

# BECOMING A STRONGER CANDIDATE FOR FELLOWSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRADUATE SCHOOL

## HOW CAN I BECOME A STRONGER CANDIDATE?

Strengthening your candidacy has benefits that extend beyond applying for fellowships and scholarships. Building your candidacy can be valuable in helping you obtain internships, special opportunities and employment. Start building your candidacy as early as possible, even in the first year of college.

Below are some of the ways to become a stronger candidate.

### ACADEMIC RECORD

- Scholarship, fellowship, and graduate school selection committees look at other admission criteria in addition to Grade Point Average. Selectors look at the types of courses you have chosen throughout your college career. A student with a 4.0 Grade Point Average who has completed the minimum amount of work to earn his or her degree (for example, a student who chose the most basic courses to complete requirements) will not be as competitive as the student with a slightly lower Grade Point Average who enrolled in more challenging coursework.
- To enhance your academic record, classes you choose should complement your discipline of study, or major. Seek out faculty mentors or academic advisors to explore specialized coursework they can be incorporated into your degree including the following:
  - Independent Study course
  - Research under the guidance of faculty

- For-credit internship
- Virtual Work Experience

In a global career environment, students may also consider the advantage of Study Abroad programs, which can enhance language skills and broaden to understanding of multiculturalism and diversity.

- Consider selecting an academic minor to strengthen your discipline of study. For example, if you are majoring in STEM, declaring a minor in business management or psychology could add competencies that would fit well with your career goals. If you are majoring in Business/Accounting, a minor in data analytics could provide you with a competitive edge as corporations rely more heavily on technology in their business models.
- There are many creative ways for a student in *any major* to incorporate a minor and/or specialized coursework. Consider the business marketing major who minors in art to learn how to promote a company's products in a more attractive way, or philosophy to gain a better sense of ethical practices in business. Consider the social work major who chooses a minor in cinema and learns how to create a moving documentary that helps raise awareness of an issue affecting the community. Consider the psychology major that chooses a minor in art, music or dance as a way to develop a more holistic form of therapy. This can be an opportunity to present yourself as a well-rounded, creative and interesting individual.
- Some students declare a double major to gain a more in-depth knowledge of another discipline. Talk with a faculty advisor before deciding on a double major because it can significantly increase course work and demands increased time and financial commitments. Be aware that certain minors may be more difficult to complete and can interfere with your academic success. Enlisting the advisement of a faculty advisor can help you make an informed decision.

#### **GRADE POINT AVERAGE ISN'T THE WHOLE STORY**

- Consider Student A and Student B, nursing majors with the same Grade Point Average and both applying for a nursing related scholarship, fellowship, or graduate school. Student A has done very little but achieve high grades. Student B has interned at a medical

clinic, volunteers time at an adult resident facility as well as an after-school program for at-risk adolescents and organizes special guest speakers for the weekly Nursing Club meeting.

- Even if Student B's Grade Point Average was lower than Student A's, Student B would still be the stronger candidate. Student B demonstrates a passion for the field by completing a nursing related internship to gain experience and demonstrates motivation to pursuing a chosen career field. Student B also demonstrates leadership potential and initiative by seeking out professional experience in the field to ensure success.
- There is a wide range of scholarship, fellowship, and graduate school eligibility criteria. Many students have lower Grade Point Averages with significant leadership and community service. Other students demonstrate high Grade Point Averages, but may not have leadership or community service in their applicant profile. Scholarships on a national level are especially competitive because they attract large numbers of applicants. Some scholarships, fellowships, and graduate school selections are based on unusually outstanding accomplishments, or perhaps a particularly moving story of overcoming hardship. Others are based solely on the creativity of writing an essay and may rely less on Grade Point Average. Research each opportunity carefully to make certain you are a good candidate to be included in the applicant pool.

## LEADERSHIP

- Scholarship, fellowship, and graduate school selection committees look for candidates who demonstrate initiative and leadership that makes a difference in the community. Recipients are often students who volunteer in civic engagement programs, community-based organizations, student clubs, or social justice initiatives. Engagement in leadership opportunities make applications stand out to selection committee members!
- Serving as a club president or the team captain is noteworthy, but there are other ways to demonstrate leadership such as organizing a

community- based social justice event like a charity fundraising walk or food drive. Introducing a campus club that focuses on supporting students in need or speaking out on social issues can add value to your application. Choose an issue that is meaningful to you and run with it!

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN YOUR FIELD

- Selection committee are drawn to students who have the potential to make outstanding contributions in their fields. Seek opportunities to gain direct experience in your chosen field and work hard to make contributions under the guidance of professionals. For example, students pursuing careers in scientific research would benefit greatly from an undergraduate summer program that allows them to work with established researchers.
- Join professional organizations in your chosen field (e.g., the American Psychological Foundation, the Council on Social Work Education, etc.). Annual student memberships are inexpensive, and monthly publications will keep you up to date on advances and challenges in your field. Some organizations offer membership scholarships for members.
- Visit Student Services offices on campus (Student Life, Career Center) to find out more about leadership opportunities. Ask faculty members as well. Remember to include all such leadership experiences, achievements and affiliations on your resume!

## AMBASSADORIAL POTENTIAL

- How well do you think you can represent your college and your country while studying abroad? This is known as Ambassadorial Potential. Selection committee members are very interested in how capable students are at fostering a cultural exchange between the host country and your own country as well as embracing global diversity.

## INTERVIEWING SKILLS

- Some of the more prestigious scholarships, fellowships, and graduate schools require an interview as the final stage in the selection process. An interview for a scholarship, fellowship, or graduate

school is held with the selection committee members and is usually the same format as an internship or employment interview. For more information on interviewing, visit the *Acing the Interview* page.

## CHALLENGES OF WORK AND FAMILY RELATED RESPONSIBILITIES

- Many students have substantial family, work, and financial responsibilities that interfere with participation in leadership, community service and other record-enhancing opportunities. Here are some ways you can build achievements into your family and work responsibilities.
  - Develop or plan special activities or events at your place of employment that involves leadership or community-based advocacy potential. For example, initiate a toy drive for children in need if you work at a children's retail store.
  - Volunteer to coach a family member's sports team or arrange to tutor adolescents or adults at a local school.
  - Organize a shared childcare program if you are a single parent in your community

Leadership and civic engagement is about contributing in whatever way you can. It will add value to your application.