

Graduate Student Conference Education Fund (Travel Fund)

Travel Award Policy & Guidelines

Effective Date: August 1, 2025

Overview

Effective August 1, 2025, administration of the Graduate Student Conference Education Fund (Travel Fund) will transition from the Graduate Student Association (GSA) to the Graduate School. This document outlines student eligibility, award limits, application procedures, and funding guidelines.

Purpose

The Travel Fund is designed to offset costs associated with graduate students presenting their research at regional, national, or international scientific meetings. With this award the Graduate School recognizes that presentation of research findings at an external meeting is an essential professional development opportunity for all graduate students and supports academic presentation skills, professional feedback, and networking.

Governance

The Travel Fund is managed by the Graduate School. Any changes significant changes in policy or process will only be made after consultation with the GSA Representative Council (GRC).

Operational Calendar

The Travel Fund operates on the institution's fiscal year: **July 1 – June 30**.

Eligibility Criteria

PhD and Professional Degree Students

To qualify for a Travel Award, applicants must:

1. Be in good academic standing.
2. Be enrolled full-time and have paid the student activity fee.
3. Have presented research findings through either a poster or podium presentation in at least one of the following:
 - Graduate School Research Poster Session
 - Three Minute Thesis (3MT)
 - GSA Symposium

Note: Participation in these events in the *previous academic year* qualifies applicants for the *next year's* award.

Transition Period Exception (Effective August 1, 2025 – July 1, 2026):

Students who have not yet met the participation requirement may apply if they commit to fulfilling the requirement within the academic year.

Application Requirements

Applicants must:

- Submit proof of meeting all eligibility requirements prior to travel.
 - Be the first and presenting author of a poster or talk at one of the following:
 - International conference
 - National conference
 - Regional conference sponsored by a national society
 - Submit a complete application before travel, including:
 - Signed application form (applicant, mentor, program director, department administrator)
 - Submitted abstract or paper
 - Proof of acceptance to the conference
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Award Limits

- **PhD students:** Eligible for up to two awards during their academic career.
 - **Professional degree students:** Eligible for one award during their academic career.
 - **Transition clause:** Students who have already received more than one travel fund award prior to October 2025 will be eligible for one additional award.
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Fellowship and External Funding

- As the travel fund is limited it is expected that students with fellowship funding use any travel funds associated with those awards first, when applicable.
 - Travel Awards may be combined with fellowship funding.
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Virtual Conference Policy

- Applications for virtual conferences are eligible for limited funding.
 - Only registration fees will be reimbursed, with a maximum of \$500.
 - Applicants must provide:
 - Proof of registration
 - Link to the official conference website
 - All other eligibility criteria apply
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Deadlines

- Applications are due at least two weeks prior to the conference start date.
 - Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.
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Award Amount

- **\$1,000 per award**
(Effective October 1, 2025)
 - The fund awards will amount will be set at the start of each academic year based on fund balance, expected fund revenue, and expected usage during the following academic year.
 - Prior to the start of each academic year the Graduate School will ask all programs to provide an estimate expected usage of the fund during that year.
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Application Submission Process

- Email completed application as a **single PDF** to: gradschool@mcw.edu
 - The application must include:
 - Fully signed application form
 - Submitted abstract or paper
 - Proof of abstract/paper acceptance
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Award Review Process

- The Graduate School will verify participation in required eligibility events:
 - Research Poster Session
 - GSA Symposium
 - Three Minute Thesis
 - Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. Applicants will be notified via email if their application is incomplete.
 - Award decisions will be emailed to the applicant, their program director, and department administrator.
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Disbursement & Reimbursement

Prepaid Expenses

- Departments are encouraged to prepay airfare and/or registration fees using the Travel Award Cost Center.
- If upfront expenses:
 - Exceed the award limit: student must coordinate with their mentor and department for the excess.
 - Are below award limit: remaining funds may be used for eligible reimbursements (e.g., lodging, meals).
- Funds may be accessed before formal acceptance of the application, but if:
 - The application is later denied, or
 - The student does not attend the conference, the student's department may be responsible for reimbursing the Travel Award Cost Center.

Use Without Abstract Acceptance

- Departments may access funds for students without accepted abstracts, but a completed application must still be submitted. If the submitted abstract is not accepted by the conference, travel can no longer be supported by the fund, and any costs should be reimbursed.
- Failure to submit an application or required materials may result in a requirement to refund the award amount.

Reimbursement for Travel Costs

- Students must submit proper documentation for expenses to their Department Administrator.
- Shared costs (lodging, transport) must be divided appropriately.
- Rental cars are discouraged and may not be reimbursed.
- Total reimbursements + prepaid expenses must not exceed the award limit award amount.

Policy Validity

This policy is in effect **October 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026**, and is subject to revision in future years after consultation with the GRC.