

Guidelines for Saint Mary's Financial Aid: Scholarships and Bursaries



Applications for financial aid, including scholarships and bursaries, require a form of writing, and a focus on the self, that are often unfamiliar to students. Successful applications are crafted by being attentive to the requirements and conventions for personal statements, paying attention to overall tone and language, and carefully reviewing the details of the application.

NAMED UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS

How to apply for the awards:

- Pick up a Named Undergraduate Award Package from the Financial Aid & Awards Office
 - Service Centre, McNally Main 108.
- Review the application in the package and determine which application form(s) you should complete.
- Before completing the application, read the Regulations and Procedures for each application form.
- Complete and submit the application form(s).
 - Be sure to attach the necessary personal statement.
- Request reference letters.
 - Ask your referees to forward these directly to the Senate Scholarship Committee (address on the front of the application package). Ask that your referees indicate they are recommending you for a Named Undergraduate Scholarship.
- Adhere to the deadlines for each application.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

If two applications are equal in every way (marks, accomplishments, etc.) it can be an exceptional reference letter or personal statement that determines who receives the award.

Before starting to write, assess yourself:

- What is special, unique, distinctive or impressive about you?
- What are your career goals?
- What personal characteristics do you possess (integrity, compassion, persistence)?
- What skills do you possess (leadership, communication, analytical abilities)?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give to the Committee that will make them interested in you?

Consider your audience:

- Remember who you are writing to and why.
- Try to give the Committee an understanding of who you are, and your interests, goals and accomplishments.
- Share only information applicable to the scholarship or award.
- Take time to write and edit your statement. Focus on the opening paragraph.

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Stay informed about the awards being offered:

- Review the awards available on the Undergraduate Award Website:
<http://www.smu.ca/academics/undergraduate-aid-and-awards.html>

Identify specific conditions or requirements that you meet:

You will most likely be eligible for many awards. However, there may be some awards with specific conditions for which you feel particularly eligible. If there are, subtly mention this in your personal statement.

- **Example #1 – The Beta Sigma Phi Scholarship** is based on academic standing. Special consideration will be given to the applicants who are members or son/daughters of members of Beta Sigma Phi. This scholarship is open to first year as well as senior students. If you or your parents are members of Beta Sigma Phi, it would be to your advantage to mention this in your personal statement. Otherwise, how would SMU know you are eligible for this award?
- **Example #2 – The Daniel Fogerty Scholarship** is based on academic standing; it is awarded to a student who shows interest in education and is judged to demonstrate the best potential to be an outstanding teacher. In addition to academic standing, reference letters and the personal statement are critical documents used by the Committee to choose this award recipient. Applicants need to identify themselves by stating that they wish to become teachers. Additionally, it would be to their advantage to speak about why they want to be a teacher (describing motivations, desires, and influences, for example).

Don't "pigeon-hole" yourself:

Although it is important to mention any special conditions you meet that make you eligible for specific awards, speak broadly enough to be considered for many awards. For example, if you speak solely about your financial need, the Committee may think you only want to be considered for awards that are based on financial need. If you speak only about your involvement in sports, the Committee may think you only want to be considered for athletic awards. To be safe, you may wish to state that you would like to be considered for all awards for which the Committee deems you eligible.

Be sincere and honest:

Speak sincerely and honestly. You may meet the donor of your award at the Fall Scholarship Reception and could be asked specific questions concerning your experiences, volunteer or extra-curricular activities, sports activities, interests, or academic achievements.

In general:

- Share information if it is applicable to the scholarship.
- Try to give the committee of an understanding of who you are, your interests, and your circumstances.

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Top 10 tips for personal statements:

1. When possible, address your letter to the appropriate person or committee.
2. Remember to introduce yourself and explain what the purpose of your letter is, instead of going directly into a list of reasons why you are deserving of particular awards.
3. Be sure to demonstrate an appreciation for Saint Mary's University.
4. Ensure that immensely personal information (e.g. financial or medical problems) is only included to illustrate an applicable point, not to invoke pity.
5. Do not dwell on past achievements (e.g. high school achievements) unless they relate to your cause, and do not focus on just one area of your Saint Mary's experience.
6. When listing extra-curricular activities, explain how these activities benefitted you as a student, or what you learned from them.
7. Do not exceed limits (e.g. page length, requested materials) set by the committee.
8. Be clear and specific when describing future career goals.
9. Have someone proofread your letter, and remember to sign it.
10. Ask yourself if your letter will give the deciding committee an accurate depiction of who you are.