Schiff Undergraduate Fellowship Program
Brandeis University Application
Information & FAQ’s

The Schiff Undergraduate Fellows Program is ideally suited for Brandeis undergraduates with an innovative research or pedagogical project they want to explore in-depth under the mentorship of a Brandeis professor. In the course of working closely with your chosen mentor for a full academic year, you will have the chance to conduct exciting and dynamic research.

How do I select a Mentor?
It is possible for a professor to single you out and suggest you apply, but you should feel free to take the initiative. Start by thinking about professors who appeal to you because of their research, their teaching, or their specific area of expertise. What classes have presented material you would love to pursue further in an independent project? Many faculty members are already be aware of the Schiff Undergraduate Fellowship Program, but it’s probably a good idea to share this information and application packet with your professor. The mentoring relationship is very important to the Selection Committee. Be sure your Mentor will act as a steady guide for you through the research process. In talking to your prospective mentor, ideally s/he will be on campus during the time of your fellowship.

What makes a successful application?
Each year we anticipate that up to 10 Schiff Fellow/Mentor teams will be selected. In general, successful applications include a clearly delineated plan for a project, a strong letter of recommendation, and show that you have the knowledge and skills required to fulfill your project goals. The committee is looking for a proposal that outlines a carefully thought-out collaboration between the applicant and the proposed Mentor. The project should be clear and feasible. Projects that involve doing clerical work for a professor or that merely replicate senior honors efforts are not viewed favorably by the Selection Committee. Take time to address how you plan to work with your Mentor in your application. Recommendation letters are weighed heavily and, while a student’s cumulative grade point average is not viewed as a significant predictor of success in the program, grades in the project area are often noted. Your academic record and resume should show that you have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete your project. Your application should be proofread carefully, assembled according to the instructions provided, and submitted by Monday, March 16, 2020.

How do I design a proposal?
The opportunities for project proposals are practically limitless. The best proposals are those that have emerged from the joint efforts of both Fellow and Mentor, where both people design and contribute to the project and ultimately benefit from it. The most successful projects will underscore innovation and the potential to make a meaningful difference. Questions to ask as you design your project are: Is this interesting to me? Is it feasible? Is there enough time during the year for me to accomplish the project? Is this work that will help me grow and stretch beyond my regular course work, as well as beyond my honors thesis? What will I learn through this project?

What kinds of projects have been done in past years?
• Interview black female artists and create a documentary about their experiences with oppression
• Design an upper level laboratory in inorganic chemistry for non-concentrators
• Design and conduct a study to measure the effects of childhood adversity on cortisol production
• Research the history of ballet and modern dance for a new course
• Interview local senior citizens to analyze changes in Soviet-Jewish identity in the Post-War era
• Develop a new course on modern Jewish religious thought
• Create and test a computer program to analyze rhyming schemes
• Research genetic transformation in Naegleria gruberi and work as the T.A. for a genetics course
• Measure relationship between ocean acidification and tuna catch in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean
What is the time commitment involved?
The project should span the entire academic year. Depending on the nature of your project, your time commitment may fluctuate or remain consistent throughout the year. Some Fellows begin their work in the summer and use a portion of their stipend to finance lodging on campus. Most Fellows and Mentors meet at least weekly for an hour.

What is an appropriate use of the stipend?
Fellows have used their $2,000 stipend for different purposes, including buying computer hardware and software; books; travel allowances, lodging and related expenses when attending an out-of-town conference; lab supplies; and payment for experimental subjects. Mentors are awarded a stipend of $500 for general research/teaching expenses, which need not be related to the project. Awards may be taxed according to IRS guidelines.

With whom will I share my findings?
Each year, all Schiff Fellows are asked to present their research and/or project to the campus. This presentation may be tied to a forum featuring undergraduate experiential opportunities on campus (e.g. the Experiential Learning Symposium) or may be performed on a smaller scale (e.g. a departmental presentation). Fellows are also encouraged to talk with their Mentors about ways to co-publish or present their work in journals and/or at conferences. The Fellows also meet, approximately once a month, to discuss their work and share their experiences with each other.

What kinds of things do Fellows and Mentors do in the program?
A sampling of the kinds of activities Fellows have experienced with their Mentors over the past ten years includes:
• Designing a course together
• Going to dinner at a Mentor's home
• Creating lab experiments for science courses
• Teaching classes and/or leading course sections
• Revising course materials and writing curricular proposals
• Writing papers for publication
• Presenting at professional conferences

What have past Fellows said about the program?
Here are some reflections former Fellows have offered about their experiences in the Schiff Undergraduate Fellows Program:
• “The friendship that develops is one of the most rewarding aspects of the program. Without the support and confidence of my Mentor, I would not have been able to take on all of the responsibilities of my project or to take the reins of my project and really run with it.”
• “The relationship with [my mentor] is proving to be one of the most meaningful in my academic career to date.”
• “This experience is going to be as intense and important as [you] make it. This is an amazing opportunity to get to know the professors better, to advance in your field, to make connections and use resources that are not available otherwise. Make the most of it, don’t be lazy, dig into it.”
• “I learned about the many aspects of teaching that transcend the course material itself. I learned about teacher-student relations, student-student relations, and also I learned about myself, as both a student and scholar-in-training!”

Whom should I contact with additional questions?
Please contact the Assistant Director of Academic Fellowships, Elizabeth Rotolo, at erotolo@brandeis.edu with questions or to schedule a meeting to discuss your proposal.
Schiff Undergraduate Fellowship Program
Brandeis University Application
Cover Sheet

Please submit your final application to Elizabeth Rotolo in Academic Services (Usdan 130; MS 001) no later than 5pm on Monday, March 16, 2020. Late applications will not be considered.

Name ___________________________________________ Class ______________________

Mail Box Number _______ E-Mail Address _____________________________ Phone __________________

Home Address ____________________________________________________________________________________

Major(s) _____________________________ Minor(s)______________________________

Student Identification Number (SAGE ID)__________________________________________

Mentor's Name and Dept ___________________________________________________________________________

Title of your project: _________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Is this project connected to a Senior Thesis (please circle one): YES  NO

If you circled yes, please address how this project supplements, or is different from, your thesis: ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

APPLICATION CHECKLIST (PLEASE DO NOT STAPLE MATERIALS)

(1) This application cover sheet including your project title.

(2) Essay, no more than 1000 words in length, describing your proposed project and/or activities. How do you plan to work with your mentor? (Be specific.) How does this project relate to your educational and professional goals? Be sure your project is not just about helping a professor with his/her research, but is driven by your own initiative and creativity. How will the stipend enhance your ability to carry out your project?

(3) Resume, including honors, special programs in which you are enrolled, extracurricular activities, etc.

(4) Faculty Mentor letter – confidential; in a sealed and signed envelope, or via email to erotolo@brandeis.edu. The “Mentor's Instructions” should be given to your mentor to inform them of the fellowship criteria and application process. If your Faculty Mentor will email the letter to Academic Services, please indicate that when submitting your application.

(5) Your transcript – one official copy in a sealed envelope.

If you have any questions, please contact:
Elizabeth Rotolo, Assistant Director of Academic Fellowships, Academic Services, erotolo@brandeis.edu, x63461
The Schiff Undergraduate Fellows Program is made possible by the generous funding of the Jerome A. Schiff Charitable Trust Foundation. The program is designed to provide promising students with the opportunity to perform innovative and dynamic research, including pedagogy-related projects such as course development, under the close guidance and mentoring of a member of the Brandeis University faculty. Each year we anticipate that up to 10 Schiff Fellow/Mentor teams will be selected, and projects normally span one academic year.

We ask both the applicant (in the project proposal) and mentor (in the letter of recommendation) to describe in their own words: (1) the proposed project(s), and (2) the work you each expect to do. **Project descriptions should demonstrate the student’s leadership in the research or praxis proposed, and should be clear about how the mentor and student will work together.** Describing opportunities for (co)publishing or (co)presenting research results would be an asset to the application. Proposals that appear to either utilize students only for clerical, research, or TA support or duplicate senior thesis efforts are not appropriate. Fellows who try to take on a Schiff project and a thesis at the same time are often overwhelmed by their research responsibilities. Schiff Fellows may be from any class year.

The Selection Committee is looking for the Faculty Mentor letter to address the following questions regarding the project:

- How do you know the applicant?
- What is the project?
- In what ways will both you and the student contribute to the project?
- Do you believe the applicant has the skills, knowledge, and ability to successfully complete their project?
- How will this project make an impact in your field?
- How will this project influence the student’s future?
- How will this experience enhance your own research or teaching?
- What benefit will this project have for the University?

In addition to describing the project, your letter also serves as a CONFIDENTIAL letter of recommendation for the applicant. Please indicate how you know the applicant and provide an evaluation of his or her work and potential in the field. Both concrete examples and general impressions are useful to the selection committee. You might also compare this student with other applicants or other concentrators with whom you have worked closely.

**The deadline for receipt of applications is Monday, March 16, 2020.** Your letter can be emailed directly to Elizabeth Rotolo (erotolo@brandeis.edu), or can be returned to the applicant in a signed and sealed envelope, to be submitted by the student with the rest of the application package. Thank you very much for your interest in and support of the Schiff Undergraduate Fellows Program. It provides an invaluable opportunity for Brandeis undergraduates.

Please feel free to direct any questions you may have to:
Elizabeth Rotolo
Assistant Director of Academic Fellowships
erotolo@brandeis.edu
781-736-3461