



2019-2020 Graduate Student Senate Professional Development Awards Review Process

EFFECTIVE JANUARY 15, 2020, The Professional Development Travel Award no longer requires the workshop to be that of "travel," and thus will be known as the Professional Development Award.

The Graduate School, in conjunction with the Graduate Student Senate (GSS), is continuing a popular program to support students who need financial support for professional development opportunities. An ad hoc committee, the GSS Professional Development Awards Committee, will work with the GSS President and Dean of the Graduate School to select awardees.

The GSS Professional Development Awards allow graduate students to receive support to travel to workshops or other professional development opportunities. Throughout this document, the word "workshop" will be used generally to describe a variety of professional development opportunities including, but not limited to, workshops to develop skills not taught in courses at the university, field research experiments to collect data or observations, laboratory visits to learn how to use field-specific equipment not at the university, and trips to archives whose materials cannot be accessed remotely. These funds are only available for opportunities in which applicants are *active* participants, thus they are not available for students to passively attend conferences.

We strive to make a difference for graduate students but must also balance this with the goal of funding as many travel **and workshop** requests as possible. The applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, but only one award is allowed per graduate student per academic year. Applicants shall apply for the award at least two weeks prior to the start date. Every effort shall be made to complete the review process in a reasonable amount of time following each submission, with initial recommendations to be achieved within two weeks of submission. Once initial decisions are made, final approval is subject to the

advice and consent of the Dean of the Graduate School. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions via email. Notifications are generally sent within four weeks of submission.

Due to the nature of the source of the funding, all travel or workshop attendance must be completed by May 31, 2020 in order to be considered.

In order to clarify the decision process, this [document outlines](#) a summary of the procedures used to determine eligibility for an award and any funding decisions. [Frequently asked questions regarding the application and reimbursement processes are listed on the following pages.](#)

Summary of Procedures

Automatic Rejection: The application will be automatically rejected if any of the following criteria are met.

- Failure to obtain any of the necessary signatures – applicant, academic advisor, and department head (or college dean if no department).
- Failure to submit a summary of the workshop including how attendance at this workshop will positively impact the applicant's professional development **beyond passively attending lectures and networking opportunities.**
- Application is submitted less than two weeks before starting date of the workshop.
- The applicant's demonstrated net financial need is a negative or zero amount (see below).

Criteria Used During Review

- Impact of workshop
 - Applicants are expected to write a summary of the workshop indicating its positive impact on the applicant's professional development. Indicate specific skills to be gained through the experience. Each summary should be limited to 250-1,000 words.
 - The summary must include the expected level of participation in the workshop, including a percentage or hourly estimate as to how much *active* participation will be required of attendees.
 - Summary must include why the workshop is relevant to the student, as well as how there are no similar opportunities at the university.
- Demonstrated net financial need
 - The amount of supplementary assistance indicated by the applicant's department and/or college, as well as any additional financial assistance from other sources (e.g., workshop travel awards, grants, advisor, etc.) is subtracted from the total listed cost for travel.

If exhibiting both a positive impact and a demonstrated net financial need, applications are considered for funding. If chosen for an award, support of up to \$1,000 can be provided through this program. This award can only be used to cover registration, travel, and lodging. Per diem for meals will **not** be covered.

*****Due to the rolling nature of applications and a limited fixed budget, GSS Professional Development Travel Awards Applications will be accepted and awarded until all funds have been allocated. The GSS website will be updated when applications are no longer being accepted.*****

Frequently Asked Questions

When can I submit an application for a Graduate Student Senate Professional Development Travel Award?

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. They may be submitted at any time, **as long as it is submitted two weeks prior to the workshop start date.**

Who can I contact for more information about the application or the review process?

The GSS Vice President may be reached by email at gsspdtravel@utk.edu.

What makes a competitive application for PDA funding?

The committee strongly encourages that graduate students structure their application in such a way that resembles a small grant proposal. It should be similar in that the applicant is proving the need for funding, illustrating the gap in “knowledge” or in this case skill/experience, the advancement the applicant would make (project advancement, professional skill, etc.) and the long term impact the advancement would make on an applicant’s professional career.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Active participation is referenced in the criteria, but how is that scaled?

The PDA review committee considers active participation as an applicant being involved in the pursuit of the skill, project advancement, or other professional advancement opportunity approximately 50% of the time that the applicant is present at the workshop.

I was rejected for my attendance not being active enough. I am not sure how to word my active participation in the application since I will not be learning a skill on site. How do I still sell my need for funding to the PDTA?

The PDA committee suggests that applications should emphasize the need for the workshop attendance as a direct benefit to your professional career. Simply stating that an applicant will be networking, attending panels or discussions, etc. would not make a strong enough case for funding. Therefore, by reformatting an application of this nature to directly fit the long term benefits or wording it in such a way that allows for a skill to be attained would be an ideal way to sell the funding need.

For example: *"I will be traveling to Conference X to pursue professional relationships with well-known researchers in my field of Y. I will be actively pursuing an open relationship in which our lab, located at the University of Tennessee, could collaborate with their lab, located at University Z. This would be of benefit to us since we lack the ability to perform (skill) and this particular lab is very proficient in this research and has proven so because of xyz. This will allow me to learn (skill) that will benefit my professional career."*

I was granted an award. Am I guaranteed to receive the full amount indicated in my letter?

No. The amount an applicant is awarded is the maximum that he or she may receive, but applicants are only guaranteed to receive the amount for which they present receipts for acceptable travel expenses. All expenses must meet the requirement of UT Fiscal Policy. See administrative personnel in your department for more information on acceptable expenses.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

What should I do if I receive an award but subsequently do not complete the professional development activity?

Applicants should notify the GSS Vice President via email at gsspdtravel@utk.edu as soon as they become aware that the funds will not be spent. Applicants who are offered awards – but do not use them – are eligible for another award during the same academic year provided they withdraw their applications.

Why am I only allowed to receive one award per academic year?

The goal is to make a difference in as many students' travel needs as possible, both to give students the opportunity to participate in professional development and to increase the University of Tennessee's presence at workshops and similar opportunities. Given the large number of anticipated applications and the allotted budget, it is necessary to limit the travel awards to one per student per academic year.

How do I file for reimbursement?

Applicants should submit their travel awards letter, as well as all receipts for acceptable travel expenses and proof of attendance, to their departmental representative responsible for travel claims. He or she will then submit the request to the Treasurer's Office using the appropriate account number.

How long does it take to receive reimbursement?

Reimbursement will generally be distributed via direct deposit approximately two weeks after the request is filed and approved through the Treasurer's Office.

Who should I contact for more information regarding the reimbursement filing process?

Questions relating to reimbursement should be directed to your departmental representative that handles travel.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

I do not know if my college offered me any financial assistance. How do I find out if I was awarded partial funding from my college?

Questions concerning college funding should be directed to the office of the dean of the applicant's college.

I do not know if my application to attend the workshop has been accepted. Will this affect my eligibility for a GSS Professional Development Travel Award?

Priority is **not** given to applicants who have already applied and been accepted to their target workshop, so eligibility is not affected. Applicants whose workshop proposals are **not** accepted, however, should contact the GSS Vice President <gsspdtravel@utk.edu> at their earliest convenience in order to preserve their future eligibility by withdrawing their applications.