How to Apply for a Convocation Postgraduate Research Travel Award

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What are the Convocation PGRTAs?

- The PGRTAs were established by Convocation, the UWA Graduates’ Association, and are a competitive grants scheme.

- The scheme began in 1988, and for the first five years one award was made available each year. For the next six years there were two awards available each year. Since 1999 the number of awards has steadily increased.

- Funds for the awards are provided by Convocation (the UWA Graduates’ Association), the Postgraduate Students’ Association, and BankWest.

- These funds are then matched by the UWA Research Committee.

- Awards are valued up to $2,500.
How many awards are there?

• In 2007 at least 15 awards will be made available.

• In 2006 there were 17 awards with 41 applicants.
How do I apply?

- Convocation will have already sent you an email via your student account with details of the Awards and the application process.

- You can download the forms at [http://www.graduates.uwa.edu.au/awards/postgraduate_research_travel_award](http://www.graduates.uwa.edu.au/awards/postgraduate_research_travel_award)
When will I know if I won?

• Until 2006 applicants were not told if they had won an award until the presentation ceremony. However, this year the Awards Committee will write to each nominee prior to the ceremony and let them know if their application was successful.

• The Awards will be presented in mid October 2007.
What type of people win?

- Katherine Hill (School of Environmental Systems Engineering): Further understanding of DNAPL behaviour in fractured rock. Katherine used her grant to visit Queen’s University, Canada and present at the AGU Conference in San Francisco.

- Joanne McEwan (School of Humanities): 'A lodger in the house'; space, authority and knowledge in the relationships between lodgers and household(er)s in eighteenth-century London. Joanne used her grant to travel to London to explore archives, attend a conference and carry out further research for a book.

- Christopher Jones (School of Plant Biology): Development of essential oil biosynthesis-specific molecular markers for the improvement of plantation Indian Sandalwood, Santalum album L. Christopher used his grant to travel to Canada to carry out further work on Sandalwood.
Who are the awards judged by?

- A panel of six judges:
  - Warden of Convocation (or nominee),
  - The Convenor of the Awards Committee
  - A member of Convocation Council
  - The PVC - Research and Research Training
  - The PSA President
  - A nominee of the PSA Committee
What criteria are used to judge the awards?

- Quality of the applicant (weighting 20%)
- The academic or research ability of the applicant. This is generally evident in the publications of the student, and the experience and knowledge they are able to demonstrate.
- The level of support provided to the candidate by their Head of School/Graduate Research Co-ordinator.
Showing you are a quality candidate

- Much of this criterion is based on your previous record. So your academic transcript, your publications and your CV generally.

- Make sure your CV is up to date.

- Also, make sure you give your supervisor and then Head of School or Graduate Research Coordinator enough time to write a considered letter of support for your application.
Quality of the proposal (weighting 40%)

- Clarity of the proposal. The best applications tend to be clear and concise.

- Variety of tasks to be undertaken (lab visits, conference papers, networking etc). Generally, the best applicants plan to use their trips for multiple purposes: Going to a Conference and visiting a Lab with important equipment.

- The relevance of the proposed travel to the applicant's current research programme (as described by the applicant). Generally, the committee has preferred candidates who can add to their research and explore previously unexpected avenues.

- The costs of the proposed travel relative to the likely benefits
Ensuring you produce a quality application

• Read the Application Information Sheet and Award Regulations carefully. These were sent out in hard copy and are available on the website.

• Follow the instructions to the letter.

• **DO NOT STAPLE OR BIND YOUR APPLICATIONS.** This is because Convocation have all applications copied for the judging panel!
Making sure you are competitive

• Most applications are of a high standard, so it is easy for the judges to dismiss your application if you fail to present your case well. It’s often easy to spot the rushed jobs and careless errors can cost you an award. So:

• KEEP to the WORD LIMIT!

• Make sure your application is clear and concise.

• Try to limit the jargon (discipline specific discourse) in your application. The judges are not experts in your field, so you must ensure that your aims are clear to the lay person.

• Proof-read your work; run a spell check; get someone to read it before handing it in.

• Use a clear font (at least 11 pt) with adequate margins.
Benefit for the applicant of the proposed travel (weighting 30%)

• The ability of the student to benefit from the proposed travel.
• On-going benefits for the applicant in his or her current research.
Selling yourself

• Presenting a refereed paper? Say so. If your paper has already been accepted, provide evidence.

• Been invited to a prestigious Conference with limited Postgrad involvement? Say so.

• Visiting a top research group? Say so.

• Make sure you explain why travel is necessary, rather than you just communicating with experts electronically.

• How is the travel going to aid you in your research and in your future career?
Benefit for others of the proposed travel (weighting 10%)

• The likely benefit of the proposed travel for others in the applicant's discipline, the University, or the community.

• The committee tends to favour candidates who can show that they will be bringing back new skills to the University.
Benefits to UWA

• It’s not enough to ask for a travel award to allow you to go and chase a postdoc. The best applicants show a benefit to UWA. For example, going to a conference and presenting a refereed paper. Or declaring an intention to publish your results after comments from peers. Publications generate revenue for the University!

• IF your travel includes time spent within a lab or working with a group, and you will be developing new skills, or learning to use equipment which we don’t use (yet) at UWA, you should highlight these skills as a benefit not only to you, but to UWA as a whole.

• Also, if you’ll be forging new links with other study groups/Labs which will benefit others at UWA, say so.
Budgeting

• Properly budget your trip and explain how the funding will be used.

• If you are only travelling interstate for a couple of weeks, don’t ask for the full $2,500 (the Committee can assign a smaller sum to applicants).

• Include: Costs of travel, including internal travel such as trains, accommodation, general expenses etc. Even if your trip is a year away, provide estimates of the cost.

• Be reasonable in your costs, no one expects a postgrad to stay in five star accommodation.

• Include any additional funding available.
Beware

- The Application asks “How the proposed travel benefits or changes the applicant’s research programme as outlined in the research proposal lodged with the GRS”.

- Supervisors are then asked to endorse these benefits/changes.

- This is not a trick question. The idea of the awards is to help bring about benefits to your research.
Best advice we can give

• When applying for any type of grant, approach the application with a degree of professionalism.

• Try not to convey a sense of entitlement.

• These applications do require some effort, which is why there is so much time made available before the applications are due. So, start early.
Frequently Asked Questions?

• Q: Can I apply if my thesis is submitted before my trip.

  A: YES. You can apply for the award as long as you are enrolled in the research programme on June 30th.

• Q: These awards are for travel in 2008, what if I want to go at the end of 2007.

  A: These awards are intended for 2008 travel (funds for 2007 were made available in 2006). However, funds can be spent on travel after the official announcement at the end of October.
PSA Coming Events

Connect @ The University Club
5.00pm - 6:00pm Thurs July 5th

Winter Sundowner @ The Tav
5.30pm - 7.30pm Wed July 18th
Free Beer/Softies and Pizza!