

Policies and Guidelines for Sea Grant Scholar Fellowships

The Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship Program is intended to promote education, training and research in fields related to coastal resources. The Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship awards are a mechanism through which NYSG stimulates study and provides support, in the form of a stipend, to graduate students who carry out research relevant to projects funded through its program. NYSG recognizes that Scholars themselves constitute one of its most important products: a cadre of trained individuals who in their subsequent careers can provide a leadership role in the development and wise utilization of marine and coastal resources.

The Scholar's activities are specifically identified and justified within the project proposal to NYSG, and funds for the Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship award are requested and matched as part of the overall project's budget. Prior to or concurrently with the initiation of the project, the Scholar must be identified by the investigator(s) and then appointed by NYSG. Appointment forms are provided to the project's lead principal investigator with each year's Letter of Award.

The lead principal investigator for the project is fully responsible for the Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship award and its requirements, and for overseeing the supervision of the Scholar.

Eligibility

A Sea Grant Scholar must be registered as a full-time student in an approved graduate program working toward a recognized degree, under the supervision of one of the project's principal investigators. A Scholar must remain in good academic standing at their institution and within their degree programs, carrying out their projects diligently and making good progress toward the completion of a thesis, dissertation or equivalent research paper. A Scholar must maintain his/her award recipient eligibility throughout the duration of the Fellowship. If a student does not fulfill the eligibility standards (e.g., graduates or, conversely, fails to make progress), the Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship award will be terminated. It is the responsibility of the project's lead principal investigator's Grants and Sponsored Programs Offices to notify NYSG of such status in writing.

A Sea Grant Scholar is expected to work as a creative member of the project research team (not simply a laboratory helper or inexpensive laborer). The Scholar is not considered an employee and no hourly requirements are to be set for their work. The primary activities of all Scholars should be working on the project, learning and pursuing their degree.

NYSG does not provide part-time Sea Grant Scholar Fellowships. While NYSG will not prohibit the student from receiving supplemental support, the Fellowship will not be reduced to reflect a part-time status. If significant additional funding for student support is available, the lead principal investigator may request to shift the Scholar Fellowship to another person, following the policies and procedures detailed elsewhere in this document.

Funding

When the project award is made, the investigator's account will not include funds proposed for Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship stipends. Those funds are "withheld" and Sea Grant Scholar payroll distribution is managed directly by NYSG. Any funds for Scholars are specified on the project's Award Acceptance Form, and also appear separately at the bottom of the project's budget page.

Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship stipends are pre-determined by the principal investigator(s) of the project, and are based on the prevailing rates of the student's department at the time the project's budget was submitted to NYSG for funding consideration. Biweekly checks paid at the rate specified in the project's approved budget will be issued to each appointed Scholar.

The Scholar's stipend is fixed at the amount requested in the approved proposal budget.

Appointment

Scholar appointment forms are sent to the lead principal investigator along with the "Letter of Award" if the project has proposed a Sea Grant Scholar. The appointee must complete and return these forms to the lead principal investigator, who must forward them to NYSG for approval and processing. If the Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship does not begin as proposed on the start date of the project, the lead principal investigator must notify NYSG in writing, describing what impact, if any, the reduced Scholar contribution will have on the overall project, and how this will be remedied (see also below).

It is the lead investigator's responsibility to ensure that the Scholar's appointment package is returned to NYSG in a timely manner. Payroll advances are not possible.

Duration

A standard Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship for a two-year project will run for two consecutive 12-month appointments, which are expected to coincide with the project's start and end dates. If this is not feasible for the project, the following options can be considered:

1. Delaying the Start of the Project

Since the Scholar is intended to be an integral part of the research team, it may be necessary to briefly delay the start of the research project until the Scholar is available. This would require a re-evaluation of the project's timeline, and may be subject to NYSG funding time limitations.

2. Beginning the Project as Scheduled

The lead principal investigator may elect to begin the project as scheduled, under options a. or b. below:

a. Divide a late-starting fellowship among more than one individual (e.g., appoint two, 6-month Scholars in the first year) to keep the project's timeline on track. To afford the most benefit to students moving forward in their degree programs, Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship appointments must be at least one semester in duration.

b. Appoint the Scholar at a later date. In this case, the duration of the Scholar's appointment will be shortened (and the total stipend reduced commensurately) to coincide with the project's end date. If the project's lead principal investigator requests and justifies the need for a no-cost extension of the project, NYSG will also consider extending the Sea Grant Scholar up to the original proposed duration, if requested and justified. The student must still be eligible to receive continued Scholar support.

3. Extension of Sea Grant Scholar Fellowships

If the project's lead investigator began the support of a Sea Grant Scholar after the project's start date, an extension of the Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship up to the original proposed duration may be possible only if requested and justified as part of the No-Cost Extension (NCE) request for the project. The NCE request should include specific information regarding which project objectives the Scholar will be working on, the time period this support is expected to cover (cannot exceed the original proposed duration of the fellowship), and an update on the Scholar's anticipated thesis, dissertation, or graduation dates.

4. Providing Scholar Support from Remaining Project Funds

An investigator may also request to return unobligated grant funds to NYSG to continue support of a previous Sea Grant Scholar who has otherwise received his/her full stipend during the grant period, but who is still working on objectives of the NYSG project.

Tuition Fees Waivers

Requests for funds to cover tuition and/or miscellaneous university fees payable by Sea Grant Scholars are not allowable in the NYSG research project budgets.

Tuition waivers may be available to Sea Grant Scholars, depending upon local campus policy. It is the responsibility of the project's principal investigator(s) and Scholar to determine whether this is available from their campus.

Tuition costs are allowable as cost-sharing for federal funds under a NOAA award as long as they directly benefit the project for which they are being used as cost-sharing. This direct benefit to the project should be specifically addressed in the budget justification of the project's proposal. The requirements regarding documentation and verification of these costs and how they are applicable to the project are the same as if they were paid from the NYSG portion of the project's funds.

Taxes

Sea Grant Scholars are considered “Fellows” by the Research Foundation for SUNY. A Fellow is not an employee, and the stipend received is not considered “pay” for services. At the end of the year, Scholars will not receive a W-2 statement; however, they will receive a letter from the Research Foundation for SUNY stating the amount of money they have received from the Fellowship during the previous 12 months. It is the Scholar’s responsibility to report any of this amount which is considered “income” to the IRS (this does not apply to foreign/nonresident alien students... see next paragraph). Scholars are encouraged to speak to their tax advisors regarding this matter. If the Scholar does not have a tax advisor, he/she may contact the Research Foundation Human Resource Services - Payroll Department, at 631-632-9314, for more information.

A Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship stipend may or may not be tax-exempt for a foreign student, depending on whether the Scholar’s country has a tax-exempt treaty with the United States, and whether fellowships are included in that treaty. The Payroll Department (see above) can help to determine the Scholar’s status if the information is otherwise unavailable.

If a foreign student Scholar cannot prove that his/her stipend is exempt from taxes, the stipend will be charged withholding tax at the rate of 14%. The foreign student Scholar will receive a Form 1042S at the end of the year, regardless of whether or not a tax treaty exists, for use when filing a tax return (in consultation with a tax advisor).

Health Insurance

Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship stipends do not incur costs to cover fringe benefits. Health insurance and other “employee benefits” are not part of the Fellowship award.

As a current student, a Scholar may be eligible for health services through their local campus infirmary or through a health insurance plan for students. Some Scholars may also be eligible for insurance under existing plans held by their spouses or parents. Scholars are strongly encouraged to identify all of their health insurance options.

As a Fellow paid by the Research Foundation for SUNY (on behalf of NYSG), Scholars are eligible to participate in the optional Research Foundation for SUNY Graduate Student Employee Health Plan. Although the plan is not inexpensive, it is an alternative to having no insurance at all. If the Scholar decides to participate in this plan, the costs will be deducted from the student’s stipend paychecks. For individual coverage, Scholars would pay about \$4200 a year, which includes dental and eye glass coverage. Additional rates for Scholars with dependents are available from Human Resources, Stony Brook University.

Information and enrollment forms for this plan are included in Sea Grant Scholar Fellowship appointment packets provided to the lead principal investigator. These forms should be returned to the NYSG office along with the other appointment forms. Additional information

about the Research Foundation health plan can be obtained by contacting the Student Health Center at Stony Brook University at 631-632-6144 or Human Resources at 631-632-6180.

Thesis Defense and Graduation

NYSG must be informed, in advance, of a Scholar's thesis defense date as well as his/her official graduation date. It is beneficial for NYSG staff to attend a Scholar's defense. Upon graduation, a Scholar's thesis or dissertation must be submitted to NYSG as a pdf.

NYSG support must be acknowledged in the Scholar's printed thesis and any oral presentations. This is an important courtesy. Any publications resulting from the Scholar's efforts also need to reference NYSG funding.

Scholars and principal investigators are asked to keep NYSG updated on the Scholar's career progress (e.g., first employment, additional graduate school, etc.) and contact information. NYSG tracks former Scholars in order to help justify the benefits of this type of educational program.

Scholars who graduate before the end of their appointments, or who drop out of the program, cease to be eligible for financial support. The lead principal investigator is responsible for promptly informing NYSG about such circumstances, so that NYSG can terminate payroll expenditures. He or she may request that the remaining Scholar stipend funds be allocated to a replacement Scholar, given that the support will last for at least one full semester and is necessary to complete the project's objectives.