Elliott School Undergraduate Scholars Application FAQs

How do I find a faculty advisor?
Finding a faculty advisor who is a good match for your project is one of the most crucial – and sometimes daunting – aspects of the application process. It is therefore imperative that you start the search as early as possible.

Think about professors you’ve had in the past, or ask past professors to help you brainstorm other options. You should also consult the Elliott School’s Full-time Faculty Listing and Guide to Specialists (focusing on full-time faculty) for possible matches. In addition, you can scan the Schedule of Classes (which lists out the names of special topics classes) and the University Bulletin course list to identify professors who teach classes on relevant topics.

You are not limited to professors with Elliott School appointments, though it often works out that way. It helps to start with professors you already know, but many students have had success in the past by “cold calling” (via email) professors.

Your proposed faculty advisor does not need to be an expert on all aspects of your topic but must have sufficient background to be able to advise you appropriately. Sometimes, a faculty advisor will have content expertise but less regional expertise, or vice versa. This kind of match typically still works, though you may wish to seek out additional support from a second professor (who may be part- or full-time) who is familiar with the other aspects of your research. If additional professors agree to work with you, feel free to mention them in your research proposal.

Does my faculty advisor really need to be a full-time professor?
Yes – Your faculty advisor should be a full-time professor who will not be on sabbatical or any other type of leave during that year. If, however, a part-time faculty member seems like your best or only option, you may request an exception to the “full-time professor rule” by explaining in your application why the part-time faculty member would be the most appropriate advisor. As with all proposals, yours should explain which faculty advisor you hope to work with and why. Additionally, you should include a separate document (outside of the two-page proposal) with a paragraph or two explaining why you have selected this part-time professor and why your situation merits an exception to the “full-time professor rule.”

For such a request to be viable, it must meet the following conditions:
(1) Full-time faculty members who might have expertise on your topic are not available or are unwilling to be your advisor; or there is no full-time faculty member who is an expert on your topic.
(2) The part-time faculty would be a much better match as your faculty advisor because of the part-time faculty member’s area of expertise.

The Dean’s Office will review your request and decide whether or not to approve the petition.

I will be studying abroad for a semester next year. May I still apply?
No – Undergraduate Scholars must be on campus for the full year and must register to take both the fall and spring classes associated with the program. If you will be a junior next year, consider applying to participate during your senior year…and start planning your application (topic, faculty advisor, etc.) in the meantime.

I am abroad now. Can I apply from overseas?
Yes – You may certainly apply from abroad. You may be able to attend the information through Skype or a Google hangout meeting, but even if you don’t you will not be penalized (and all materials distributed at the sessions will be available online). You will need to work on your application from overseas and contact potential faculty advisors via email and/or phone. A friend can pick up your unofficial transcript from the Registrar and drop it off at the Office of Research on your behalf, or the
Registrar can send in your copy. The rest of your materials need to be submitted via mail, email, or fax. Many students have successfully applied in the past while studying abroad, and strong topics often use overseas courses, research, or general experience as a starting point.

*Can my Undergraduate Scholars paper be an extension of a paper I've already written?*

Your Undergraduate Scholars paper may build upon existing research or writing you have completed but must cover discrete new ground. A past paper can serve as a starting point, but the Scholars project must tackle your research question in a more rigorous manner and have no direct writing overlap with past work. You may use data collected in the past, but again, this project must use that data in updated ways.

*What does “primary research” mean?*

In this case, primary research means that you will be identifying, engaging with directly, and analyzing quantitative or qualitative data. That is, you may not merely describe or synthesize analysis conducted by other researchers but rather, you must collect and analyze the data yourself.

For the purposes of this project, examples of primary sources include quantitative data sets, information sessions, interviews, archival material, transcripts, as well as traditional/social media. Undergraduate Scholars are encouraged to collect their own data, but in certain cases they may also rely on existing datasets to conduct their analysis.

*Can I earn Special Honors with the paper I write for the Scholars program?*

Yes – Students who earn a grade of A- or higher on the Undergraduate Scholars paper, earn a cumulative GPA of 3.7 upon graduation, and earn 60 credit hours in residence at GW will be awarded Special Honors. Special Honors is noted on a line of the final transcript that indicates graduation with Special Honors from the Elliott School. No additional paperwork is required to be eligible for Special Honors. If you have questions about Special Honors, please contact the Special Honors coordinator, Chandra Holloway (chollow@gwu.edu).

*Can the paper I write for the Scholars program satisfy the University Honors Program Senior Thesis/Seminar requirement?*

Yes – You will need to submit to the Elliott School the UHP Special Honors Verification Form and then give that signed form to the University Honors Program.

*Can I take the fall course for more than one credit or the spring class or more (or fewer) than three credits?*

No – The fall course is set as a one-credit class. The spring course is set as a three-credit course.

*Should my research proposal include footnotes?*

If necessary, you may include footnotes; however, the level at which you are describing your topic should not require formal citations.

*Can you help me with my research proposal?*

You should work with your faculty advisor and the Research Instructor on your research proposal. You may also ask other professors to review a draft. In addition, you may also wish to visit the Center for Undergraduate Fellowships & Research, the Writing Center, and the Gelman reference librarians for further support.