

Graduate Student Conference Education Fund Policy

Revised: December 2019

Purpose: The Graduate Student Conference Education Fund (Travel Fund) is available to help defray the costs of individual degree-seeking students attending a regional, national, or international scientific meeting. The fund is intended to give students an opportunity to present their research before a scientific audience, obtain helpful feedback for future progress, and network with other scientists. The pool of money comes from yearly contributions from the Friends of MCW, the Graduate Student Association (GSA), and annual fundraising. The Development Office assists the GSA with an annual Write-a-Thon and Phone-a-Thon and offers the Graduate Student Conference Education Fund as a targeted option in solicitation materials used for the Annual Faculty and Staff Fund Drive.

Governance: The Travel Fund procedures are determined by the GSA in consultation with departmental administrators, the Graduate School Business Manager, the Director of Enrollment, and other faculty advisors.

Travel Award Amount: \$600

Important Annual Events/Deadlines Regarding the Travel Award:

Deadline for application submission:

Any time prior to the start of the conference or by December 1st (whichever is earlier).

September-October

Fundraising (Write-a-Thon and Phone-a-Thon).

December

GSA Representatives meet with Program Directors to discuss award eligibility and likelihood of travel for the following calendar year.

January

List of eligible awardees is submitted to the GSA and posted on D2L

GSA votes on their contribution to that year's Travel Fund

Funds available for the calendar year is communicated to the Graduate School by the Development Office

Travel Award Policy Committee meets with the Business Manager and advisory faculty to discuss cap for the new calendar year

February

GSA reviews financial reports from the previous calendar year's award distribution. Based on funds available and projected student travel, the Travel Award Policy Committee presents its recommendation for the year's cap to the GSA

Representative Council for a vote. The new cap is communicated to the Department Administrators by the Business Manager and to the graduate students via the Graduate School staff and/or GSA Representative Council.

Eligibility:

- a. Only students who have participated in the Fall Write-a-Thon or Phone-a-Thon are eligible for travel awards in the following calendar year. A list of all participants is posted on the Graduate Student Association group on D2L.
- b. Each GSA representative will meet with his or her Program Director in December to develop a list of students who are eligible and likely to travel in the next calendar year. The list must be submitted at the January GSA meeting, and will also be posted on the Graduate Student Association site in D2L.

Application Requirements:

- a. Student is the 1st author of submitted, peer-reviewed, and accepted abstract.
- b. Student is attending a meeting that is one of the following:
 1. An international meeting/conference
 2. A national meeting/conference
 3. A regional meeting/conference sponsored by a national society
- c. Application is signed by applicant, mentor, program director, and program administrator.
- d. Application is accompanied by a copy of the submitted abstract and proof of its acceptance at the meeting.
- e. Applications are required to be submitted prior to departure for the conference or December 1st, whichever comes first.

Application Process:

- a. Students apply for the award by completing an application located in the Graduate Student Association group on D2L in the "Travel Award Process" folder or in the Forms section of the Graduate School website. It is the student's responsibility to ensure all portions of the application, including the faculty sponsor comment and signatures, are complete.
- b. Completed applications must be submitted to the Graduate School office (gradschool@mcw.edu) before attending the conference or by December 1st (whichever is earliest). Only completed applications submitted prior to the deadline will be forwarded to the Awards Committee of the Graduate Studies Council for review.
- c. Should the application be incomplete, this will be communicated to the student by the Graduate School and the student has no more than 7 days to amend his or her application and resubmit it to the Graduate School for committee approval. Failure to return a complete application within this time window will constitute a rejection of said application.

- d. **Each eligible student may receive ONE Travel Award in a calendar year.** If a conference occurs early in the calendar year, students can submit completed applications during the previous calendar year in order to prepay flights/registration;
- e. however, the cap for the year in which the travel occurs is to be used. If prepaid expenses initially charged to the Travel Award Cost Center exceed the new cap (i.e., the previous year's cap was higher than the cap for the year in which the travel actually occurred), the Department Administrator, or the student (if Department did not approve funding in excess of Travel Award), must reimburse the difference to the Travel Award Cost Center from alternative funds.

Awards Committee Review Process:

- a. The Awards Committee of the Graduate Studies Council (GSC) will review the application to determine whether or not all criteria have been met.
- b. The Awards Committee members will communicate via e-mail their decision to the Graduate School (gradschool@mcw.edu) who will in turn email the decision to the applicant, relevant Program Director, and Department Administrator.

Disbursement Process:

- a. Departments are encouraged to prepay airfare and/or conference registration fees when applicable. Department Administrators can access funds from the Travel Award Cost Center for prepaid fees. If these expenses exceed the cap, the student must coordinate with their mentor and Department Administrator to determine alternative payment methods for the amount exceeding the cap. If these expenses are less than the cap, the funds left from the student's award will be available for reimbursement of other expenses accrued to attend the conference.
- b. Departments may use funds from the Travel Award Cost Center prior to Travel Award Application acceptance to prepay airfare and registration fees. If the application is subsequently not accepted, or the student does not travel, the Business Manager will contact the Department Administrator and the student to determine who is responsible for refunding the Travel Award Cost Center for these funds.
- c. Department Administrators may use the Travel Award Cost Center funds to prepay airfare and registration fees for students who do not have accepted abstracts. These students must complete and submit the completed Travel Award Application to their Department Administrator and the Graduate School. If, upon review, funds have been used without a submitted application, the Business Manager will contact the Department Administrator and the student to submit an application immediately. To access funds prior to abstract acceptance, Department Administrators must verify accuracy of the Travel Award Application, particularly the type of meeting attended (regional, national, international). Funds can only be used up to the cap assigned to the given meeting type; use of funds exceeding the cap must be refunded to the Travel Award Cost Center. Student noncompliance may result in fund reimbursement to the Travel Award Cost Center from the student.

- d. Any student using funds without a complete application submission (Travel Award Application, abstract, and proof of abstract acceptance) as well as their Department Administrator will be contacted by the Business Manager to submit any missing documentation. If the student fails to submit the necessary documents, the student and/or Department Administrator must refund the Travel Award Cost Center from alternative sources for the funds used.
- e. For reimbursement of expenses (hotel, taxis, meals, etc.), students must submit proper documentation to their Department Administrator. If a hotel room is shared, separate bills should be obtained for each person. Shared transportation costs should be divided equally, and rental cars should be avoided. Travel Award Cost Center funds may be used to reimburse students for qualifying expenses, but funds used are not to exceed the cap for all prepaid and reimbursed expenses.

Award Cap:

- a. Awards caps will be assessed annually and modified at the start of each year calendar year if necessary. The GSA Travel Award Policy committee, in collaboration with the Business Manager and relevant advisors, will determine an appropriate cap based on the funds available and the number of eligible students. The Committee will make a recommendation to the GSA Representative Council, which will vote on the final cap for that calendar year, regardless of type of conference (i.e. international, national, regional).
- b. All students that receive the award will receive the set cap for the corresponding meeting type. If the student's expenses are less than the cap for that year, their award will be for the total expenses accrued rather than the cap.

Accountability:

- a. At the end of each award cycle, the Business Manager will identify the unused funds for that calendar year. Unused funds will be retained in Graduate Student Conference Education Fund for the following calendar year.
- b. The Graduate School Business Manager will audit the reports described above to be certain all expenditures were appropriate and will prepare a summary report for the Graduate School Dean, GSA president, and GSA Travel Award Policy Committee detailing who received funds, what meeting was attended, and what funds, if any, were unspent.
- c. Any GSA travel funds disbursed outside of the guidelines provided here must be reimbursed from other funds (e.g., departmental or mentor's funds).
- d. Travel Award summary statements for the prior year will be reviewed with GSA representatives at the February GSA meeting each year.