Responsible Scholarship Colloquium V
Writing Grant & Fellowship Proposals

INTRODUCTION

Asking other people for money to support your education and research is not a natural gift, but a learned skill. It can be developed to a high order. Today’s graduate education (and tomorrow’s professional activities, whether you remain in the academy or pursue a career outside it) will involve study abroad, graduate, dissertation, post-doc, research, project support, and fellowship applications of various kinds. In the academy, it has become harder and harder to count on your institution to provide the money for the development and research time that you need to grow professionally, and the costs of such programs are too prohibitive to be self-funded except for a very few. Over the course of your professional career, certainly in the academy and very likely in the public or private sector, you will apply for outside funding for many things. You will apply for support to:

- enhance language ability by studying abroad,
- get internships to develop a particular professional skill or interest,
- attend special technology or skills-development workshops,
- do primary research in domestic or foreign venues,
- buy time to experiment with innovative teaching methods or curricular design,
- travel domestically and abroad to attend conferences, do research, or engage in program development,
- generate funding to host conferences and meetings,
- generate funding for special projects and initiatives,
- provide you with a summer stipend,
- provide leave time to write up your research and subventions to publish it.

This is the reality. You need to add grant-writing to your tool kit of necessary skills learned in graduate school.

What do you need to do to be competitive? You need to start right away and develop the skill. Like any other skill, grant-writing improves with practice. Start with small requests as a graduate student, find your style, master the language, learn the rhetorical strategies, and you will move more easily to larger and more complex projects further along in your career.

A. When should you think about grant or fellowship proposals?

- You should have thought about them yesterday. As you think about the evolution of your professional career and plan your next steps, ask yourself: “At which points am I going to need some assistance to achieve my goals?” Then begin to familiarize yourself with suitable funding agencies that will support you as you work toward those goals;
- It is no longer yesterday, but you still need to become familiar today with the range of funding that is available and suits your goals;
- Start a computer file of funding opportunities and keep notes on and URLs of any suitable opportunities. Make a plan to get on top of this subject.
B. What do you need to know about available grant or fellowship opportunities?

- You need to know what they are and who funds them. Identify the national, regional, and local agencies that offer relevant opportunities. This will take some research on your part; do it.
- Learn what the mission and goals of the these agencies are; *learn not only how their money may support your work, but also how your work might support their mission and goals.*
- Pinpoint the opportunities that look like the best fit for your intellectual profile.
- Know the kind and level of funding and support that these agencies provide. Some provide a straight stipend or salary replacement, others support only concrete expenditures (travel, housing, photocopying and supplies). Awards may range from a few hundred dollars to $50,000 or more. Will you have to put together a “package” of several awards to achieve your goal?
- Learn about the kinds of material and information the grant agencies require from you for application: how much writing is involved? what kind of data do you need to provide? Start tracking those data now.

C. How do you find out what kind of opportunities are available?

In graduate school you train to be a researcher, so you will have to do the research. Here the internet is your friend. Bear in mind that you will run across long lists of available grants, but most of them will not suitable to your category (pre-dissertation, dissertation, post-doc, mid-career) or to your particular initiative. So think creatively about finding the right funding for you and your project: Do you need funding to study abroad? there are specialized agencies. If your research or project has a social science or history aspect, that will interest one set of agencies; literature, religion, film suggest different agencies, while pedagogy or linguistics yet others. Does your dissertation touch on Holocaust literature or film? A whole new set of grant options opens. Include art or music? Many large museums and libraries have funding for research in their collections. Women’s studies? Medieval studies? all different opportunities and agencies. Think beyond Slavic studies. Be knowledgeable about the grants that your peers receive.

Is there a guaranteed grant opportunity for the project you might conceptualize? No. You may have to rethink your strategy or rethink your project.

D. Who offers grant opportunities for Slavists, including graduate students?

**KU Resources**

- **CREES** (Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies) offers some specialized awards of various kinds, including travel funds
- **FLAS** (Foreign Language and Area Studies) Fellowships support regional and language studies in critical and less-commonly-taught (apply through CREES or through the Center for Global and International Studies, CGIS)
- **SLL** (Slavic Languages & Literatures has some funding (including travel awards and study abroad support)
- **CLAS** (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences) and the University’s **Office of Graduate Studies** also have some funding: there is not much there for the humanities, but there is some travel money
- **The Hall Center for the Humanities**
  The **Richard and Jeannette Sias Graduate Fellowship in the Humanities** provides two KU humanities graduate students with one semester each of financial support to focus entirely on the dissertation.

**Graduate Summer Research Awards**
Humanities Summer Graduate Internship
Andrew Debicki International Travel Award in the Humanities

Pre-Doctoral Funding

- **ACTR** - American Council of Teachers of Russian:
  - ✔ Advanced Russian Language and Area Studies Program
  - ✔ Balkan Language Initiative
  - ✔ Business Russian Language and Internship Program
  - ✔ Eurasian Regional Language Program
- **AAUW** - American Association of University Women (Among other programs, they offer International Fellowships --MA, PhD, dissertation, and post-docs -- also for non-US citizens)
- **AWSS** - Association for Women in Slavic Studies (Pre-Dissertation Fellowship in Slavic/East European and Eurasian Women's Studies, for research and travel; open to non-US citizens ($1,000 award). The award is small, but you are not limited to applying for one grant -- sometimes it takes a package)
- **Alfa Fellowship Program** (11 months of language study and internships for private sector positions)
- **Critical Languages Program** (United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Selection; administered by American Councils for International Education)
- **Boren Awards** for International Study

Dissertation and Post-Doctoral Research

- **IREX** - International Resources and Exchanges Board
- **ACTR/ACCELS** - American Council of Teachers of Russian
- **NCEEER** - The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research
- **NEH** - National Endowment for the Humanities
- **Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program**
- **SSRC** (Social Science Research Council) International Field Research Fellowships
- **Eurasia Program** fellowships at all levels
- **ACLS** (American Council of Learned Societies) offers about 65 dissertation research awards a year, they also offer post-doctoral support
- **Kennan Institute** Research and Short-term awards, summer research
- **Woodrow Wilson Foundation** has several different fellowships, including a dissertation fellowships, one specifically for women’s studies (which might be relevant to a Slavic dissertation)
- **Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowships** (for those planning academic careers)
- **Summer Research Laboratory** on Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia at the University of Illinois
- **Kosciuszko Foundation** (and other foundations aimed at particular national groups)
- **Charlotte Newcombe Foundation** dissertation fellowships (religion and ethics)
- **National Academy of Education Spencer Dissertation Fellowships** (for dissertations on history, theory, or practice of education; they also have post-docs)
- **Council for European Studies**
- Remember to consider foreign agencies, like the **Deutsches Akademisches Austauschdienst (DAAD)**, **the Hokkaido Slavic Research Center**, **the Chateaubriand Fellowship**, and American foundations that fund research and writing fellowships abroad, like the Rockefeller Foundation’s **Bellagio Residencies, American Academy in Berlin**, etc.

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Research Fellowships, Post-Docs

- **Harriman Institute**, Columbia University Fellowships and Visiting Scholars program
- **Davis Center for Russian Studies**, Harvard University Postdoctoral Research Fellowships
- **Stanford Humanities Center**
- **Kluge Fellowships** at the Library of Congress (many large research libraries have some kind of stipends or awards for researchers)
- **University of Chicago** Postdoctoral Fellowships
  - Franke Institute for the Humanities in Chicago
- Later in your career there are opportunities from the **Guggenheim Foundation**, **Princeton Institute for Advanced Study**, and other entities
- **National Humanities Center** (North Carolina Research Triangle); this is a general competition, but many Humanities Centers around the country have their awards, often with broad themes that may fit your research
- **Carnegie Mellon University** -- A.W. Mellon Post-Docs in the Humanities (Modern Languages)
- **Mellon et al. Post-Docs.** The Mellon Foundation and other foundations support humanities post-docs at other institutions; these are irregular and may move around from year to year, but their number is growing. These are often targeted at specific areas -- feminist criticism, linguistics, interdisciplinarity, humanistic inquiry broadly defined, war, American studies, or specific topics announced by institutions for a single competition (and often you can tuck a Slavic topic in there). These are announced by individual institutions and vary from year to year.

Three important tools for tracking grant and fellowship opportunities:

1. **Professional Organizations:** AATSEEL and ASEEEES both have lists of grant opportunities on their home pages; they also list internship opportunities (not to mention many other useful resources for young scholars). ASEEEES offers scholarships for student members to travel to the national conference. Both AATSEEL and ASEEEES announce resources and grants in their on-line and hard-copy newsletters. Both professional associations, the two fundamental professional groups in our field, have a special student membership rate. You should become a member of at least one of them, if you are not already.

2. **Listservs:** The main Slavic listserv, SEELANGS, announces many funding opportunities that are relevant to our field, just as almost all of the jobs in our field are announced over SEELANGS. If you still have not signed up for SEELANGS, do so immediately.

   If you are a new graduate student, this is your chance to see the calls for funding applications as they go out, get a sense of what is available and on what time line, follow up and learn about the granting agency or foundation, and build your own list of relevant options so that you do not have to scramble when it suddenly becomes important. Check out the **SRAS Newsletter**, which comes over SEELANGS: it is an excellent resource for many things, including funding, internships, and short- and long-term job opportunities in the Former Soviet Union.

   If you are an advanced graduate student, you can follow the job announcements and see what profiles institutions are looking for and how they present their needs. This will help you shape your own professional profile.
For employment, whether academic or alternative, you will be competing with people who have demonstrated that they have the skills to apply for and get grants and fellowships. We live in an entrepreneurial age. If you want to live the life of the mind, you now have to fund it yourself.

3. Meta-Lists. Finally, check out and bookmark the web site of the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere at the University of Florida’s page on Grant and Fellowship opportunities. They list hundreds of external funding sources for humanities and soft social sciences. This is one of the best and easiest-to-use meta-lists of available funding I have seen (but Google is your friend in this endeavor).

- For graduate students:
  - http://www.humanities.ufl.edu/funding-graduates.html
- for faculty:
  - http://www.humanities.ufl.edu/funding-faculty.html

E. The Process. Let’s walk through the grant application process for a major dissertation grant, such as a Fulbright Dissertation Research award or an ACLS Dissertation Completion grant. These might be aspirational for beginning grad students, but they may be very real for more advanced students. Smaller grants will be a shorter and less complex version of this process.

1. Think ahead: know which agencies might fund your branch of research and when their deadlines are likely to occur. Most grants have fairly stable deadlines, same each year, varying by a day or two.
   - Be far enough along in your project to understand it. You cannot select the right agency if you do not know how long your project will take, where you may need to go, what you may need to do, and how much it will probably cost. Do you know enough about your project to write a compelling narrative that will impress the review committee?
   - Review regularly your file about grant and other opportunities and calls for applications on SEELANGS and other listservs, so that when the time is right, you know what you are going to apply for.
   - In addition to your own monitoring, use your support personnel: consult with your academic advisor and/or the director of graduate studies about what kinds of grants, fellowships, or other opportunities are most suitable for the general goal or the specific project you have in mind; consult with the KU HGDO\(^1\) for additional information and application strategies.
   - And by the way: always go in to consultations informed about possible opportunities and with a list of specific questions; never begin this conversation with “What do you think I should apply for?”

2. Draft your proposal and put your “package” together well in advance: For a significant award (Fulbright or foundation grant), you will need several months (at a minimum), not days, to get a competitive application together. You should be thinking think about it 6-12 months out before you need to submit the application; 2-3 months to prepare the proposal is realistic if you have had your dissertation proposal accepted and are making progress on your project. If you are applying for multiple grants, you will be writing several proposals about your research plans, and each one must be tailored to the requirements of that particular agency. Give yourself time to do this properly.

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\(^1\) HGDO = Humanities Grant Development Office, directed by Ms. Kathy Porsch in the Hall Center for the Humanities.
You may only need a couple of days to write a small travel grant. But large or small, ten pages, five pages, or one, you will need time to understand what the agency wants, locate your project into their paradigm, crystallize what you need to say, plan a strategy, consult with the appropriate people, get recommendations, draft the proposal and the personal statement, build a budget, and have peer and faculty reviewers edit and comment on your effort.

3. Conceptualize the proposal:
   • The first question you have already asked: What is my goal and will this grant support my goal?
   • The second, equally important question you need to ask is: **How does my project support the mission of the agency and how does it fit into the spirit of the particular competition?** Submitting a grant proposal is not just about you getting money. Like you, the agency has a plan; it has a mandate and a mission; it has to demonstrate that it is fulfilling its mandate and mission by awarding its money to people who will use it appropriately and wisely. Help the agency see that you and your project are exactly what they are looking for.
   • Ask yourself:
     • Is my project suitable for this agency?
     • Is this a project they will want to fund?
     • If my project fits in some ways, is there a way to tweak the project to meet both my priorities and theirs?
   • If you are not sure about the fit, call the program officer and ask. You can ask the program officer many things:
     • “Is my topic suitable for the agency?”
     • “What are you really looking for?”
     • “Does my research as I describe it represent a priority for the agency?”
   • You can also ask little things:
     • “Do you want the narrative be double- or single-spaced?”
     • “Can my narrative be shorter than the specified length?” (Note that it can never be longer.)

4. Ethical issues: There are ethical issues here that we need to consider:
   • What you want to do vs. what the agency wants you to do: how much should you “bend” your concept? (if you have to bend it too much, do not apply -- prevaricating on your proposal is not an option, as it violates your scholarly integrity).
   • Sometimes it is worth compromising a little in your conceptualization to fit the agency priorities. Like you, the agency knows that every large project is a work in progress; if it were finished, you would not be applying for support. Since the project is sure to change in some unanticipated way that neither you nor the agency can predict, you might be willing to make some adjustment this early in the process. In the end, the project will be what it will be.
   • Sometimes you decide that this agency is just not the right agency for your project; your mission and its mission do not align. Recognize this, accept it, and look for another agency.

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2 Networking the program officer is a great idea, since these people often sit in on deliberations, and if they can add something to the discussion, they often do. If they have met you on the phone and like you, they may have an incentive to support your application in the discussions.
5. **Write the proposal narrative:**
   - Review the proposal instructions carefully and repeatedly; check back periodically and reread them.
   - Create a check-list for yourself that includes a time line and a to-do list, then follow it;
   - **Follow all agency instructions TO THE LETTER.**
     - **Concept:** address everything they ask for in your narrative: omit nothing.
     - **Form:** use the font type and font size, set the margins, meet the word count and every specification that the agency sets.
   - Think about the mode of communication or “genre,” if you like, that a grant proposal represents: it is not a research paper, but an entrepreneurial “pitch” in which you are convincing the review committee that the agency should give fund your project and not someone else’s. Keep it clear and straightforward.
   - In your narrative, discuss items in the order suggested in the call for proposals or in the instructions (instructions, by the way, can be very simple, or ridiculously complicated and arcane, so be prepared).
   - Use active voice and declarative sentences; you want your project to sound dynamic and engaging, not flat and aloof.
   - Write so that your project is understood by any intelligent person, regardless of their field: in fact, write for people who do not know your field intimately and are unfamiliar with its jargon (do not, for example, count on a synchronic Slavic linguist being on the panel; that person will not be there; the panel may have no one in your particular field or world region at all). Mis-gauging the audience is the number one problem with most proposals. Never forget who your audience is. If you want to know more, ask the program officer what the general make-up of the review committee is.
   - Make your proposal as visually attractive as possible, with eye-resting white spaces (the reader has a stack of 75 or more proposals to read; give him or her a break); add section headings (easier to flip through); bold key terms. Make your narrative “easy” to read and follow.
   - You are not alone in this endeavor: work with your advisor, the DGS, or with HGDO: they will help you make sure that your proposal fits the agency’s mission, is well-conceptualized, clearly written, and nicely presented.

6. **Get the right recommendations.**
   - Discuss with your advisor who your best advocates are and why.
   - Make an appointment with those persons whom you are going to ask to write for you.
   - Go in prepared to tell your writers the following:
     - Why you have chosen to pursue this opportunity;
     - How this fellowship/award/opportunity will help you shape the professional profile you want;
     - What qualities you have that will make you successful in the endeavor;
     - What makes them the best person to write a letter on your behalf;
     - What you want your recommender to address specifically (and give examples, help your writer out -- he or she is not a specialist on all aspects of your life).
   - Provide any additional information they may ask for.
   - Make sure your writers know the due date for the recommendation letter and how they are to submit it (will they get an autoprompt? does it have to be snail-mailed? What is the
address? Do they send it to as an e-mail? to whom?). If you treat this part of the process casually, your writers will treat their part of the process casually. And you need good, strong letters.

- Follow up by putting all pertinent information (including helpful examples and “buttons”) into a short e-mail and sending it a few days later with your “thanks for taking the time to meet with me” e-note.
- Provide your writer with a draft of your proposal as soon as you have it.
- P.S. If your choice for letter writer tells you that he or she cannot write you the letter you want, press no further.³ Thank them for their time and walk away (then thank your lucky stars that they were honest with you).

7. Submit the proposal:

- Assemble the material requested in the order that it is listed in the instructions (or follow the online instructions; most grants are now submitted electronically).
- Submit before the deadline (get a date stamp or send UPS or FedEx if you are submitting hard copy; save monitoring info).⁴
- If possible, try to submit earlier, in the week before the proposal is due. Electronic submission sites (especially the notorious “grants.gov” site) often develop problems when too many proposals come flooding in simultaneously and overload the system. If you submit a few days in advance, there is time to contact the program officer if there is a problem. No shipping service is 100% reliable. Build that into your timetable.
- Print and save any confirmations.

8. What happens to your grant proposal after you submit it:

- The program officer at the agency will date stamp it and check to make sure it conforms to agency requirements (again: don’t bother sending in anything late -- it will be tossed).
- Your materials, along with the materials of the other applicants (as few as a couple dozen or as many as several hundred) will go to review (selection, evaluation) committees to be rated and ranked.
- Each agency has some kind of check sheet that reviewers use to rate the proposals, since they are asked to look for specific things. This is why your narrative needs to cover the material in the order requested, and why you need to assemble and submit the pieces of your proposal in that order. If you make it a little easier for the reader, he or she will appreciate it and you will be certain that each category is correctly rated. If the evaluator cannot easily find your response to the rating category, you get a zero.

9. Understand how the review committee works:

³ Assume nothing about the reasons for the refusal. It is tempting to conclude that the faculty member does not like you or your work, or that he or she would write you a bad letter, but this is not always the case. Sometimes faculty feel that they do not know you or your work well enough to write the necessarily-detailed letter; sometimes they are under horrible deadlines themselves or buried under a pile of other work, and they fear that they cannot give your letter the time and thought it needs if it is to help you win the grant; sometimes they may already be writing for someone else and see accepting your request as a conflict of interest; if you ask too close to the deadline, they might not have the time or inclination. Writing support letters for advanced graduate students or junior colleagues is hard, time-consuming work -- do not treat this as a casual request.

⁴ Granting agencies are heartless and cruel (and, frankly, they have to be): miss a deadline by two minutes, and you are out of the competition. Forget to include a single piece of the application materials, and you are disqualified. Think about it: If you cannot follow directions and meet deadlines, how can anyone assume that you will complete your project or submit a final report?
The review committee consists of 3-6 faculty, professionals, or a mix of the two, who serve as reviewers; an agency program officer often meets with the committee in an advisory capacity.

Reviewers read the proposals and rank them, using a rating sheet that conforms to the requirements as stated in the proposal instructions; the reviewers usually have a few weeks to read 50-100 proposals (while doing their day job).

Then the review committee meets (ideally this is in person in a central location, but it could also be by conference call, video conference, or Skype).

The members usually agree quickly on the best proposals (fund ☑️) and the worst proposals (do not fund ☐️).

The committee closely scrutinizes the middle, over which they sometimes wage long battles and make many unpredictable compromises.

The committee then submits their recommendations to the program officer.

Note that the agency has a little wiggle-room at this point. The agency may have announced a particular theme for the competition and chooses to prioritize proposals that address the theme. Political or policy issues are sometimes involved in certain types of research, and the director of the agency may over-rule the reviewers on a proposal or two. Final decisions will be made on the basis of what serves the agency best (although this is a very broad, mostly inclusive category). But remember that government agencies are obligated to meet federal mandates, and private foundations have the founder’s vision and the Board’s directives to implement.

After final decisions are made, you are notified in writing of the success or failure of your proposal.

10. What to Do if You Are Funded:

- Celebrate. You really beat the odds.
- Ask the program officer to share the comments of the reviewers and learn from them what you did right. Do it again next time. What was criticized? Put your finger on your weak spots.
- Do not become overconfident; the process remains much of a crap shoot. The particular committee that reviewed your project like it; the committee meeting in the next room might have rejected it.

11. What to Do if You are Not Funded:

- Take a deep breath.
- Yes, its a lot of work. But this is not about you and your worth as a human being; it is about your project and your proposal. Dozens of possible reasons exist for why you were not funded, and you will never know the real one. There were better projects. There were better-written proposals (this is partly an essay contest, after all). One of the reviewers thought your topic was unfashionable. Another marked you down because you are not doing the project he would have done if he were you. (This makes no sense, but such reviewers are out there.) A third reviewer really hates one of your recommenders and is cutting you no slack. Another has a thing about proposals from certain institutions (“But it’s not an Ivy!” or “But it’s an Ivy!”) The chemistry among reviewers can be weird. The good news is that the majority of selection panel members are conscientious and professional.
• Ask the program officer to share the comments of the reviewers, learn from them, and try again. Sometimes program officers will give you feedback over the phone if they do not send out reviewer comments (some agencies do not).
• Consider the fact that you were competing with 300 other alphas for 35 fellowships. The odds are about one in twelve. Those are the odds. Period.
• Rework and resubmit. “Rework and resubmit” is part of our lives.

**Important Take-Aways:**
1. If you *do* apply, you may or may not win the award. If you *do not* apply, you will *not* win the award. It is a no-brainer: “Apply.”
2. The majority of proposals that do receive funding are second submissions: most proposals are funded on the second time around. By the second cycle, the applicant has usually rethought the project, made progress, reviewed the comments of the review committee, talked to the program officer, gotten some advice, and consequently submitted a much stronger and more competitive (and fundable) proposal.
3. The more you apply, the better you will be at applying, and the more often you will receive the award. The more you receive in grant funding, the more you will receive in the future. Having a track record of successful grantsmanship is a powerful endorsement.

**ON ANOTHER SUBJECT:**

**F. Some Comments on the Statement of Intent (Purpose) and Personal Statement.**
National research grants will ask for an extended *project narrative*. Your CV will serve as your “personal statement.” But some grants, especially small internal ones, will ask for a Statement (or Letter) of Intent (or Purpose); they may or may not also ask for a Personal Statement. What is the difference? There is no crystal-clear distinction, but here is how to think about these two “genres”:

The **Personal Statement** tends to be more autobiographical and, well, personal (but not too personal); it tells the story of how you got to where you are right now. How and why were you inspired to pursue this path? What experiences, events, or people channelled your life in the direction it has taken? So include:
- A statement of what your greater commitment is
- The background (experiences, events, people) that brought you to this commitment
- The different kinds of things you have done to prepare yourself for meeting this commitment (be specific and give examples)
- Your academic interests and how they engage the commitment.

If the Personal Statement looks backward, the **Statement of Intent or Purpose** looks forward and explains how you plan to build on the base you already have to achieve a particular goal. So what should your statement of intent say? It should:
- briefly tell your professional or intellectual story, outlining those achievements and experiences that will allow you to succeed in the opportunity for which you are applying (and thus bring glory to the department, school, or agency);
- briefly articulate your vision of your future in your chosen profession (think about it in one-, two-, and five-year “chunks”);
- **tell what you intend to do with the money or opportunity;**
- explain your project and tell why you want to do it;
• explain why this project is important for mankind;
• tell how this particular opportunity will position you for the next step of your career or be a bridge from what you have achieved so far to what you plan to achieve in the future. Be sure not only to address how the opportunity is relevant to your professional development, but also to recap how your project is a good fit with the funder’s goals.
• Even in this genre you must answer the dreaded “so what?” question: We give you the money, and then -- so what?

Your statement must offer a coherent narrative that expresses self-awareness, self-confidence, and intellectual maturity as you work toward your concrete goal, one big or little step at a time. Your purpose is to convince the review committee that you are a better investment for their money than other applicants.

Do show personality in both the personal statement and in the letter of intent; you want to make yourself stand out from the other applicants as someone professional, dynamic, reliable, committed, focussed, and interesting. This takes some thinking about who you really are. It is a good and useful exercise.

Do not sprinkle in hackneyed quotations from famous writers (Russian or otherwise), descriptions of hallelujah moments, heart-warming family anecdotes, stories of your beloved pets, or other distractions. If you are the victim of a creative writing course, hide that fact. Be professional -- not cute, shocking, innocent, snarky, or arch. Squeeze out all clichés and “adverbiage.” And get a “second (or third) pair of eyes” on it before you send off anything.