

Money for Nothing (and your PhD for Free)

A guide to funding sources for postgraduate students of Latin American studies in the UK

Doing a research degree is a thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding experience although let's face it, even if you are lucky enough to have been awarded a studentship or work as a part-time lecturer at your university, the chances are that you will still be struggling to make ends meet.

Every year, thousands of postgraduate students experience financial difficulties during the course of their PhD or Masters programmes, at all stages of the evolution of their degree. The consequences can include impeding initial postgraduate entry, preventing travel to Latin America for fieldwork (or at best limiting time spent there), reducing the quality of your research as equipment is unaffordable and in the worst cases, complete abandonment of a doctorate when studentship funding runs out. However what few students realise is that there are actually millions of pounds available every year from a multitude of both private and public sources that you can apply to so that such eventualities are overcome. This article highlights a variety of funding sources that you may wish to apply to.

University Funding

Let's start off closest to home. Aside from providing conference funding and PhD Studentships, often your own university will actually offer awards to conduct a number of research activities including overseas fieldwork or paying for research costs. Sometimes these are linked to academic performance but these bursaries are not always well advertised, so it's worth being proactive and contacting your institution's Scholarships and Bursaries Department for more information.

Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS)

PILAS' parent body, SLAS provides a range of postgraduate grants and they'd like to encourage more students to apply. Grants are available to assist students to attend conferences outside of the UK, for travel grants for fieldwork and for postgraduate students based at British institutions of higher education (of any nationality) who are presenting papers at the SLAS Annual Conference. <http://www.slas.org.uk/grantsPrizes/postgrad.htm>

Private Trusts and Foundations

This source is a hidden gem that few students are aware of. Thousands of private charitable trusts and associations exist in the UK, many of which actually provide funding to individual postgraduate students either towards course fees, research costs or to alleviate hardship. Each Trust has very specific eligibility criteria, which can range from being gender or age-specific, restricted to a particular academic discipline or are targeted at certain groups in society such as ethnic minorities, specific nationalities or even vegetarians (I should know!) To uncover this intriguing Pandora's box of funding possibilities, it's worth investing some time and doing your research properly. By searching through the numerous Directories that are available, these detail the specific application requirements and funding deadlines imposed by each Trust. Once you have shortlisted the organisations that are most likely to support you, a written letter of application is usually necessary together with evidence of academic achievement, financial need or whatever is relevant in your case. Two sources that are especially recommended are 'The Educational Grants Directory' and 'The Guide to Grants for Individuals in Need'. Both are published by the Directory of Social Change (DSC). These are quite pricey but are often be available for reference from public libraries or the DSC library in central London:

<http://www.dsc.org.uk/Publications/Fundraisingsources>

The following website also has a comprehensive list of such organisations and is worth browsing through. <http://www.postgraduatestudentships.co.uk/organization>

University Studentships, Research Councils and Other Charities

UK Research Councils are the most common channel through which to access funded PhD programmes. FindaPhD is a useful resource for this purpose, especially with regards to searching for these or funded Masters programmes. It also offers information about accessing state funding, bursaries from the European Union and outlining which sources to apply for if you are an international student <http://www.findaphd.com/students/funding.asp>.

Finally, the National Postgraduate Committee also provides useful advice about such issues <http://www.npc.org.uk/whatiswherecanifindhowdoi/money/funding>

Research Councils such as the AHRC and the ESRC not only offer funding for PhD and Masters Programmes, but provide funding for award holders to conduct up to twelve consecutive months fieldwork in one or more countries, as well as providing overseas conference grants. See <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index.aspx> and <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk> for more information.

In short, a world of funding opportunities exists out there. Hopefully I have provided you with some of the tools to uncover them.

Written by: Dan Ozarow (Middlesex University), 2010 – d.ozarow@mdx.ac.uk

Dan Ozarow is a PhD student at Middlesex University Business School. He has worked as a fundraising consultant for a range of NGOs and as Director of Danador Charity Fundraising Services.