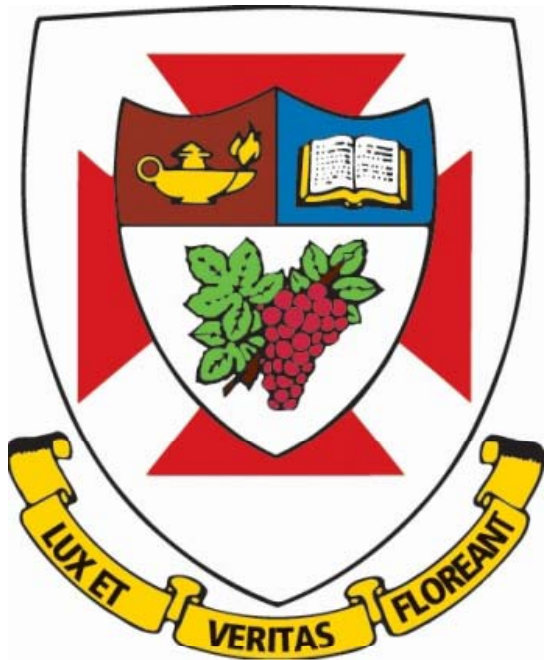


# Tips for successful grant and fellowship applications, NSERC or otherwise



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# Purpose of this presentation

- To provide NSERC-specific tips for successful fellowship and grant applications
- To provide general tips, relevant to ALL fields and disciplines:
  - What makes an application effective?
  - What goes on during adjudication?
  - Common pitfalls and blunders, and how to avoid them

# How can I help you?

- \$10+ million in external research funds since starting at UW in July 2008
- Largest NSERC Discovery Grant in UW history
- Research group students and trainees have collectively earned:
  - 18 scholarships and fellowships, institutional to international, excluding NSERC USRA
  - Includes 1 NSERC VF PDF, 1 Vanier, and multiple CGS/PGS-D, CGS/PGS-M
- Majority of wins at larger institutions than UW
- Service on NSERC grants review panels
- Service on UW student awards committees



*"I can help you hit the bullseye!"*

# NSERC-specific criteria

- The tips and guidelines provided for the SSHRC-specific application generally hold also for NSERC (and CIHR)
- Adjudication criteria are a bit different
  - CGS-M:
    - **Academic excellence (50%):** academic record, scholarships, program type, course load, relative standing, etc.
    - **Research potential (30%):** Relevance, significance, originality, feasibility, quality of research proposed or undertaken
    - **Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills (20%):** Work and leadership experience, project management, communications skills, outreach, etc.

# NSERC-specific criteria: Doctoral

- Adjudication weighting for doctoral-level fellowships more towards research:
  - PGS-D/CGS-D:
    - **Academic excellence (30%):** academic record, scholarships, program type, course load, relative standing, etc.
    - **Research potential (50%):** Relevance, significance, originality, feasibility, quality of research proposed or undertaken
    - **Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills (20%):** Work and leadership experience, project management, communications skills, outreach, etc.
  - Vanier: Last criterium replaced with leadership

# NSERC: make-or-break points

- The make-or-break criterium is often *Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills* and *Leadership*, even though it's weighted the least!
  - Many applicants have excellent academic records
  - Research potential is also often quite high
  - So how well you succeed in “soft” skills and leadership is often critical!
- This is especially important for Vanier, as strong and demonstrated leadership separates successful applicants from the pack.

# How do I develop leadership skills?

- Get involved!
  - Mentor and teach
  - Supervise and get involved in committees and self-governance roles of organizations
  - Manage projects
  - Provide outreach (institutional, community, scientific community, etc.)
- These are necessary **BUT NOT SUFFICIENT** for success
  - You must still also be academically excellent and do outstanding research
  - Do it because you want to, not just to get your ticket punched

# What happens when your application is reviewed?

- Typically several levels of adjudication
  - Institutional: very common for screening
  - Granting organization selection committee
- Reviewers are almost always volunteers
  - No compensation for review time
- Interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary committees very common
  - Conflicts of interest often remove people who know the most about your subject from reviewing your application
- Many applications to review
  - Reviewers looking to KNOCK YOU OUT, not keep you in!

***So you MUST tailor your application to the review process!***



# Write for the specialist AND a general audience!

- Write your application for BOTH the specialist, and for a non-specialist
  - You must have the technical and field-specific rigor to pass muster...
  - ....but someone who's not an expert needs to know:
    - What are you doing?
    - Why is it important?
    - How are you doing this?
    - What's the impact?
- If you don't do this, your application will likely not succeed
- True for BOTH institutional AND granting organization review!

# How do I satisfy writing for both a specialist and a non-specialist reader?

- Writing for both a specialist and a non-specialist simultaneously is VERY DIFFICULT, especially for a short proposal (e.g., most fellowship applications)
- Some tips to help:
  - Write in plain English whenever possible
  - Avoid jargon and acronyms
  - Be organized in your writing
  - Get to the point
  - Use the summary section to provide a clear, brief capsule
  - Have your proposal read by someone both IN your field, and someone not

# Other useful grantsmanship tips

- State your hypothesis and objectives early on
  - Answer the question: *“What are you doing, and why is it significant?”*
- Keep introductory remarks pertinent but brief
  - Answer the question: *“Why should I care?”*
- Work out AND justify your logistics train
  - Answer the question: *“Can the applicant do this?”*
- Have a short closing statement
  - Answer the question: *“What is the impact of my work?”*

# A few obvious and not-so-obvious tips

- Follow the directions
  - Font, size, margins are all important
- Be mindful of available space!
  - But use ALL available space
  - Avoid widow lines (that have only a few words in them)
- Proofread and find ways to poke holes in your own application
- Have someone review it, both in and out of your field
- Avoid bullsh\*t
  - It's ridiculously easy to spot
  - Your application will wind up in the round filing cabinet
- Give yourself enough time!