PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

*Enrolled less than fulltime during the last semester:* To be eligible for the SFS scholarship, a student must be a full-time student. However, there may be exceptions to this requirement for the final semester of the student degree program. Below is some guidance on how to treat requests to be enrolled less than fulltime during the last semester.

- It’s highly recommended to have guidance in place at the institution program level outlining expectations of your program to include if exceptions to the fulltime requirement can be requested and approved, what that process is, and that they are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

- The expectation is that the PI would have a defined plan for students before they enter the program. It’s understood that sometimes classes aren’t offered every semester so this can sometimes leave the final semester less than full time. The Program does not expect and/or require that a student take random classes just to be considered enrolled fulltime. In these cases, it’s acceptable to allow them to be enrolled less than fulltime but treat them as fulltime (i.e., 100% of stipend).

- There may also be those cases where the original plan is changed such as switching from a PhD program to a Masters. This type of situation is not covered by program guidelines allowing the full stipend and the PI may need to reduce the amount of stipend the student receives the final semester. For example, you may have a student who would only have one course the last semester because they switched from a PhD to a Master’s program and NSF suggested a 50% stipend with the understanding that the obligation to the government would not change.

In either case, please be sure and notify us prior to decisions to allow students to enroll less than fulltime so that we can ensure no policy has changed and to determine if the stipend amount needs to be less than the full amount and if so get approval from NSF. You can do this by emailing us the details along with the PI’s recommendation.

*Work during last semester:* There may be instances where a student requests to work during the final semester of their degree program. Working while in school is left to the discretion of the PI with the understanding that working 20 or more hours per week makes the student ineligible for the living stipend (you may still cover tuition). In instances where you make this exception it must be understood that time worked before they graduate will not count towards their post-graduation commitment and the length of their service obligation will not change.
The PI must review/support/approve the students request and send to the Program office via email approving it along with acknowledgment from the student that they understand the work during the last semester will not count towards their post graduate (PG) commitment obligation and that this will not reduce the time of their post graduate service obligation.

**Professional Allowance/Development Funds:** The Program Office regularly receives questions regarding what this allowance can be used for. As outlined in the SFS solicitation, the Professional Allowance is to be used for the SFS Job Fair and other travel, professional certification, etc., and the PI has overall responsibility for the administration of the SFS award. As such, the PI approves/disapproves requests to use these funds and should maintain good documentation to support how those funds were used. To assist in making that determination, here are some guidelines.

Clothing: It is not appropriate to use the Professional Allowance to buy clothing. When business attire is a general requirement and not a specific uniform, it is reasonably expected the same attire will be used for other purposes and is something students would need to pay for themselves (i.e. think “stipend”).

Laptops: The Professional Allowance funds should NOT be used to purchase general purpose laptops. However, they could be used to purchase a laptop if it needs to be customized to be used for professional development/research purposes. (e.g. install custom OS kernel; network card in promiscuous mode etc.) Such research-customized laptop would be the student’s property (rather than university).

Travel: With the PI’s approval, a student could use these funds for travel to/from the summer internship if it leaves a sufficient amount to cover mandatory travel for the job fair and other required activities.

Living/Housing Expenses: The Professional Allowance funds should NOT be used for general living/housing expenses.

**PROGRAM REMINDERS:**

*Timely Declination of a Job Offer:* please remind your students that if they have an offer pending and they decide to go a different direction, they MUST let the agency know immediately that they are no longer interested. Agencies spend a lot of time and resources on recruitment efforts, and we need to be respectful of that so they continue to hire from our talented pool of candidates. Also, it should not be encouraged to decline offers from Federal Executive agencies to accept positions at FFRDCs.

*Changes in Student Status:* To assist us in maintaining an accurate record of all SFS students, we ask that you please notify us immediately of any changes in their program status. You may let us know by emailing sfs@opm.gov. The following are some examples of instances, where we would require an update: Student graduates sooner than expected, Student is going to take longer to graduate than expected, Student decides to resign from the SFS program, Student graduated 18 months + ago and still hasn’t secured a job to meet their post graduate commitment obligation, the student is
not going to be receiving SFS funding for a few semesters/quarters but will be funded for future semesters/quarters, etc.

**Commitments:** As your students start to receive final/firm job offers and a start date as a result of the job fair last month, please remind them to report their commitments on the website.

**PROGRAM NEWS:**

*4th Annual SFS Scholar Bootcamp Aug 22-23, 2019:* Tennessee Tech University (TTU) held their 4th annual SFS Scholar Bootcamp. The 2-daylong bootcamp is designed to help new students become successful in the SFS program and take their place as the nation’s next cybersecurity professionals. This bootcamp offered scholars with tips and resources to supplement their technical learning at their respective programs, and was a huge success!

*SFS Con Sep 27 – 29, 2019:* Cal Poly Pomona hosted their third Annual SFSCon. They had 105 SFS students participating from 42 different institutions. The hands-on security training sessions were taught by NSA, UIUC NCSA, Indiana Uni CACR, NIWC-Pacific, UW-Madison (DHS SWAMP lead) and faculty from Cal Poly Pomona. These organization also had recruitment booths and conducted interviews.

SAVE THE DATE: SFSCon 2020 will be held August 28-30, 2020 at Cal Poly Pomona. Registration and Program details will be announced soon.

*Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico Spring 2019 rankings for the National Cyber League (NCL) competitions in Capture the Flag (CTF):*

PUPR ranks 16th at a national level in NCL competitions in CTF. Schools are ranked based on their top team performance, their top student's individual performance, and the aggregate individual performance of their students. Every year, over 10,000 students from more than 300 colleges and universities across the US participate in the NCL competitions.

These rankings represent the ability of students from these schools to perform real-world cybersecurity tasks on the Cyber Skyline platform. Students had to identify hackers from forensic data, penetration testing & audit vulnerable websites, recover from ransomware attacks, and more.
PUPR also ranks in 9th position for the Centers of Academic Excellence (CAE) in Cyber-Defense Education (CDE) at a national level in NCL competitions in CTF. Currently there are more than 250 CAE’s in the Nation.

Big congratulations to the cyber-castor team and NSF CyberCorps students!

University of Maryland, Baltimore County: UMBC performed some interesting research studies from 2017 – 2019. See the attached reports.

Army Cyber Command: ARCYBER has developed a new and exciting program, Cyberspace Effects Career Program (CP 71). To learn more, see the following news article and the attached Fact Sheet. The SFS PO will accept commitments to be served here and would be under a Federal Executive agency (80%). To keep cyber workers, Army opens up its wallet

Please continue to submit suggestions, news, and best practices to sfs@opm.gov for future editions.

Thank you,
Stephanie Travis
HR Consultant, MPA
SFS Program Office
OPM|HRS|FSG|SAB|MASB
200 Granby St, Suite 500 | Norfolk, VA 23510
P: 202-579-4951 | F: 757-441-6145
sfs@opm.gov | www.opm.gov/HRS