

# Discretionary Fund Summary of Policy and Procedures

The Discretionary Fund (DF) is used primarily to support research and educational activities for students in the UT Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences (EPS). This includes funds for research for graduate thesis research, undergraduate research projects, and travel for conferences and workshops. Funds are also provided for special needs (such as for non-course related student field trips).

Requests for DF money should be sent to the Chair of the Discretionary Fund Committee. In the cases of travel to a professional meeting at which the student is presenting and thesis/dissertation research funds (sections 1 and 4 below), the DF Chair can approve the funds directly. All other requests are sent to the entire Committee for a vote. The Head of the Department also has the authority to award Discretionary Funds (according to the Departmental Bylaws).

## Discretionary Funds application procedures:

### 1. Conference Travel

Any EPS student (grad or undergrad major) can apply for travel funds *to present their research* as a talk or poster at a conference (normally one trip per academic year). This can be done at anytime by sending an email to the Chair of the DF with:

- Name, location, and dates of the conference
- Title, authors, and a copy of the abstract of the talk
- Statement from advisor affirming that the conference is important for the student's academic and/or career development and that all other funding sources are exhausted (i.e., the student will not be able to attend without the funds requested from the DF)

Students are typically awarded \$200 for regional conferences (e.g., SEGSA), \$400 for national conferences (e.g., GSA), or \$500 for international conferences (e.g., a Penrose conference in Britain). The award is paid through a travel expense claim submitted to the departmental office staff (Angie Staley [astaley@utk.edu](mailto:astaley@utk.edu)) and the student must observe all of the UT travel rules (including submitting a pre-trip "Travel Authorization" form). Normally, students will receive travel funds for, at most, one conference trip per academic year. Requests for funds for additional trips must include explicit justification.

### 2. Workshop Travel

Any EPS student (grad or undergrad) can apply for travel funds to *participate* in a workshop or advanced-training session (e.g., a geophysics short course in Houston). The application consists of an e-mail to the Chair of the DF with the following information:

- Name, dates, and location, and a short description of the workshop
- A discussion of the student's reasons and goals in attending the workshop
- A statement of support from the advisor, including possible supplemental grant funding
- A short budget (list of expected expenses)
- A list of other funding sources applied for and/or received

Requests for funding for workshop travel are normally reviewed by the full DF committee. Award amounts and payment procedures are the same as for conference travel.

### **3. Undergrad Conference Travel Awards**

EPS undergraduate students (but *not* graduate students) can also apply for DF support to *attend* a professional conference, even if they are not presenting a talk or poster. The application forms are attached and requests are considered twice a year (Sept 30<sup>th</sup> and Feb 28<sup>th</sup>) and are reviewed by the DF Committee and the Chair of the Undergrad Program Committee.

### **4. Thesis/Dissertation Research Support**

Only graduate students *admitted prior to Fall 2015* are eligible. This program will terminate once students admitted prior to Fall 2015, and eligible for the support, have applied for funds. Graduate students, once they've completed their research proposal and had it approved by their supervisor committee and the Graduate Program Committee (GPC), then a student is eligible to apply for research funds (\$325 for MS; \$650 for PhD) from the DFC. The student should send an email to the Chair of the DF requesting the funds, with a cc: to their supervisor and to the Chair of the GPC. These funds are usually paid to the student as "extra service pay".

### **5. Undergrad Research Grants and Otto Kopp Research Awards**

*Otto Kopp Research Awards* honor the memory of former EPS professor Otto Kopp and his dedication to undergraduate research. The Kopp awards recognize exceptional potential in research by an undergraduate early in their academic career (i.e., sophomore or junior years). Awardees will be determined by the Discretionary Funds committee based on nominations submitted by EPS faculty. To nominate a student, the faculty member should send an e-mail to the DF Chair with:

- An outline of the research the student will be engaged in during the upcoming academic year
- A description of the indications of exceptional potential
- Some indication of the student's academic performance (e.g., unofficial transcripts, testimonials of performance in core classes)

Three awards, each with a \$500 research stipend, will be given out each year. ***The due date for nominations for the Otto Kopp Research Awards is Sept. 30.***

*Undergraduate Research Grants* support undergraduate research within the department, with the goal of preparing students for a scientific career. Students awarded Undergraduate Research Grants will be expected to carry out research of publishable quality and present the results at a scientific conference and in appropriate publications. Proposals for these grants are submitted by a student-advisor team and must include the following:

- Proposed Research – ½ to 1pg (single space) description of the proposed work in as much detail as possible
- Budget – including amount requested (up to \$450 per academic year), description and itemization of need, and advisor contribution
- Unofficial transcripts

- Letter of endorsement/recommendation from advisor

All materials should be e-mailed in a single packet to the Chair of the DF. The student-advisor team is required to submit a 1pg (single spaced) summary of research accomplished at the end of the academic year, also e-mailed to the Chair of the DF. ***Due dates for proposals for Undergraduate Research Grants are Sept 30 and Feb 28.***

*Specific Research Expenses:* Undergrad students can also apply for funds to allay specific research costs (e.g., thin-sections, chemical analyses) by sending an email to the DF Chair. These requests should outline the goal of the research and the purpose of the funds. The student's faculty supervisor must also send an email to the DF endorsing the request. The amounts of the undergrad awards varies according to their need and are usually paid through departmental purchasing, rather than being paid directly to the student.

Students will not receive both the Kopp Research Award and the Undergraduate Research Grant in the same academic year, though they may apply/be nominated for each. Students may request discretionary funds to allay specific research costs even if they have received the Kopp Research Award or Undergraduate Research Grant, but the request must demonstrate why the Award/Grant could not cover the additional expense.

## **6. Other Requests**

Requests other than those types listed above will also be considered by the DF Committee. However, if they do not directly involve supporting student research or education, the chances of success are slim.

## **Acknowledgement of Support**

Discretionary Fund awards are possible only because of the generosity of EPS alumni, faculty, and friends who created the endowment that supports this fund. Students are encouraged to consider DF awards as "loans" rather than "gifts." Once you're actively employed after graduation, we hope that you'll continue to support our EPS Department through annual giving, participation in departmental social activities and involvement in collaboration, hiring our students, etc.