording of facts already listed on the application or an elaboration of your statement of proposed study."

The rest of the application includes a Foreign Language Report, which you must have completed by a professional language teacher, three letters of reference (on forms provided), an evaluation form from the UC Fulbright Committee, and official transcripts.

Clearly you need to be on top of the details for this one, since the entire package has to be submitted through IGSA Office by the deadline.

A key question the Fulbright selection committee asks is "Is this project feasible?" In other words, you need to persuade the committee both that the project is worth doing, that you are the best person to do it, and that you must do it in the location you have selected. The single most persuasive thing you can provide is some evidence of "**affiliation:**" letters from faculty at the host institution expressing willingness to supervise your project (if you win the grant), documentation that you have begun to apply for admission to the university where you want to study, or other signs that you have seriously looked into the feasibility of the project you describe.

In addition to establishing some sort of affiliation, you should think about practical matters such as the scope of the study you plan to undertake, particularly if you are not yet completely prepared academically or linguistically. You should not plan to use archives without some advance assurance that you will be given access. You should not propose field research without a clear signal from someone at the site that such research is appropriate for the question you are investigating and that you have the proper preparation to undertake it. You should not plan to work in a scientific laboratory without a letter of commitment from the laboratory director confirming that you will be welcome. If you plan to study at a foreign university, you should investigate the requirements for admission and be sure that the program you seek to embark on can be completed in a year. (If not, have a plan for extending your stay with other funding).

Applicants for Teaching Assistantships should have a supplementary study in mind that they will undertake in their spare time. Its purpose is to demonstrate your interest in getting to know the people and culture where you will be living. The Project Proposal here would fall into two sections: first, what you would bring to the teaching of English to adolescents in that country; and second, what other interest you would develop when not in the classroom itself.

Crafting these two essays requires serious attention, since the space is so limited. Be as specific as you can, identifying key issues that might arise and suggesting ways you might deal with difficulties that you have anticipated. Be particularly careful to establish that your linguistic fluency is adequate to accomplish the project.

As John Wilson, former Graduate Studies Advisor put it,

"For research grants, the project essay might follow this format:

- 1) Specify the university or institution (museum school, etc.) you want to attend, the course of study you want to pursue there (also indicating the specific research topic or intellectual issue you might focus on) and explain why that course of study is especially suited to that institution in that country.
- 2) Explain why this course is worth pursuing and the "results you hope to obtain."
- 3) Explain why you are qualified to do it, on the basis of your undergraduate course work or other experience .
- 4) Describe steps you have taken or will take to investigate the program of study. (Have you written for or received information regarding faculty, courses, library or other facilities? Do you have an

application?) Include in your application any letter or e-mail documenting that you will be welcome to the institution.

5) Explain how the program of studies relates to your future career interests.

"For teaching assistantships 'candidates should indicate both their reasons for wishing to serve as teaching assistants and the supplementary study they would undertake in their free time.' Your essay might stress the following points:

1) Your interest in the culture and your knowledge of it, especially your facility with the language. If you have spent your junior year abroad in the country, or traveled extensively there, stress that experience. Although preference is given for all Fulbright awards to someone who has spent fewer than 6 months in the host country of the proposal, it is particularly helpful in application for a teaching position to be able to demonstrate knowledge of the host culture. The preference is applied only when "everything else is equal." If you have not had experience of the country, emphasize instead how important it is that you should improve your knowledge of its language and culture. (If you are applying to teach in France or Germany, you must have a command of the language already, but you do not have to have lived there.)

2) Stress any aspect of your academic background or extracurricular experience that makes you especially qualified for teaching in general and for teaching language in particular: advanced academic projects, tutoring English as a second language here or overseas, summer camp work, Big Brother/ Sister programs, etc. Stress the benefits you will derive from teaching. If you intend to be a language teacher, stress that career goal (prospective language teachers are given preference in the German and French competitions). If you are at all familiar with the educational system of the country, stress that as well. If you have taken courses in English or especially American literature or history, or if you have traveled widely in North or South America, mention this background. In sum, convince the reviewers (and yourself) that you are an interesting American who has much to offer the young people you will serve as a native English speaker. If you are interested in a career other than teaching such as international relations, diplomacy, or business, explain how the Fulbright grant will further that goal.

3) Discuss briefly a specific program of reading, study, or other project you would pursue in addition to your teaching assignment. This is your chance to present yourself as a creative person with deep cultural interests in the host country. For Korea, Hungary, Turkey, stress that you want to learn the language and culture.

"The personal essay gives you the chance to present yourself as intellectually alive and culturally aware, a tactful person of goodwill who will make an excellent ambassador in the Fulbright year. Explain how your proposed program of studies or teaching assignment relates to your personal intellectual growth at the close of your undergraduate years. Stress any special intellectual interests, avocations, artistic or musical abilities that you could develop or contribute during your Fulbright year. Coordinate this personal essay with the project statement. Finally, your essay must display a graceful and concise command of your native language, so plan to revise, revise, and revise. Both Fulbright essays are subject to strictly enforced page limitations. They must be carefully composed and coordinated, without fluff or redundancy."

Marshall Scholarships

These awards are highly competitive, designed to honor the "best and brightest" American college graduates by providing funds for them to **spend two years** earning a degree at a British university. **All disciplines are eligible and the scholarship can be held at any British university.** Such an opportunity is not only one of the highest honors a student can receive, it also enables Marshall Scholars to significantly advance their education. In the available time a person with an American bachelor's degree can earn a second British bachelor's, or in some cases a master's degree. In some cases these degrees are transferable to graduate, medical, or law degree programs upon returning to the United States. Forty awards are made each year, distributed among 6 regions of the United States.

A key qualification for a Marshall Scholarship is high academic ability, to the point that applicants without at least a 3.7 grade-point average in the years after their first year of college are discouraged from applying. The stated **objectives** of the program are as follows:

- to express the gratitude of the British people to the American people for the Marshall Plan;
- to bring for study in the United Kingdom intellectually distinguished young Americans who will one day become leaders, opinion formers and decision makers in their own country;
- to enable them to gain an understanding and appreciation of the British way of life and British social and academic values;
- to encourage them to be ambassadors to the United Kingdom for their own way of life, and to establish long-lasting bridges and ties between the peoples of the United States and the United Kingdom, at a personal level; and
- to raise the profile of the United Kingdom in the United States, particularly among its young people.

The selection committee seeks "distinction of intellect and character as evidenced both by their scholastic attainments and by ... other activities and achievements. Preference will be given to candidates who combine high academic ability with the capacity to play an active part in the life of the United Kingdom university to which they go, and to those who display a potential to make a significant contribution to their own society. Selectors will also look for strong motivation and seriousness of purpose, including the presentation of a specific and realistic academic programme."

Applicants for British Marshall Scholarships are required to "outline their proposed field (and level) of study and to nominate a first- and second- choice university in the United Kingdom; they are further required to justify their choice of course and institution in a statement which forms part of the application process. Candidates are expected to prepare their application as fully as possible ..."

Thus preparation of an application requires the student to look carefully into the possible courses of study, and select among them those that match best the student's interests and goals. Then the proposal itself must persuasively justify the choices made. The two major statements to be submitted are

- a **statement of fewer than 1000 words describing the applicant's academic and other interests and pursuits, and**
- a **statement of fewer than 500 words identifying the proposed academic program, and giving the reasons for wishing to undertake the study proposed and for preferring the first-choice university as a location.**

In addition there are forms to be filled out (available on-line), and four letters of recommendation, which will be much more persuasive if you have discussed your plans with the recommender. The University Honors Scholars Program provides the institutional endorsement that must accompany each application. There are no limits on the number that we can submit.

As you prepare the Marshall statements, you should try to project yourself as destined for future leadership, in the broadest possible sense. A certain self-confidence (but not arrogance) is particularly effective. If you can identify instances where your actions have made a difference, try to work them into your personal statement. If you can identify a program at a British university that particularly extends your long-held and passionate ambitions for further study, that is ideal. And of course, the statements must be flawlessly written. What would impress a selection committee is a coherent picture that emerges of a disciplined and dedicated student, one who is confident to follow his or her own path and who exercises good judgment in choosing that path. This description is necessarily vague, since the hallmark of such a student is his or her individuality.

Again, John Wilson's words of advice are valuable:

"The **Personal Statement**, should put together 'a case on personal grounds why they should be awarded a Marshall. For students, the essay is perhaps the most challenging part of the application. What they use it for should provide selectors with a good sense of their personality and motivations.'

"For the second essay 'Candidates should describe ... their proposed academic programme, giving reasons for their choice of course and preferred university [in Britain]. Those hoping to read for a research degree should give an outline proposal of the research they wish to undertake.' (One page, single spaced.) For this essay you must be informed regarding faculty and courses in your subject at the two universities you select. The following reference works, available in most large public or university libraries, are recommended: *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook*, published by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and distributed in the US by Stockton Press, New York; *British Universities Guide to Graduate Study*, (Association of Commonwealth Universities); *Current Research in Britain* (The British Library). In addition most British universities maintain excellent web sites that you can consult."

Rhodes Scholarship

Like the Marshall Scholarship, the Rhodes rewards achievement at a very high level while providing the opportunity to study **in any field at Oxford University for two to three years**. The four criteria for selection of the 32 Americans each year, as specified by Cecil Rhodes in 1903, are as follows:

- literary and scholastic attainments
- fondness for and success in sports
- truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness, and fellowship
- moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one's fellow beings.

As an academic scholarship, the most important criterion is intellectual distinction, measured in large part (but not exclusively) by grades and academic honors. Letters of recommendation can provide

important supportive evidence of intellectual distinction. The criterion of success in sports is to show that you have the energy to use your talents fully. Thus other ways of demonstrating energy, physical vigor, and ambition besides participation in varsity athletics are acceptable. At the same time, leadership and teamwork are often well demonstrated in competitive sports, and unusual athletic distinction is a definite plus. The leadership sought is in any field, not simply political. The Rhodes seeks to identify and nurture those who will advance the course of human civilization in all its manifestations, a lofty goal indeed!

The application process requires an institutional endorsement (from the University Honors Scholars Program), between five and eight letters of recommendation, a list of principal activities and honors in college with dates (no more than two pages of at least 10-point type), and a **1000-word essay describing your academic and other interests, the specific area of proposed study, and why you wish to study at Oxford**. The selection committee will place special emphasis on this personal statement, so it should be the very best work of which you are capable. Since you will have already listed many of the qualifications that you believe to be most significant, this is an opportunity to describe how they relate to one another and to your long-term goals. Particular experiences connected with these or other incidents in your life can be described to the extent that they have shaped your development and the direction of your interests. To persuade the selection committee to choose you over the many other qualified candidates, you need to present yourself as a unique individual, competent, imaginative, ambitious, disciplined, with a vision for yourself and your place in the world, and with a particularly appropriate idea of how to further that vision by earning an Oxford degree.

Advising for the Rhodes is through the University Honors Scholars Program.

Summary

Even when you submit essentially the same proposal to multiple funding agencies, you need to see each application as a specific, individual effort that addresses the boundary between your needs and those of the agency offering support. By thinking that through, and incorporating your understanding into your proposal, you will greatly improve your chances for success.

Information for this handout excerpted from **Holy Cross College**

<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/gradstudies/website/proposewrite.htm>

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Personal Statement (This would have to be shortened for Fulbright)

I lived until the age of 18 in Lacey, Washington, a small town made up mostly of the strip malls and fast food restaurants that line Interstate 5 from Portland to Seattle. Very few of my high school classmates left this town, and instead moved back into the service industries and lower rungs of state bureaucracy where their parents had worked before them. For those of us who wanted to leave, the only routes, at the time, seemed to be the military or higher education. Since, by middle school, I had been tracked into college prep courses, I assumed that I would go to college but did not know where or what to study.

In our garage, my grandfather kept back issues of National Geographic dating to the 1920's. The summer before starting high school, he paid me to dust them and it was then that I discovered something called "Anthropology" which, when studied, appeared to lead to a more interesting life in a more interesting place. For my Freshman Physical Science course's "SCIENCE CAREERS DAY," I wrote "Anthropology" down as my career goal, though I knew nothing at the time about the discipline besides the name.

I likewise chose a college which I knew nothing about - Lewis and Clark in Oregon - because the brochure mentioned that there were several dozen overseas programs available through the school. Though I could have gone to India, Indonesia, Ecuador, Australia, Korea or many other countries, I decided to apply for Kenya because the year before I had read a book about nomads and the program included a unit on nomadic pastoralism and ecology.

After rereading this book much later, I discovered it to be an incredibly sappy, melodramatic and condescending account of the lives of indigenous Australians and other nomadic peoples. When I was seventeen, though, the plot of the book - mainly, that humans have an innate desire to wander the earth, in the same manner the Aborigines retrace the paths which their ancestors sung into existence at the beginning of time - seemed quite compelling and true. I was fixated on nomads for the rest of my undergraduate career; however after my stay in Kenya for 7 months in 1990, the nature of my interest changed.

The event that both altered my perspective on nomads, and also led to an eventual decision to pursue a graduate degree in Anthropology occurred while driving north past Mt. Kenya with an American instructor who had lived in Africa for 25 years. After descending from the rich, green highlands into a hot arid plain of acacia trees, scrub, and dry river beds, from the car window there appeared cattle kraals made of thin branches and thorn bush, small boys herding goats, sheep and cattle, and the squat, dung-walled, oval houses belonging to the Samburu communities who occupied the area. The instructor stopped the truck, took in the view, and then announced quite dramatically, "These people have lived like this for 6000 years."

Everything about that statement was false. The communities currently occupying that area had not been there 600 years, let alone 6000. Additionally, the people who I met in Northern

Kenya, though definitely poor, had fully "modern" lives. They wore jewelry reconstructed from 35 mm film canisters and shoes from old tire treads. They voted in elections and kept up with national news. I had watched men mix vats of fluorescent green chemicals with which to vaccinate their cattle. I had seen women cook with tin pots and tea kettles and kids on their way to school with exercise books and soccer balls made from plastic bags.

At that moment, I was confronted with a glaring contradiction between what I observed - that is, an encounter with modernity as complex and confusing as that which I had witnessed in my own culture - and what I, along with many other of my fellow travelers to Africa, often want to believe - that somewhere out in the world there are people who represent what humans beings were meant to be, what we used to be, and what we have lost. What I gained from that moment was ultimately an appreciation, instead, for what people really do with their lives - how they manage the economic, political and social transformations that are occurring, and have always occurred, in their local communities. Moreover, I developed an interest in how groups of people are made to stand for something else, like a concept, an ideal or, perhaps, a fear. This interest has switched over time from a focus on how Europeans and Americans use images of African communities representationally (the idea of the 'noble savage,' for instance) to, as I explain in my proposal, a concern about how communities use debates over children to represent conflicts in other areas of social life.

In the summer of 1994, I had the opportunity to travel to Tanzania on an SSRC Predissertation Grant to begin to establish affiliation, research clearance and possible fieldsites. I have also made contacts at the district level with officials and academics in the area. Though I already speak Kiswahili, the national language of Tanzania, I also have made arrangements to study Maa, the language of the Kisongo Maasai and WaArusha who live in the district in which I will be working. I am looking forward to working in Tanzania not only because of its political stability and unique history as a nation, but also because of the opportunity to generate information about children and education in pastoral communities there, a topic which is still under-researched despite the restructuring of national curriculum in recent years.

Proposal

This research begins with the assumption that communities often use children's activities as powerful symbols in larger debates over identity and social change. Despite their position at the very bottom of a social hierarchy based quite rigidly on age and sex distinctions, Maasai children in Monduli District, Tanzania contribute in important ways to Maasai economic life, not only in terms of the labor hours they provide towards production but also in their pivotal and unique position as learners and possible transformers of culture. As such, this research will show that implicit to the socialization of children is an often unspoken recognition *by local communities* of children as receptacles of tradition. This recognition often manifests itself in conflicts over how children are taught and what children do. My research will argue that, in many respects, conflicts over children's work and education are also conflicts over a community's self-definition and attempts at continuity.

The Maasai are a valuable case study for an analysis of the relationship between children's activities and larger forces. Often considered resistant to primary education, described as unwilling participants in the commercial and political life of the colony or nation-state, and held up as bearers of a "conservative commitment" to a cattle-keeping tradition (Gulliver 1969), the Maasai have long been a focus of academic, administrative, and fictional accounts of life in East Africa. In part, this literature suggests that Maasai identity is founded upon the premise of pastoral specialization - that is, being "people-of- the-cattle" in opposition to agriculturists or hunter-gatherers (for example, Jacobs 1965; Galaty 1982; Waller 1976).

Recent literature, however, has begun to emphasize the fluidity of the Maasai economy, pointing out that many Maasai are not now, nor have they ever been, engaged solely in pastoral production and consumption, especially during economic and ecological crisis (Spear & Waller 1993; Berntsen 1979; Knowles & Collett 1989). In the context of my case study, the ethnically mixed communities of Northern Monduli District are places in which the 'pawning' or loaning of children's labor between the Maasai and neighboring WaArusha farmers has been a common way of diversifying production, ensuring survival during crisis, and securing loans since the 19th century. Furthermore, in the 1990's, as Maasai lose grazing land through encroachment by cultivators and as terms of trade weigh more heavily in favor of agricultural production, impoverishment is leading to the sale of livestock and the inability to pursue cattle-keeping as a viable means of subsistence.

My research will straddle both sides of this debate, arguing that the Maasai have undergone profound socio-economic transformations, especially in the last century, but at the same time continue to maintain an understanding - though perhaps conflicting or contradictory - of what "being Maasai" means and how to ensure cultural continuity. Moreover, I assume that even if circumstances make it practically impossible to be pastoral producers, this economic ideal still plays a meaningful role in how Maasai see themselves and how they choose to raise their children.

I will therefore address the following questions: 1) What are Maasai conceptions of children and childrearing and how, if at all, are they transformed with changing adult livelihoods, inter-ethnic relations, and structures of education? 2) How and when do conflicts over Maasai children become metaphors for discussions of larger issues such as relations with other Maasai, non-Maasai or the State? 3) Finally, how can adult and non-Maasai accounts of Maasai children be set against a child's daily activities and behavior? What events, individuals, places and experiences shape children's days? What social or economic limitations do they face? What do children do (and think they are doing) versus adult depiction, opinion and reconstruction of child life?

This research, then, will be an attempt to address the issues of socialization, economic contribution and organization of production from the perspective of culture. These issues have been addressed on numerous occasions from a wide variety of perspectives: studies of socialization from cultural and social anthropology (Raum 1940; Read 1960; Levine & Levine 1977; Schildkrout 1979; Riesman 1992), quantitative accounts of children's economic and social 'value' (Aries 1962; Arnold 1971; Zelizer 1985; Reynolds 1991; Nieuwenhuys 1994) and structural analyses of cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Willis 1977; Katz 1991; McGaffey 1982). All of this scholarship indicates

that children in and out of Africa are both important and active participants in the production and reproduction of their communities. Furthermore, it suggests that children's daily activities help to mediate social transformation (see, for instance, Katz's 1991 study of the changing nature of Sudanese children's environmental knowledge).

My research, then, treats organization of production as a key factor in the socialization of children and, additionally, assumes that while social categories of age help to manage production, other factors play an important role in what children learn about and through work. These factors include macro-level forces such as national education and incorporation into the market economy, but also, at the most micro-level, variance in the abilities and experiences of individual children.

At the same time, my research examines not just social institutions but ideas about those institutions. By focusing on the ways in which people teach their children about social life, the kinds of knowledge that communities deem crucial for children to learn, and the sorts of struggles that ensue when multiple parties are involved in the bringing up of children, I hope to touch upon such issues as the relationship between society and cultural forms and the ways in which local communities deal with tradition, modernity and change.

The methodology of this project will entail, first, a description of children's activities and environment through structured observations and an analysis of kinship and residential networks to describe the relationships that form the social parameters of a child's world. I will additionally carry out interviews with boys and girls, emphasizing how they describe their activities and how they actually carry out tasks and/or play. I will use this information, as well as baseline socio-economic data generated through a survey of households, as a context for describing the social and economic relationships that support both parental and community decisions about what children should do and how they should learn.

I will juxtapose these accounts of children's daily life with interviews of Maasai adults. These interviews will concentrate on understanding Maasai conceptions of childhood, socialization and tradition. Because the Maasai may not have terms for these specific abstract nouns, I will focus instead on their expectations of children, their portrayal of appropriate and inappropriate learning, their perceptions of boys and girls' activities, and their remembrances of their own childhood in order to understand what shapes adult decisions and discussions about children and cultural continuity. In addition, I will conduct interviews with teachers, administrators and local politicians about their views on education and socialization practices in Maasailand to help place local level discussions on childhood and child-rearing in the broader context of Maasai engagement with non-Maasai institutions.

Lastly, I will look historically at education and child life in Maasailand through archival research in relevant regional, national, and missionary archives. Here I will review pre-independence accounts of education in the former Maasai District, as well as attempt to locate possible court cases involving disputes over Maasai children. This archival research, as well as the interviews with Maasai adults about their own childhood, will help situate my study of socio-economic transformation in time. I am most interested in documenting changes in the formal and informal education of children beginning from the period of British colonial rule, since it was at this point when Maasai in Tanzania became more full

incorporated into the primary education system and other state and mission structures (Germany relinquished Tanganyika as a colony to Britain at the end of World War I).

As explained in my personal statement, I began making arrangements for research in Tanzania, as well as for the study of Maa (a language not taught in the United States), with the help of an SSRC Predissertation Grant during the summer of 1994. At the University of Dar es Salaam, I have spoken to the chair of the Department of Sociology, Dr. Maghrimbi, about affiliation with the department. Dr. Joe Lugalla has agreed to sponsor me and Dr. George Malekela has expressed interest in aspects of my project having to do with Maasai children and school absenteeism. Dr. Ndagal a, the Commissioner of Culture at the Ministry of Education and Culture, an anthropologist who has worked for fifteen years with Monduli Maasai, was extremely useful in helping me to clarify my project conceptually. Also, Reuban ole Kuney of the Training for Rural Development Center in Monduli will help me in establishing local connections in Monduli District. I hope that the fieldwork involved in this research will provide the base for an eventual career in research on children's issues for child advocacy and policy purposes.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW DOES ONE APPLY FOR A GRANT?

Students enrolled in a U.S. academic institution at the time of application must apply through the Fulbright Program Adviser (FPA) on their campus. If you are unable to locate the FPA, IIE can provide you with his/her name.

CAN GRANTEES OBTAIN CREDIT FOR THEIR YEAR ABROAD?

Applicants who are [not currently enrolled \(at-large\)](#) may obtain application forms and information directly from IIE.

ARE YOUNGER STUDENTS AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THE COMPETITION?

Because most foreign universities do not use the credit system, there is no guarantee that a student will receive credit for work done abroad. If a student desires credit for work done abroad, he or she must make arrangements with the home institution, preferably prior to departure.

WHAT TYPES OF FORMS ARE REQUIRED?

No. The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board looks favorably on qualified graduating seniors, who are still in the process of developing specific career plans. In fact, such applicants benefit greatly from the international skills and awareness they gain as a Fulbrighter, which will be invaluable as they embark on their careers.

There is a single application form for all types of grants: Fulbright full and travel grants, teaching assistantships, etc. Since candidates may apply generally only to one country, one application suffices for all awards to that country for which an applicant is eligible.

WHEN IS THE APPLICATION DEADLINE?

For example, candidates applying to Germany will be considered not only for the Fulbright full and travel grants, but also for the Bavarian State Government Grants, or the Germanistic Society of America-Quadrille Awards, provided they meet all the qualifications for each of the awards. There is no need to file a separate application for each award.

HOW CAN ONE APPLY FOR SUMMER GRANTS?

The application deadline is October 21, 2004 for all grants for the 2005-2006 academic year.

CAN IIE-ADMINISTERED AWARDS BE USED TO OBTAIN A MEDICAL DEGREE OVERSEAS?

There are no summer grants available under the IIE-administered portion of the Fulbright Program. IIE, however, does administer several non-Fulbright study abroad programs that are available during summer. Partial scholarships are available for some of these programs.

WHAT ABOUT CANDIDATES WHO HAVE A PH.D.?

No. However, if candidates already have an M.D. or the equivalent and wish to continue medical or hospital training or to obtain additional practical clinical experience abroad, they may apply for an award through IIE.

Applicants who do not hold a Ph.D. degree by October 21, 2004 may apply for an IIE-administered award to any country, even though they may anticipate receiving the Ph.D. degree before taking up the grant.

Others who hold Ph.D.s should inquire about Fulbright Research Grants or Fulbright Scholar Grants through the [Council for the International Exchange of Scholars](#).

WHAT KIND OF SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION MUST CANDIDATES IN THE ARTS PROVIDE?

Specifications regarding supplementary material are provided in the application form. These instructions should be followed closely, particularly with regard to numbers of slides to submit. If no specific instructions are provided for your particular field of study (e.g., electronic music), you are free to submit whatever material you feel is appropriate and will best illustrate your abilities.

WHAT DOES THE NATIONAL SCREENING COMMITTEE LOOK FOR IN REVIEWING APPLICATIONS?

The National Screening Committee looks very closely at all application materials. Specifically, the *Statement of Proposed Study* is reviewed very carefully. Considerations include the nature of the project, its originality, the academic preparation for completing the project described, and any additional investigation the student has undertaken to ensure that resources to accomplish the project are available in the proposed host country.

The screening committee also takes into account factors such as academic and professional achievement, demonstrated leadership potential, and community involvement. Successful grantees are expected to exhibit these and other related qualities that demonstrate their flexibility and aptitude for success in an unfamiliar environment abroad.

Resources to Assist In Grant & Scholarship Proposal Writing

- Basic steps to grant writing: http://www.npguides.org/guide/basic_steps.htm
- Three essays on how to write a fellowship proposal
<http://grad-affairs.uchicago.edu/handouts/essays.html>
- Foundation Center's Writing guide:
<http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>
- Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance guide:
<http://www.cfda.gov/public/cat-writing.htm>
- Online grant writing tutorial from the Environmental Protection Agency:
<http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants.html>
- Nonprofit writing guide: <http://www.grantproposal.com/>
- National Network of Grantmakers guide: <http://www.nng.org/resources/cga.htm>
- Writing guide from the *funder's* perspective:
<http://www.guidestar.org/news/features/grantadvice.jsp>
- Donor's Forum of WI guide: <http://www.dfwonline.org/resources-grantapp.asp>
- Writing grant proposals online: <http://www.tgcigrantproposals.com/>
- Michigan State University Guide: <http://www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/>
- Minnesota grant writing guide: <http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm>
- Dept. of Health & Human Services guide:
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/ncn/grants/default.htm>
- Grant proposal basics and resources: <http://www.proposalwriter.com/grants.html>
- Educator's guide to grant writing:
<http://www.uml.edu/College/Education/Faculty/lebaron/GRANTBEGIN/>
- Faculty & Research grant writing guide:
<http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/research/writing.htm>
- Non profit grant writing steps, tools, and examples:
http://www.npguides.org/guide/full_proposal.htm
- Fundraising Dictionary:
http://www.afpnet.org/tier3_cd.cfm?folder_id=2205&content_item_id=11947
- National Science Foundation guide:
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/nsf04016.pdf>
- University of Pittsburg writing guide:
http://ra.terc.edu/publications/TERC_pubs/TERCGrantManual/TOC.html
- Grant writing at Carolina guide:
<http://research.unc.edu/grantsource/grantwriting.html>
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln guide:
<http://www.unl.edu/nepscor/newpages/noframes/pubs/winners/writing.html>

Definition of a Personal Statement

Mary Hale Tolar¹

Deputy Executive Secretary, Truman Scholarship Foundation

If you are applying for nationally competitive scholarships, for graduate school, or for a number of post-graduate service or employment opportunities, you have seen the vaguely phrased request; in one form or another, it comes down to “tell us something about yourself.”

The Rhodes and Marshall competitions require a 1000-word personal essay: the Fulbright, a “*curriculum vita*.” You are asked to share your “academic and other interests.” A clearer charge might be: compose an essay that reveals who you are, what you care about, and what you intend to do in this life. Tell this story in a compelling manner, and do so in less than a thousand words. What’s so hard about that? Simply make sense of your life. (right.) But what does that mean? What will it look like?

Because personal statements are personal, there is no one type or style of writing that is set out as a model. That can be liberating; it can also be maddening. But while every personal statement is unique in style, it’s purpose is the same.

A personal statement is your introduction to a selection committee. It determines whether you are invited to interview; and if selected as a finalist, interview questions will be based on this material. **It is the heart of your application.**

A personal statement *is*:

- **A picture.** Your personal essay should produce a picture of you as a person, a student, a potential scholarship winner, and (looking into the future) a former scholarship recipient.
- **An invitation.** The reader must be invited to get to know you, personally. Bridge the assumed distance of strangers. Make your reader welcome.
- **An indication of your priorities and judgement.** What you choose to say in your statement tells the committee what your priorities are. What you say, and how you say it, is crucial.
- **A story, or more precisely, *your* story.** Everyone has a story to tell, but we are not all natural storytellers. If you are like most people, your life lacks inherent drama. This is when serious self-reflection, conversation with friends, family, and mentors, and permission to be creative come in handy.

A personal statement *is not*:

- **An academic paper with you as the subject.** The papers you write for class are typically designed to interpret data, reflect research, analyze events or reading—all at some distance. We are taught to eliminate the “I” from our academic writing. In a personal statement your goal is to close the distance between you and the reader. You must engage on a different, more personal level that you have been trained to in college.

- **A resume in narrative form.** An essay that reads like a resume of accomplishments and goals tells the reader nothing that they could not glean from the rest of the application. It reveals little about the candidate, and is a wasted opportunity.
- **A journal entry.** While you may draw on experiences or observations captured in your personal journal, your essay should not read like a diary. Share what is relevant, using these experiences to give a helpful context for your story. And include only what you are comfortable sharing—be prepared to discuss at an interview what you include.
- **A plea of justification for the scholarship.** This is not an invitation to “make your case.” Defending an assertion that you are more deserving of the scholarship than other candidates is a wasted effort—you’ve likely just accomplished the opposite.

Most importantly, a personal statement is **authentic**. Don’t make the mistake of trying to guess what the committee is looking for, and don’t write what you think they want to hear. They want to know you.

So, what must you include in the personal statement? An effective personal statement will answer the following questions:

- Who am I?
- Who do I want to be?
- What kind of contribution do I want to make, and how?
- Why does it make sense for me to study at Oxford (or York, LSE, Cambridge, Sussex)?

For the Rhodes, you will want to include a proposal of study, one or two paragraphs devoted to why Oxford makes sense to you. For the Marshall and Fulbright, your “proposed academic programme” is presented separately. Your proposal should be as detailed and specific as possible, including degree plans, course titles, and professors with whom you hope to study (especially if you have contacted them by email or letter). Why is this the right place and program? Is it consistent with your studies and activities to date? Draw connections.

Remember the goal: grab the readers’ interest, and make them want to meet you for an interview. Get a sense of the experiences and dreams you wish to share, then examine them for a helpful means of making sense of it all. You will find your story; and if you share it honestly, you will have written a personal statement.

Finally, know that writing a personal essay is hard and will take many drafts and much reflection. Don’t wait until you have it right to share it with others; their input will likely make it stronger, clearer, and tighter. Don’t put it off until you have it right ... just write!

¹Mary Tolar is a 1988 Truman Scholar and 1990 Rhodes Scholar; served as scholarships advisor at four institutions, and has served on a State Rhodes Committee of Selection. She has helped over sixty students win nationally competitive scholarships.

Getting Started....

The personal statement comes from inside you, passionate and gutsy. Its composition is organic, a natural growth dictated by an obscure, internal logic. You don't "make it up"; instead you listen. You "get it down."

First, you must trick your brain into letting you play. It wants everything nice and tidy, arranged in neat, labeled cubbyholes. Your artist brain is messy; like playing with finger paints. Lull your logic brain to sleep:

- ❖ Engage in mindless, repetitive activity. Turn off the TV and stereo; go for a run, do dishes, dig holes. Do anything that keeps you busy but allows your mind to wander. Be sure to keep a micro cassette recorder handy! Ideas may come thick and fast.
- ❖ Begin writing as soon as you wake up in the morning. Don't shower, don't eat (OK, you can have coffee), just turn on the computer. So you're not fully awake; that's good. Neither is your logic brain.

Now do this everyday. Well, maybe not every single day; make appointments with yourself. You won't have brilliant ideas each time. Some days you sit and stare at the computer screen. Nothing happens. You develop imaginary rashes that need immediate medical attention. You suddenly remember a test you should be studying for. But you sit there; you focus; eventually, an idea bubbles to the surface. You start writing.

From Getting Creative with the Truman Personal Statements, written by Jane Curlin, Ph.D.; Director of Student Academic Grants & Awards, Willamette University; writer and consultant.

An Exercise in Self-Reflection

Reflect on some specific questions that may lead you to a more general expression of yourself.

- What errors or regrets have taught you something important about yourself?
- When have you been so immersed in what you were doing, that time seemed to evaporate while you were actively absorbed?
- What ideas, books, theories or movements have made a profound impact on you – be honest.
- To what extent do your current commitments reflect your most strongly-held values?
- Where or how do you seem to waste the most time?
- Under what conditions do you do your best, most creative work?
- To what extent are you a typical product of your generation and/or culture? How might you deviate from the norm?

(Taken from From a Faculty Representative: The Truman and Marshall Scholarship Processes As Educational Experiences, by Cheryl Foster, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy and Scholarships Coordinator at the University of Rhode Island)

THREE ESSAYS ON HOW TO WRITE A FELLOWSHIP PROPOSAL: THE ART OF GRANTSMANSHIP

WRITING A FELLOWSHIP PROPOSAL OR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

by
CYNTHIA VERBA

Most fellowships must be applied for during the academic year prior to when support is needed, with many fellowship deadlines occurring during the fall of the previous year. (Fellowship tenure roughly coincides with the academic calendar.) This means that it is essential to plan ahead, both in terms of identifying fellowship opportunities and in thinking about the application process. For the proposal itself, it is important to keep in mind that a fellowship proposal is a projection of what you expect to accomplish in the future, rather than a statement with definitive conclusions. This should make it easier to write a proposal in advance. The task in the proposal is to offer sufficient reason for why your plans or project are promising -- why you deserve support. The discussion of how to write a proposal will be dealt with in greater detail below, including the predissertation stage as well as the dissertation stage. First, however, we must consider ways of gathering fellowship information and how to take the follow-up steps.

IDENTIFYING FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Since fellowships change from year to year, it is important to seek the most current information. The Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences publishes annually *The Graduate Guide to Grants and The Harvard Guide to Postdoctoral Fellowships*.

APPLYING FOR FELLOWSHIPS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF GRADUATE STUDY: THE PREDISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Note: For samples of winning fellowship proposals GSAS publishes a book entitled *Scholarly Pursuits: A Practical Guide to Academe*, which has an Appendix with winning samples. Instructions for obtaining this publication are also described above.

There are fellowships, such as the National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowships, which are intended for students at or near the beginning of their graduate study. At this early stage, fellowship application materials (letters of recommendation, transcripts, Graduate Record Examination scores) will closely overlap those used for graduate admission. Writing the fellowship Proposed Plan of Study or Statement of Purpose, however, can be a more challenging task. First-year graduate students generally are not yet ready to write a detailed research proposal, and yet they must be prepared to write an informative and focused essay about their research and study plans and future goals. The question is how to do so, conveying interests in a concrete and even personal way, while still having perhaps only tentative ideas.

Much of your knowledge at this early stage may still be related to undergraduate research, or other scholarly experiences in between college and the graduate program. It is considerably easier to present a focused and well-informed discussion on what you have already done, than on what you are about to do (a condition common to all proposal writers). In using past experiences in a Proposed Plan of Study, however, it is essential to present them in terms of their impact on your future direction. A discussion of your senior thesis or major seminar paper, for example, should not just focus on your procedures or findings for their own sake but on what you learned from them that influenced or shaped your goals in

graduate school. The impact may have been negative (directing you towards new methodologies and issues); or positive (encouraging you to continue working along similar lines). Using concrete examples from the past is primarily of value in allowing you to talk about future plans with greater assurance and precision.

In organizing the essay, you may choose to focus on a single culminating research project -- for example, the senior thesis; or, you may prefer to discuss a series of intellectual experiences and show their cumulative effect. If you choose the latter, it is usually more effective to start with your most important experiences and then proceed backwards -- a principal that works effectively in preparing a curriculum vitae. Whether you decide on a single project or a cumulative series of events, it is important to organize the material tightly and not to get too bogged down in descriptive detail. Each sentence or paragraph about past experiences should help to advance the single theme -- your future goals and how they took shape. (Note: The NSF application has a separate question on past research experience. Even after answering the research question, you should still incorporate your research experience in the Proposed Plan of Study essay in the manner that we suggest here.)

A final point about the essay is that it is also an important display of your writing skills. You should be sure that it is a highly polished piece of work. When you have completed a draft, read it over and have others read it. With a final draft, be sure to have someone else read it for typographical errors.

FUNDING THE DISSERTATION: WRITING THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Learning to write an effective fellowship proposal at the dissertation stage has implications that go well beyond the process itself; it is a skill that is essential to a scholar throughout his or her career.

A. The Nature of a Proposal: How a Dissertation Fellowship Proposal Differs from a Dissertation Prospectus

A fellowship proposal is essentially a persuasive argument for why your project deserves to be funded. Most dissertation fellowships -- and fellowships in general -- involve a highly competitive contest, judged by an anonymous fellowship committee. This is in contrast to a dissertation prospectus, where you are simply asking your own department to decide whether your project is *acceptable* or not; this is normally an easier task, more like 'preaching to the converted.'" Many departments have their own rules as to what a prospectus should be -- how long, what to include, what format to use, and other requirements -- but in general the prospectus is a fairly detailed explanation of your project.

In a fellowship competition you are asking an anonymous fellowship committee to decide that you deserve to *win* and -- yes -- that someone else deserves to lose. In this situation, it will not do simply to describe a project that is acceptable; instead, you must develop a highly persuasive and polished argument that will convince the reader that your proposed project will make an important contribution to the field, that it deserves to be funded. The argument should be constructed so carefully that each sentence and each paragraph advances your contribution argument in the most tightly-knit and logically coherent fashion.

B. Constructing a Polished Argument for How Your Project Will Contribute to the Field: Three Possible Paradigms

Before you can construct a tightly-knit argument, you must first decide what your contribution argument will be. There are three possible paradigms -- or three logical possibilities -- for defining how a study will contribute to the field:

Paradigm One: The project is a research topic that never has been done before. Almost by definition it will contribute to the field. The burden in this argument, however, is to show that the topic is indeed significant despite its neglect by scholars. Perhaps it has only recently acquired significance through scholarly developments, or perhaps there are other factors that have been overlooked that explain its importance. The main point in this paradigm is to show that the topic no longer should be neglected.

Sample Argument, Paradigm One:

"While thirteenth-century Venetian art has been studied in depth, the story of the fourteenth century remains to be written. Not only was this a period of extraordinary political and economic expansion and turning westward, but it was also a period marked by artistic transition, moving away from the prevalent use of Byzantine cultural models -- once again in the direction of the West."

Paradigm Two: (This argument is the opposite of Paradigm One.) The project will study well known material that has been examined many times before, but you are making a reassessment of that material by looking at it in a new way, which will be your contribution. The challenge in this paradigm is to make a strong argument for the need for reassessment, but without denigrating all previous work. (Your readers may well include an author of one of those previous works.) The wisest approach is to stress that you are adding a new dimension, thanks to the work that has already been done.

Sample Argument, Paradigm Two:

"The rapid turnover in population in nineteenth-century cities and the chaotic ordering of their neighborhoods has led many historians to focus almost exclusively on the social dislocation and uprootedness that they felt urban life brought. This dissertation seeks to re-examine these assumptions

Paradigm Three: (This argument logically falls between Paradigms One and Two; it is where most research projects fall as well.) In this case, the project will contribute by exposing some new material which in turn will call for some reassessment of what has already been done.

Sample Argument, Paradigm Three:

"While there have been some studies done on the Alliance's activities in North Africa, there have been none of its work in the Ottoman Empire where most of its schools were located. . . . By studying the activities of an organization which channelled Western values directly to a broad mass of young students, I hope to shed some new light on the process of Westernization at the local level."

C. Discussion of the Scholarly Literature and Incorporating It into Your Contribution Argument: Should You Include Foot-notes and a Bibliography?

You will note that all three paradigms have the advantage of allowing you to discuss the scholarly literature in the field, which is an essential part of a fellowship proposal. However, it avoids the potential monotony of simply describing a long list of works; instead it makes the discussion of literature an integral part of your contribution argument. When you discuss the literature, the general practice is to keep the scholarly apparatus at a minimum within the proposal. Cited works can be presented in abbreviated form -- author's last name and date of publication -- and placed within the text in parentheses, rather than in foot-notes. This is especially recommended when only a brief fellowship statement is required (of no more than six double spaced pages). The proposal can be accompanied by a bibliography even if one is not required, but it should be limited to *selected works*, presenting only those items that are central to the proposal.

In some competitions, usually when a longer and more elaborate proposal is required (around ten double-spaced pages), you will be expected to have references and a bibliography. Cited works can still be presented in abbreviated form within the text, or you may use foot-notes. In either case, this type of proposal should be accompanied by a bibliography, but once again, the bibliography should be limited to selected works that are central to the proposal.

D. Writing a Concise Introduction to the Proposal

Your contribution argument will have more meaning if the reader first has a grasp of the overall purpose of your project. An ideal way to begin a proposal is with an introductory paragraph that presents a clear and concise statement of the major goals of the project as a whole. If your topic concerns a particular time period and a particular location, this information should be included in the introduction. Similarly, if you are relying on a specific method or a specific kind of data, this too should be specified at the outset. The following are two examples of opening statements, with the first and longer example serving as an introduction to a longer a more complex proposal and research project:

1) "The purpose of my proposed research is to explore the transformation of Mexican rural social relations from 1940 to 1958 by examining the increasingly dominant role of business in agriculture. I will focus on the Gulf state of Veracruz, known for a wide range of soils, climates, food crops, and social relations of production, as well as for the strength of its peasant leagues since the 1920s. My preliminary work indicates that the study of business interests and networks is the most effective way of understanding the nature and pace of change in rural social relations in modern Mexico. In this context "business" may be broadly defined as the profit-oriented activities of individuals or companies with an interest in rural production -- e.g., machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, seed, credit, and marketing." The main sources for my research would be company and private papers, business publications, local newspapers, community records, government and diplomatic documents, agricultural manuals and other specialized publications, and oral history or field interviews."

2) "I plan to study archival materials in Norway relevant to my doctoral dissertation. I hope to demonstrate through an examination of his personal papers, music, and publications that Grieg developed a unique style of composition based upon a personal aesthetic outlook."

E. Significance of the Project in Broader Terms

Another important component of the contribution argument is to explain the significance of the project in broader terms, showing its relation to larger theoretical issues or to the larger scholarly dialogue. Since this is such an important part of the contribution argument, it could be included not only as you present your paradigm, but also later in the proposal, as you make your closing arguments. The following two examples illustrate the use of broader arguments. Note in both cases, the use of active words, stating the potential significance in terms of expected or predicted outcomes ("The study will contribute or "must provide a significant test case").

1) "My work on the state of Veracruz, the first properly historical study of Mexican agriculture after 1940, will test the explanatory possibilities of this novel perspective, and will contribute new sources and fresh approaches to the fields of modern agrarian history and rural development."

2) "I could say, then, that my project is justified in that working out the intricacies of the Old Norse verbal system constitutes a formidable intellectual challenge. But I feel that much more is at stake than that. First, if the facts are as intractable as they seem... then they must provide a significant test case for the descriptive and explanatory power of current linguistic theory, and bring issues into clear view which have hitherto lurked in the background."

F. Feasibility of the Project: Developing Specific Objectives or Hypotheses

The fellowship selection committee will want to know that the project is feasible, as well as important to the field. An essential step in showing feasibility is to translate your major goals into a series of well-defined hypotheses or specific objectives, making sure that the specific objectives are a logical outgrowth of the major goals. For each stated major goal, there should be at least one corresponding specific objective. The feasibility argument will be stronger if you avoid having too many objectives or hypotheses -- after a certain number of questions the project's feasibility sounds less convincing. Similarly, it is important to state all of your specific objectives in a single place in an orderly fashion. If they are scattered (and there is a common tendency for writers to pile up new questions on almost every page of a proposal), then it is impossible for the reader to know exactly what is being proposed, and how or why it fits with the major goals or contribution paradigm.

G. Research Design in Relation to Feasibility

The feasibility of the project also hinges on the research design or methodology -- and especially on how closely it mirrors both the major goals and the more specific set of hypotheses to be tested. For each specific objective, there should be at least one matching methodological procedure. The presentation of the research design or methodology should include the following:

1) overall design and why it has been adopted -- once again, with an emphasis on how closely it reflects the stated major and specific objectives (your method may be comparative, longitudinal, qualitative, quantitative, participant observer, sample survey, a case study, an experiment, or some combination of these methods).

2) type of data to be used -- the principal variables and their control

3) how data will be collected

4) how data will be analyzed

5) timetable for implementation

6) available resources for implementation

H. Personal Importance of Project -- Candidate's Relevant Background or Qualifications

Often the application includes instructions for discussing the applicant's qualifications as part of the proposal, or there is a separate essay question asking for relevant personal background. If there are no specific questions, it is nevertheless important to include some of your strongest qualifications or preparation for the project in the proposal itself, once you have described the project. This discussion also gives you the opportunity to convey a sense of your commitment and enthusiasm for the project. (Conveying your own enthusiasm may well generate a corresponding enthusiasm from the reader.) If there are no instructions, the following items should be addressed:

- 1) how the project fits in with long-term career goals of candidate
- 2) special background or skills or preparatory work for the project (languages or other skills mastered, prior fieldwork or research related to topic, etc.)
- 3) any other evidence of your promise to carry out the project successfully.

Some applications seek a more extended biographical essay -- for example, the Fulbright Institute of International Education application includes a c.v. in essay form that asks for such personal history as family background, intellectual influences, enriching experiences and how they have affected you. (Samples of c.v. essays appear in *Scholarly Pursuits*, Appendix B.) Others simply ask for a standard c.v. (Samples appear in *Scholarly Pursuits*, Appendix D.)

I. Who Serves on Fellowship Selection Committees -- Will Your Proposal be read by Specialists in the Field, or by Generalists?

Most people want to know the answer to this question so that they can address their proposal to the appropriate audience. The problem is that even in competitions that are judged by people in your own discipline, you cannot or should not assume that they are fully knowledgeable about your own specialized topic. Indeed, even specialists need convincing, and may in fact view your proposal with a more critical eye. The safest course is to provide enough background in making your contribution argument, so that both generalists and specialists will view the background as a necessary and logical part of your contribution argument. It is also wise to avoid jargon or unnecessary technical terms.

J. Paying Attention to Fellowship Descriptions; Adapting the Proposal When Applying for Several Fellowships

It is wise to apply for as many fellowships as possible, as long as they are appropriate for your project. Most fellowship announcements include a description of the fellowship, stating selection criteria and providing some details about the type of projects that the granting agency seeks to support. You may find that there are number of fellowships which are appropriate for your project, but that the fellowship descriptions vary, both in large and small details. While it is important to pay close attention to the wording in the individual fellowship announcements, it is also important to write a fellowship proposal that presents the most persuasive and logical argument in support of your project, following the principles outlined above. How can you write a proposal that does both?

We would suggest that you first construct a "generic" proposal that presents your project in the strongest light. You can then adapt it, if necessary, to create individual versions that match individual fellowship announcements as closely as possible. This process involves, above all, careful choice of wording in order

to incorporate key terminology from individual fellowship announcements. In some cases, it may also involve adding paragraphs that address specific questions asked by individual granting agencies.

Most projects can be described with a subtly different choice of wording, without distorting the true nature of the project, and without disrupting the basic logic of the contribution argument. The main point is to get your arguments in place. Once that is done, then any tinkering with surface details will not weaken the basic structure of your arguments, which is ultimately what counts.

K. Writing an Abstract or Summary of the Proposal

In addition to the proposal itself, many fellowship competitions also require a brief abstract or summary of the proposal. It varies in length -- ranging between 150 and 500 words. Most federal agencies require 200 or 250 words.

Although the abstract appears at the beginning of the proposal, it should be written last, after you have constructed your basic arguments. The abstract should consist of the most salient points in your proposal, linked with transitional sentences as necessary. You do not have to worry at all if your abstract contains repetitions from your main proposal. The abstract is intended to give a brief picture of what is in your proposal; it is not supposed to give an alternative picture. It is important to prepare the abstract carefully, since it is usually the first part that is read -- and may be the only part read by some reviewers. (That is another reason why you would want to use in your abstract some of the most polished and carefully worded passages from your main proposal.) In addition, the abstract, along with the title, may be used in the various national computerized information systems, so major reference terms should appear in the abstract.

The following items should be included in the abstract, and can also serve as a checklist, to see that the essentials have been covered in the proposal:

- 1) a concise statement of the purpose of the project (much can be drawn from your introduction)
- 2) reference to the major literature in relation to the basic paradigm of how the project will contribute to the field
- 3) significance of the project in broader terms
- 4) objectives and research design -- no more than a brief outline
- 5) personal background of relevance

L. Writing a Budget

In some fellowships competitions, you will be required to include a budget. This can be thought of as a representation of the project expressed in dollar amounts of estimated expenses. Some government funding agencies have their own budget forms; most foundations do not. In addition to the budget itself, you may want to attach budget-explanation notes. The following are major budget categories for most research projects

- 1) personnel costs - technical assistants, translators, etc.
- 2) travel
- 3) subsistence or per diem - housing and food
- 4) supplies and equipment - paper, tapes, note books, film, etc.
- 5) printing, postage

M. The Final Draft

When you have a draft completed, it is important to seek the advice of faculty advisors and colleagues in the field. Advice is also available for GSAS students and alumni/ae from the GSAS director of fellowships (Byerly Hall, second floor, 617-495-1816). When the time comes for seeking letters of recommendation-- most competitions require two or three letters -- you should be prepared to show the recommenders a fairly polished draft of the proposal.

N. Acquiring Letters of Recommendation in Support of the Fellowship Application

A good letter of recommendation not only makes a statement of support about a candidate, but presents a well-documented and informative evaluation. It also addresses the specific purpose for which it is written. When you seek letters of recommendation for a fellowship application, be sure to provide the letter writers with a close to final draft of the proposal and any other items that might prove helpful -- a curriculum vitae, a copy of the fellowship announcement, for example.

O. On Fellowship Outcomes: An Important Message

It is important to realize that the line between winner and non-winner in a fellowship competition is often very thin. So the primary message for those who did not receive a fellowship is that there is absolutely no reason to doubt your abilities, no reason for a sense of failure. As an applicant, you have been part of a distinguished group of graduate students, and you have reason to be proud of the efforts that you have made.

Above all, you should not give up -- keep working on your project and your proposal, and try again in the next round of fellowship competitions. For most fellowships, it in no way counts against you to be applying for a second time. With further progress on your project, your proposal should improve, and your chances of winning next time should be considerably improved as well - just be sure that you do submit a new proposal. (You may also want to see if the fellowship sponsors will provide you with feedback from their readers; some make this a practice, but others do not.) **MANY STUDENTS DO WIN ON A SECOND TRY.**

ON THE ART OF WRITING PROPOSALS

Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions

by
Adam Prezeworski
and
Frank Saloman

With appreciation to the authors and to the Social Science Research Council for their kind permission to let us recopy this.

Writing proposals for research funding is a peculiar facet of North American academic culture, and as with all things cultural, its attributes rise only partly into public consciousness. A proposal's overt function is to persuade a committee of scholars that the project shines with the three kinds of merit all disciplines value, namely, conceptual innovation, methodological rigor, and rich, substantive content. But to make these points stick, a proposal writer needs a feel for the unspoken customs, norms and needs that govern the selection process itself. These are not really as arcane or ritualistic as one might suspect. For the most part, these customs arise from the committee's efforts to deal in good faith with its own problems: incomprehension among disciplines, work overload, and the problem of equitably judging proposals that reflect unlike social and academic circumstances.

Writing for committee competition is an art quite different from research work itself. After long deliberation, a committee usually has to choose among proposals that all possess the three virtues mentioned above. Other things being equal, the proposal that is awarded funding is the one that gets its merits across more forcefully because it addresses these unspoken needs and norms as well as the overt rules. The purpose of these pages is

to give competitors for Council fellowships and funding a more even start by making explicit some of those normally unspoken customs and needs.

Capture the Reviewer's Attention

While the form and the organization of a proposal are matters of taste, you should choose your form bearing in mind that every proposal reader constantly scans for clear answers to three questions:

What are we going to learn as the result of the proposed project that we do not know now?

Why is it worth knowing?

How will we know that the conclusions are valid?

Working through a tall stack of proposals on voluntarily-donated time, a committee member rarely has time to comb proposals for hidden answers. So say what you have to say immediately, crisply, and forcefully. The opening paragraph, or the first page at most, is your opportunity to grab the reviewer's attention. Use it. This is the moment to overstate, rather than understate, your point or question. You can add the conditions and caveats later.

Questions that are clearly posed are an excellent way to begin a proposal. *Are strong party systems conducive to democratic stability? Was the decline of population growth in Brazil the result of government*

policies? These should not be rhetorical questions; they have effect precisely because the answer is far from obvious. Stating your central point, hypothesis, or interpretation is also a good way to begin: *Workers do not organize unions; unions organize workers. The success and failure, of Corazon Aquino's revolution stems from its middle class origins. Population growth coupled with loss of arable land poses a threat to North African food security in the 1990s.*

Obviously some projects are too complex and some conceptualizations too subtle for such telegraphic messages to capture. Sometimes only step-by-step argumentation can define the central problem. But even if you adopt this strategy, do not fail to leave the reviewer with something to remember: some message that will remain after reading many other proposals and discussing them for hours and hours. "She's the one who claims *Argentina never had a liberal democratic tradition*" is how you want to be referred to during the committee's discussion, not "Oh yes, she's the one from Chicago."

Aim for Clarity

Remember that most proposals are reviewed by multidisciplinary committees. A reviewer studying a proposal from another field expects the proposer to meet her halfway. After all, the reader probably accepted the committee appointment because of the excitement of surveying other people's ideas. Her only reward is the chance that proposals will provide a lucidly-guided tour of various disciplines' research frontiers. Don't cheat the reviewer of this by inflicting a tiresome trek through the duller idiosyncrasies of your discipline. Many disciplines have parochial traditions of writing in pretentious jargon. You should avoid jargon as much as you can, and when technical language is needed, restrict yourself to those new words and technical terms that truly lack equivalents in common language. Also, keep the spotlight on ideas. An archaeologist should argue the concepts latent in the ceramic typology more than the typology itself, a historian the tendency latent in the mass of events, and so forth. When additional technical material is needed, or when the argument refers to complex ancillary material, putting it into appendices decongests the main text.

Establish the Context

Your proposal should tell the committee not only what will be learned as a result of your project, but what will be learned that somebody else does not already know. It is essential that the proposal summarize the current state of knowledge and provide an up-to-date, comprehensive bibliography. Both should be precise and succinct. They need not constitute a review of "the literature" but a sharply focused view of the specific body or bodies of knowledge to which you will add. Committees often treat bibliographies as a sign of seriousness on the part of the applicant, and some members will put considerable effort into evaluating them. A good bibliography testifies that the author did enough preparatory work to make sure the project will complement and not duplicate other people's efforts. Many proposals fail because the references are incomplete or outdated. Missing even a single reference can be very costly if it shows failure to connect with research directly related to one's own. Proposal writers with limited library resources are urged to correspond with colleagues and libraries elsewhere in the early stages of research planning. Resource guides such as *Dissertation Abstracts International* and *Social Science Periodical Index* are highly recommended.

For any disciplines, Annual Reviews, (e.g. Annual Review of Anthropology) offer state of the art discussions and rich bibliographies. Some disciplines have bibliographically-oriented journals, for example *Review of Economic Literature* and *Contemporary Sociology*. There are also valuable area studies-oriented guides: *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, *International African Bibliography*, etc. Familiarizing yourself with them can save days of research.

What's the Payoff?

Disciplinary norms and personal tastes in justifying research activities differ greatly. Some scholars are swayed by the statement "it has not been studied" (e.g. a historian may argue that no book has been written about a particular event, and therefore one is needed), while other scholars sometimes reflect that there may be a good reason why not. Nevertheless, the fact that less is known about one's own chosen case, period, or country than about similar ones may work in the proposer's favor. Between two identical projects, save that one concerns Egypt and the other the Sudan, reviewers are likely to prefer the latter. Citing the importance of the events that provide the subject matter is another and perhaps less dubious appeal. "Turning points," "crucial breakthroughs," "central personages," "fundamental institutions," and similar appeals to the significance of the object of research are sometimes effective if argued rather than merely asserted. Appealing to current importance may also work: e.g. democratic consolidation in South America, the aging population in industrialized countries, the relative decline of the hegemony of the United States. It's crucial to convince readers that such topics are not merely timely, but that their current urgency provides a window into some more abiding problem.

Among many social scientists, explicit theoretical interest counts heavily as a point of merit. Theoretical exposition need not go back to the axiomatic bases of the discipline--proposal readers will have a reasonable interdisciplinary breadth--but it should situate the local problem in terms of its relevance to live, sometimes controversial, theoretical currents. Help your reader understand where the problem intersects the main theoretical debates in your field and show how this inquiry puts established ideas to the test or offers new ones. Good proposals demonstrate awareness of alternative viewpoints and argue the author's position in such a way as to address the field broadly, rather than developing a single sectarian tendency indifferent to alternatives.

Use a Fresh Approach

Surprises, puzzles, and apparent contradictions can powerfully persuade the reviewer whose disciplinary superego enforces a commitment to systematic model building or formal theorizing: "Given its long-standing democratic traditions, Chile was expected to return to democracy before other countries in the Southern Cone and yet... It is because the assumption on which this prediction was based is false?" "Everybody expected that the 'One Big Union' -- the slogan of the movement -- would strike and win wage increases for workers. Yet statistical evidence shows just the contrary: strong unions do not strike but instead restrain workers' wage demands.

It is often worthwhile to help readers understand how the research task grows from the intellectual history or current intellectual life of the country or region that generated it. Council committees strive to build linkages among an immense diversity of national and international intellectual traditions, and members come from the various countries and schools of thought. Many committee members are interested in the interplay of diverse traditions. In fact, the chance to see intellectual history in the making is another reason people accept committee membership. It is a motive to which proposals can legitimately appeal.

It pays to remember that topics of current salience, both theoretical and in the so-called real world, are likely to be a crowded field. The competitors will be more numerous and competition less interesting than in truly unfamiliar terrain. Unless you have something truly original to say about them, you may be well advised to avoid topics typically styled "of central interest to the discipline." Usually these are the topics about which everyone is writing, and the reason is that somebody else has already made the decisive and exciting contribution. By the time you write your proposal, obtain funding, and write it up, you may wish you were working on something else. Or if your instinct leads you to a problem far from the course that the pack is running, follow it--not the pack: nothing is more valuable than a really fresh beginning.

Describe Your Methodology

Methodological canons are largely discipline-specific and vary widely even within some disciplines. But two things can safely be said about methodological appeal. First, the proposal must specify the research operations you will undertake and the way you will interpret the results of these operations in terms of your central problem. Do not just tell what you mean to achieve, tell how you will spend your time while doing it. Second a methodology is not just a list of research tasks but an argument as to why these tasks add up to the best attack on the problem. An agenda by itself will normally not suffice because the mere listing of tasks to perform does not prove that they add up to the best feasible approach.

Some popularly-used phrases fall short of identifying recognizable research operations. For example, "I will look at the relation between x and y" is not informative. We know what is meant when an ornithologist proposes to "look at" a bird, but "looking at" a relation between variables is something one only does indirectly, by operations like digging through dusty archive boxes, interviewing, observing and taking standardized notes, collecting and testing statistical patterns, etc. How will you tease the relationship of underlying forces from the mess of experience? The process of gathering data and moving from data to interpretation tends to follow disciplinary customs, more standard in some fields than in others; help readers from other fields recognize what parts of your methodology are standard, what innovative.

Be as specific as you possibly can be about the activities you plan to undertake to collect information, about the techniques you will use to analyze it, and about the tests of validity to which you commit yourself. Most proposals fail because they leave reviewers wondering what the applicant will actually do. Tell them! Specify the archives, the sources, the respondents, and the proposed techniques of analysis.

A research design proposing comparison between cases often has a special appeal. In a certain sense all research is comparative because it must use, implicitly or explicitly, some point of reference. Making the comparison explicit raises its value as a scientific inquiry. In evaluating a comparative proposal, readers ask whether the cases are chosen in such a way that their similarities and differences illuminate the central question. And is the proposer in a position to execute both legs of a comparison? When both answers are positive, the proposal may fare particularly well.

The proposal should prove that the researcher either possesses, or cooperates with people who possess, mastery of all the technical matters the project entails. For example, if a predominantly literary project includes an inquiry into the influence of the Tulpan language on rural Brazilian Portuguese, the proposal will be checked for the author's background in linguistics and/or Indian languages, or the author's arrangements to collaborate with appropriate experts.

Specify Your Objectives

A well-composed proposal, like a sonata, usually ends by alluding to the original theme. How will research procedures and their products finally connect with the central question? How will you know if your idea was

wrong or right? In some disciplines this imperative traditionally means holding to the strict canon of the falsifiable hypothesis. While respecting this canon, committee members are also open to less formal approaches. What matters is to convince readers that something is genuinely at stake in the inquiry -- that it is not tendentiously moving toward a preconceived end -- and that this leaven of the unknown will yield interesting orderly propositions.

Proposals should normally describe the final product of the project: an article, book, chapter, dissertation, etc. If you have specific plans, it often helps to spell them out, because specifying the kind of journal in which you hope to publish, or the kind of people you hope to address, will help readers understand what might otherwise look like merely odd features of the proposal.

While planning and drafting your proposal, you should keep in mind the program guidelines and application procedures outlined in the brochure specific to the program to which you are applying. If you have specific questions about the program, you may wish to consult with a staff member. Your final proposal should include all requested enclosures and appendices.

Final Note

To write a good proposal takes a long time. Start early. Begin thinking about your topic well in advance and make it a habit to collect references while you work on other tasks. Write a first draft at least three months in advance, revise it, show it to colleagues. Let it gather a little dust, collect colleagues' comments, revise it again. If you have a chance, share it with a seminar or similar group; the debate should help you anticipate what reviewers will eventually think. Revise the text again for substance. Go over the language, style, and form. Resharpen your opening paragraph or first page so that it drives home exactly what you mean as effectively as possible.

Good luck!

THE ART OF THE FELLOWSHIP PROPOSAL

by
JOHN LIPPINCOTT

With appreciation to the editor of Humanities, Judith Chayes Neiman, for her kind permission to let us recopy this. Mr. Lippincott wrote this as a member of the endowment staff.

Each year the NEH receives thousands of individual fellowship applications from good scholars for good projects. A few hundred are recommended by review panels for funding, but only a few score elicit a unanimous recommendation of "Absolutely Yes!" As budgetary constraints on the endowment increase, the importance of a strong panel endorsement to the success of an application also increases.

Writing a fellowship proposal that receives enthusiastic endorsement from panelists is both an art and a science. The science is in carefully following the guidelines for the format of the application and in presenting a proposal that clearly reflects knowledge of the subject being studied and the methodology appropriate to it. The art is more difficult to describe and is the subject of this article.

The art of writing a successful proposal is not a matter of knowing arcane secrets of grantsmanship, a presumed hidden agenda at NEH, or that influential someone in the Fellowships Division. Nor is it achieved by mimicking proposals that received NEH grants in the past. (Examples given in this article are intended to demonstrate levels of quality, not to serve as models.)

The art of writing a successful proposal is largely a matter of understanding how individual fellowship applications are selected for funding.

There are three fellowship programs which award grants for individual study and research in the humanities: Summer Stipends; Fellowships for College Teachers; and Fellowships for Independent Study and Research. They are all highly competitive because of their limited budgets and the large number of good proposals submitted each year. The ratio of grants to applications varies among the programs and from year to year, ranging from a low of one-to-five in the College Teachers program to a high of one-to-nine in Independent Study.

All three programs use ad hoc review panels, composed of scholars representing the disciplines of the applications under consideration, to evaluate the proposals. Panel ratings serve as the basis for the National Council on the Humanities' funding recommendations to the NEH chairman, who gives final approval on all endowment grants.

In making their assessments of an application, panelists consider the evidence provided by the applicant -- the description of the project, the letters of reference, the curriculum vitae, and the bibliography of works relevant to the study. (Directions for proper completion of application materials cannot be recapitulated here; they are given in the guidelines for each program and should be followed carefully.)

In evaluating this evidence the panelists adhere to the four selection criteria stated in the program guidelines. A review and discussion of these criteria (which vary only slightly among the three individual fellowships programs) will help reveal what makes for an "artful," i.e., competitive, application.

1. The quality or promise of quality of the applicant's work as a teacher, scholar, or interpreter of the humanities.

This criterion focuses more on the applicant than on the project. The panel looks for evidence that the individual has the knowledge and ability to carry out the project and a commitment to excellence in

scholarship. In making this determination, the panel considers more than just the curriculum vitae and record of previous publications. Reference letters provide critical information as well, and the project description itself, in its conception and presentation, is an important indicator of the quality of the individual's thought.

The phrase "the promise of quality" in this criterion indicates that panelists are concerned not simply with past accomplishments of the applicant. All three programs make grants to scholars early in their careers, as well as to senior scholars. Panelists try to judge the quality of applicants' work by standards appropriate to their career stages. There are no quotas set for awards to junior or senior scholars, nor is there any prejudice against either group. Among the Independent fellowships awarded last November, forty-eight percent went to junior scholars. (Forty-nine percent of the applications were from junior scholars.)

One of these junior scholars is studying the origin of the economic decline in New England from 1840 to 1925. The applicant was awarded a doctorate in history in 1979 and is currently an assistant professor at a major university. Her record of publications includes two journal articles and three conference presentations.

In evaluating her application, panelists took note of her status as a younger scholar. The sophisticated knowledge of the subject revealed in the proposal itself and strong letters of reference were instrumental in convincing the panel that there was "promise of quality" from this applicant. "Extremely impressive proposal," commented one panelist. "Well-reasoned, clear and attractive."

When panelists evaluate the "quality of work" of senior scholars, they may place greater emphasis on some aspects of the application.

One of the 1982-83 Independent Study awards to an established scholar (doctorate awarded in 1968, college professor since 1966, currently an associate dean at a major university) was for a biography of Anne Sexton. Certainly the proposal description was a principal element in panelists' consideration of the quality of work of the applicant, as were the letters of reference. But panelists also took careful note of the applicant's record of achievement: nine academic honors, three books and numerous articles of high quality, and poems published in a variety of journals.

Without this level of accomplishment it is unlikely a panelist would have concluded, "Seldom have I found an applicant I could bet on with more certainty, an absolutely first-rate proposal and person to do it." Another remarked, "Publications are quite good, references are excellent, and the candidate obviously has access and can do the biography."

It should be noted that the "work" whose quality is being judged under this criterion need not have been conducted in an academic setting. Two of the three programs entertain applications from scholars unaffiliated with colleges or universities; they also include unaffiliated scholars on their panels.

2. The importance of the proposal to the specific field and the humanities in general.

The best evidence of the importance of the project is given in the applicant's project description, though certainly letters of reference provide necessary corroboration. An applicant cannot assume that panelists will appreciate the importance of a project or have a predisposition toward the subject matter. It is incumbent upon the applicant to make the case for the importance of the study to be undertaken.

Because applications are competitive and reviewed in groups, panelists look for those projects likely to make the greatest contribution to the humanities. The contribution an applicant expects to make may be through teaching, through the production of materials that will serve other scholars, or through

development of new perspectives on the discipline that will encourage further discussion and understanding of the subject among all interested audiences.

A project that will serve only the applicant (such as remedial work by the applicant to "catch up" in a field) will not be competitive with projects that offer to add to the knowledge of students, colleagues, or a wider public.

A summer stipend was recently awarded for a project to write an archaeological commentary on the Wasps 0:

Aristophanes, applying vase paintings and other monumental evidence to a study of the play's terms, puns, metaphors, objects, actions and the mise-en-scene of the Athenian law courts.

In his proposal, the applicant argued the importance of the project by citing other scholars who have affirmed the value of applying archaeological evidence to interpretation of Aristophanes' comedies. He then offered his own view of the significance of providing a "material and historical context" for understanding literature in general and the Wasps in particular. He suggested the study would serve classicists as well as a wider group of readers and would provide a basis for more authentic and effective productions of the play.

He persuaded the panel that a new understanding and appreciation of Aristophanes was needed and could be achieved through this project. One panelist commented, "This kind of study is something we should see more of and that is an approach to a classical text which attempts to conceptualize a drama as it was originally conceived and produced as, among other benefits, a stimulus to the production of ancient comedy." Another noted that "it is the sort of work that combines 'scholarly' and 'practical' use; it may well help directors and actors present more visually meaningful performances of the play."

In addition to the importance of the subject matter, the proposal may argue for the value of its methodology, as in this excerpt from a 1982-83 Independent Study proposal:

Political history is currently out of fashion, largely because it tends to be biographical and narrative in orientation and, except for vote counting, does not lend itself to social-scientific techniques and analysis. Political history, however, deserves attention, partly because it contains the central questions of history - how are decisions actually made -- and partly because political, old-fashioned elitist history needs redoing. I propose to take a fresh look at the political history of Tudor England and study the political environment in which individuals translated their culturally conditioned aspirations and assumptions into the realities of political success and failure. It is customary to approach politics from the perspective of those who succeeded because the documentation is skewed in that direction and successful ideas live on in terms of their historic consequences. Unfortunately, successful people also tend to be well-adjusted and to know how to make the system work for them; as a result, they do not usually have much to say about the functional and psychological strains under which they operate. It is the unsuccessful who flounder and cry out and thereby reveal in their lives and writings the pressures and emotional strains under which all the natural leaders of society must work. As Scott Fitzgerald said: 'It is from the failures of life and not its successes that we learn the most.'

The ultimate tour de force is to relate theory to practice and to offer an explanation of Tudor politics in terms 0:

a multitude of failure stories, thereby rewriting and reinterpreting the sixteenth-century political scene... Irrationality in politics, political failure and paranoia are, alas, sufficiently relevant themes to need no special pleading. That they are being studied within a sixteenth-century context should not distract from their importance to the scholar, from their interest for the general reading public, or from their impact upon our knowledge about mankind.

Panelist were convinced. "It appears that the realization of this project would shed new light on the political dynamic of a crucial period.. .I think his approach will serve as an important scholarly model in terms of developing understanding of the political process in any era." "The book would likely reach not only specialists but intelligent readers generally and make a significant and original contribution to both. This is one among two or three proposals that I rank as the very best -- the reflection of a mature and brilliant scholar on a field in which he has long worked, that is at the same time an act of imagination -- an asking of fresh questions of material long familiar that will influence all our thinking."

Importance of the project is not a function of the discipline or scope of the project. There are no favored fields time periods, or cultures. It is rather what the applicant makes of the subject that determines its importance -- a point to be taken up under the third criterion.

3. The conception, definition, and organization of the proposal.

This and the preceding criterion are mutually supportive. The importance of a project is dependent on the way it is conceived, and its conception cannot be judged without regard for its importance.

Good conception, definition, and organization of the project obviously result from the applicant's command o the subject and thus fall within the realm of the science of proposal writing. There is, however, also an art to conceiving, defining, and organizing the project. Put simply, the most successful applications seem to be those in which applicants let their ideas and enthusiasm for the subject "shine through."

A potential applicant once contacted an NEH program officer and said she had two projects for a summer stipend in mind. After describing the projects, she asked the staff member which she should submit. The program officer counseled her to submit the one which interested her most.

Conception of the project involves asking the right questions about the subject to be studied, drawing the right comparisons with other works and subjects, and setting the right scope for the project. The operative term here is "right." The right questions, right comparisons, and right scope, in addition to being appropriate to the field, are those which capture the interest of the panel. And since a panel is made up of scholars in the discipline, their interests will be similar to those of an applicant's colleagues.

Competitive proposals are those which go beyond a naive or redundant treatment to explore the subject's real potential, to yield new perspectives (including interdisciplinary views), or break new ground.

Among the applications for 1981-82 Fellowships for College Teachers were two projects treating ethical issues related to science. Both studies were intended to improve classroom instruction and serve as the basis for new courses. Of these two projects in essentially the same discipline and with the same purpose, only one was funded. The quality of the conception and definition of the project made the difference.

The successful proposal focused the study on ethical issues relating to medicine and explained clearly the value of the project to the institution and students it would benefit. It then discussed the nature of and reasons for recent moral problems associated with medicine and appropriate ways for approaching these problems. The proposal concluded with the specific questions to be explored and the methodology that would be applied.

The project received a strong recommendation from panelists. Typical of their comments was, "This is an excellent proposal both in terms of care with which it is worked out and the probable significance for teaching."

The unsuccessful application proposed a two-part study on 1) "the history of the biological sciences and of philosophical issues peculiar to them" and 2) "contemporary work in the area of ethical issues in science and technology." The proposal discussed the applicant's teaching responsibilities, academic background, and current approach to and problems with teaching ethical perspectives on science, and offered as a plan of study only a brief paragraph noting resources and faculties to be consulted.

Panelists expressed concern at the application's lack of a clear focus for the study, or specific issues to be tackled of the approach to be taken. "In comparison with the other proposal which takes biology as background for considering ethical issues, this one is not as well developed," one panelist remarked.

Another called the proposal "too broad, too vague." A third said, "not clear that this really takes her enough beyond what she already does and knows to constitute a 'project.'"

As these examples illustrate, it is important that applicants state clearly what they intend to do, what questions they intend to ask and why. It cannot be left to the panel to infer or the references to imply what the plan of study will be. Panels must know how the grant period is going to be used.

4. The likelihood that the applicant will see the project through to completion.

This criterion simply means that panelists will consider whether or not what is proposed can be and is likely to be achieved.

The criterion does not mean that the entire project must be completed during the grant period, only that it should eventually be completed and that the portion slated for the period of the fellowship can be handled in that time.

A 1981-82 College Teachers fellowship was awarded for a study of gambling in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, focusing on how this leisure activity reflects changes in social and private values resulting from industrialization.

Following an intensive discussion of the significance and approach of his study, the applicant stated:

As ambitious as the project is, I believe that it is not an unrealistic one, and my previous work suggests that I can undertake it successfully. I am already familiar with much of the literature, both primary and secondary, on "sporting" topics, and I have had some success in using this material in a constructive way.

In addition to favorable reactions to the applicant's abilities and the potential value of the study, panelists were convinced of the likelihood the research and a monograph would be completed. "Proposer offers convincing argument and has evidently pursued work to point where it can be completed," said one. Another said, "[He] has background to indicate likelihood of completion."

Finally, there are a few additional factors a panel may consider in making decisions on a group of applications. Geographical and institutional diversity are sought among fellowship awards, though no quotas are set. Panelists often take this into consideration as a tiebreaker among highly rated proposals.

The individual fellowship programs give preference to applicants who have not had major grants or postdoctoral fellowships in the last six years. Panels are also sympathetic to able applicants in situations or institutions that offer few research opportunities.

There is also a je ne sais quoi a "sparkle," an appeal that distinguishes successful proposals from the nearly successful proposals. This special quality is synergistic, combining and transcending all the previously mentioned qualities, as the following excerpt from a highly rated summer stipend proposal demonstrates: