

Is the National Science Foundation (NSF) Ending Study Abroad Funding?

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The rise of globalization and development of research programs overseas means that international experience is more valuable now than ever for researchers. Adding an international component to your studies during graduate school can give you an advantage when applying for jobs. Until this year, the National Science Foundation (NSF) offered supplementary funding for graduate students to complete research overseas through its Graduate Research Opportunities Worldwide (GROW) program. However, it was recently discovered that NSF has [suspended applications for study abroad](#) funding for graduate students. What does this mean for the future of the

program? Let us take a look.

Scientific Research Under Assault

The sudden halt of funding could be part of a larger pattern of federal US programs turning their focus inward. Since President Trump took office two years ago, he has made a number of changes to scientific funding. Trump [wiped out scientific advisory boards early in 2018](#), placing restrictions on who could participate. Hiring freezes and censorship regarding climate change science have also become widespread. While Congress [saved NSF's budget from drastic cuts](#) that the White House proposed in 2018, it remains a target for the Trump administration. While NSF's funding was spared, it still [closed its overseas offices](#) in a sudden move that still leaves many confused as to its long term strategy.

What is the GROW Program and Why Does it Matter?

The GROW program [allows hundreds of researchers to spend time overseas](#) doing research each year. It's part of the NSF's flagship Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF) program. Students already receiving the \$34,000-a-year fellowship can apply for an additional \$5000 GROW allowance to cover travel and living expenses while working in one of 17 countries. In the past, NSF has sponsored up to 400 GROW awards a year for international collaborations lasting from 3 to 12 months.

The abrupt halt of the GROW program is just as surprising as the closing of overseas NSF offices. Students usually apply in the fall to receive GROW awards. But this year, students who tried to submit their applications online found that the system would not accept them. NSF has recently stated that it is reviewing the program and will make an announcement soon regarding its future. It cited declining recipient numbers as one reason for the review.

Disappointment Among Students

Students who planned to apply for this year's grants were deeply disappointed at the news that it had been suspended. Claire Fox, a PhD student studying the evolution of flatfishes at Cornell University, had planned to go to India to complete research for the final chapter of her dissertation. She was depending on this funding to make her travel possible. Previous grant recipients have said the [program is very beneficial](#). Calen Henderson was part of the program through Ohio State University, and he went to South Korea to study gravitational microlensing. The experience of co-authoring a paper in a foreign country led him to appreciate the cultural differences in approaches to science. He also said that his experience helped him build international relationships that were valuable later in his career.

What's Next for GROW?

With the fate of GROW uncertain at this moment, it seems that GRF recipients who wish to study abroad will have to seek other sources of funding. There are [many benefits to international collaboration](#), and it will be a shame if opportunities for doing so shrink. Researchers and funding organizations should continue to prioritize international research so that the research community can become closer.

What do you think of the halt of the GROW program? Have you benefited from the chance to work abroad? Please let us know what you think in the comments below.

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