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MSG 2002-012

FROM: Richard A. Whitford, Acting Associate Director for Employment Service

Subject: Scholarship for Service Program--A Reminder

We would like to ensure you do not miss the opportunity to recruit from a pool of highly talented students on their way to becoming the best information assurance professionals to graduate from our country's universities. On October 26, 2001, we unveiled "Scholarship For Service," a program that provides scholarships to selected students pursuing careers in information assurance. In exchange, these students agree to serve at a Federal agency after graduation for a period equivalent to the length of the scholarship.

Why should Federal agencies be interested in these students? There are several powerful reasons.

- **These students are attending selected universities with information assurance (IA) programs that have earned the certification as Centers of Academic Excellence for Information Assurance Education (CAE/IAE). The National Security Agency grants such certification only to universities with IA programs that meet a number of exacting criteria.**

- **The participating universities use screening processes aimed at awarding the scholarships to their top students. The result is a pool of top-notch individuals who have committed themselves to government service.**

- **Your agency does not bear the costs of the scholarship. The National Science Foundation provides full funding for the scholarships through grants issued to participating universities**.

Currently, there are 32 students participating in the program. Several are still available to be matched with a Federal agency. Attached are answers to the most frequently asked questions about the program. If you need additional information, please have a member of your staff contact Kathy Roberson at sfspo@opm.gov or (210) 805-2423, extension 506. We look forward to your participation.

ATTACHMENT: Frequently Asked Questions:

Scholarship For Service

—Frequently Asked Questions—

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1. What is the Scholarship For Service (SFS) program?

It's the federal government's response to deal with the threat to our information technology infrastructure by strengthening the cadre of professionals who protect it. This program provides grants to selected 4-year colleges and universities to develop or improve their capacity to train information assurance professionals. It also provides selected 4-year colleges and universities scholarship grants to attract students to the information assurance field.

2. What agency administers the SFS program?

The Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) oversees the program. The ICC is composed of representatives from the National Security Council (NSC), National Security Agency (NSA), Critical Infrastructure Assurance Office (CIAO), National Science Foundation (NSF), U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NSF administers the grants process and the capacity building component. The scholarship component (including the placement and tracking of participants) of the SFS program is administered by OPM's San Antonio Service Center. Questions about the program may be addressed to Kathy Roberson, SFS Program Manager, at sfspo@opm.gov or (210) 805-2423, extension 506.

3. Why is the SFS program important to the federal agencies?

The SFS program is important to the federal agencies because it helps them obtain the talent they need to protect their information systems. Upon graduation, participants must serve at a federal agency for a period equivalent to the length of the scholarship or one year, whichever is longer. This service must be in a position concerned with information assurance. During their period of federal service, participants join the agency's cadre of professionals that protect its critical information systems infrastructure.

4. Is there any evidence that the SFS program will work?

Yes. The SFS program is modeled after other successful programs and borrows some of their best features. For example, much like the PMI Program, top-level students are nominated by their institutions. The summer internship offers the student-agency bonding opportunity of the co-op work experiences. The scholarships and stipends mirror the recruiting bonuses and retention allowances federal agencies may use to attract top talent.

5. Can any college or university participate?

No. Colleges and universities may vie for participation if they are certified by the National Security Agency as Centers of Academic Excellence for Information Assurance Education (CAE/IAE), or their information assurance programs are deemed "equivalent" to those of certified schools. There are 23 CAE/IAE-certified colleges and universities at present. Six of

them (Purdue University, Iowa State University, University of Idaho, University of Tulsa, Carnegie Mellon University, and Naval Postgraduate School) are participating in the SFS program in the 2001-2002 school year.

6. What costs are covered by the SFS program?

The SFS program covers tuition, room and board, and books for up to two years of undergraduate or master's level study. In addition, undergraduates receive an annual stipend of $8,000. The stipend for graduate students is $12,000.

7. When, and for how long, can a student get a scholarship?

The scholarship is conferred during an undergraduate's junior and senior years. Graduate students are conferred the scholarship while pursuing a master's degree. Scholarships may be conferred for up to two years.

8. What is the shortest period for which a student may be funded?

The shortest period for which a scholarship may be granted is one semester. However, upon completion of degree requirements, students funded for less than two years must have an information assurance academic background equivalent to that of the typical graduate funded for two years. For example, in order to enroll in the SFS at the beginning of his or her senior year, a student must have been pursuing information assurance studies during his or her junior year.

9. Is the student entitled to the full stipend during a year in which he is funded for less than a year?

No. The student is entitled to a prorated amount. For example, if he or she receives a scholarship for only one semester, the student is entitled to only half the stipend. If the student receives a scholarship for only three semesters (one-and-a-half academic years), he or she is entitled to only half the stipend during the year the student receives funds for only one semester.

10. How long must a student serve at a federal agency?

A student must serve for a period equivalent to the length of the scholarship or one year, whichever is longer. An academic year (i.e., the fall and spring semesters) is equivalent to a calendar year of employment. If the student is funded for two academic years, he or she must serve at a federal agency in a covered position for two calendar years. If the student is funded for one academic year or less (e.g., only one semester), he or she must serve for one calendar year.

11. Who pays for the scholarships?

The National Science Foundation awards the grants for the scholarships to the selected colleges and universities. The federal agencies that choose to participate by hiring program participants bear none of the cost for the scholarships.

12. How may students apply, and how are they selected for the program?

Students must apply to a participating university. Students who apply will be selected in accordance with the process and screening criteria set forth by the participating university.

13. What are the student eligibility requirements?

The student must meet all of the following:

- be pursuing a bachelor's or master's degree at an institution that has been awarded an NSF grant under the SFS program;
- be attending school on a full-time basis while receiving a scholarship under the SFS program;
- be willing to pursue studies with an emphasis in information assurance;
- be a United States citizen;
- meet criteria for federal employment; and
- be able to obtain a security clearance, if required.

14. When did the first group of students join the program? When will they be ready to join the federal service?

Thirty-two students joined the program in the 2001 fall semester. Approximately half are graduate students. Virtually all of these students will receive scholarships for the full two years. Therefore, they will be ready to serve their internship during the summer 2002, and begin serving their post-graduation federal employment commitment in May 2003.

15. What is the process for "matching" students with federal agencies?

Participants are asked to complete an electronic résumé in OPM's Résumé Builder. The SFS Program Office provides federal agencies electronic copies of these résumés. Upon receiving the résumés, agencies contact directly those students in whom they are interested for the purpose of effecting student/agency matches. When a match is made, the agency obtains from the student an e-mail statement indicating he or she has agreed to match with the agency. The agency forwards a copy of the e-mail to the SFS Program Office.

16. Is it important that matches be made early?

It is very important that matches be made early to ensure all students who receive scholarship funds for more than one academic year have the opportunity to serve a summer internship performing information assurance-related work. The internship, which is a program requirement, is intended to enhance the students' information assurance knowledge by exposing them to worthwhile, field-related work experiences. Therefore, an early match allows time for planning an optimal internship.

17. After the match is made, what is the federal agency to do?

After the match is made, the agency's immediate next step is to select an employment avenue to provide the student the opportunity to serve the summer internship.

Agencies Under title 5: The agency should evaluate the hiring options available and choose the one that best fits the particular circumstances. Important factors to consider include the feasibility of making a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) appointment and whether or not the participant is eligible for non-competitive appointment.

a) If making a SCEP appointment is viable, the agency should seriously consider using this option. It fosters the development of a bond between the student and the employer and facilitates placement into the competitive service upon graduation. Agencies should be aware that the internship served during the intervening summer will not be sufficient to satisfy the 640-hours-of-related-experience requirement. However, the remaining hours may be accumulated through short-term employment during breaks, part-time employment arrangements when feasible, or carefully planned paid telecommuting assignments. For example, the student may be asked to work from his or her home or school on portions of information assurance-related projects through electronic mail or other means of communication.

b) If making a SCEP appointment is not viable but the student is eligible for non-competitive appointment, the agency may be able to use this eligibility to appoint him or her to a position in which he or she may serve the summer internship.

c) The agency may also use the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) to provide the student the opportunity to serve the summer internship. If this alternative is used, we strongly recommend that the agency not terminate the temporary appointment at the end of the summer internship, but place the student on an unpaid status until graduation. Retaining the student as an employee provides the means to nurture the relationship started during the summer internship. Additionally, it enables the agency to employ the student on a part-time basis or for short periods by simply restoring him or her to a paid status.

Agencies under other titles: Federal agencies whose employment system is governed by other titles should use whatever appointing authorities are appropriate under the regulations that govern their temporary employment practices.

Note: Regardless of the appointing authority used for the summer internship, the agency should maintain contact with the student throughout the scholarship period. The designated mentor should remain in contact with the student and collaborate with the Principal Investigator to ensure the student's academic focus is in line with agency and program expectations.

18. What authority may agencies use to appoint SFS program participants upon graduation?

Agencies Under title 5: There is no special hiring authority created for the placement of Scholarship For Service participants. However, there are several avenues open to the agencies to afford students the opportunity to fulfill their post-graduation employment commitment. More importantly, in general, the length of the employment commitment will provide agencies plenty of time to seek the permanent placement of students under time-limited appointments. However, there are two caveats to remember. The agency must comply with the regulatory requirements applicable to whatever authority is used; and the appointment must be of sufficient duration to

permit the participant to serve for a period equivalent to the length of the scholarship period or one year, whichever is longer.

a) If the agency used the SCEP at the outset, it may convert the student to a term or permanent appointment provided all conditions were met.

b) If the agency did not make a SCEP appointment, it may appoint the participant using any existing authority under which the participant is appointable. For example, the agency may announce the position using competitive procedures; reinstate or transfer the person into its ranks if eligible for reinstatement or transfer; or make a Career Intern appointment. In all instances, the agency must adhere to the provisions in the rules and regulations that govern the appointing authority used.

c) If the person is not appointable under any other authority, the agency may make an appointment under 5 CFR 213.3102(r) and seek conversion to a permanent competitive appointment at a later date. This authority allows the appointee to serve in the excepted service for up to four years.

Agencies under other titles: Federal agencies whose employment system is governed by other titles should use whatever appointing authorities are appropriate under the regulations that govern their term and permanent employment practices.

19. Does the student have to serve the summer internship at the federal agency that will employ him or her upon graduation?

No. The student may serve the summer internship at another federal agency. However, the nature of the work assignments must meet program requirements. Moreover, for several reasons, it is strongly recommended that the summer internship be served at the agency that will ultimately hire the student. For example, the summer internship provides the environment that helps create a bond between the student and the employer. It also helps create in the student a sense of belonging, of being a part of that agency's cadre of information assurance professionals. More importantly, the summer internship should be an integral part of a mentoring process that should span throughout the entire academic and employment phases of the program.

20. May an agency make an offer of employment to a student who served the summer internship at another agency?

There is no legal or regulatory basis to prevent an agency from making an offer of employment to a student who served the summer internship at another federal agency even if the student is currently on the latter's rolls. However, we strongly discourage the making of such employment offers unless the agency at which the student served the summer internship will be unable to place him or her. In general, by the time students reach graduation, their prospective Federal employers will have made significant investments in them in terms of time, effort and financial resources. Hence, we exhort agencies to refrain from making employment offers to students who served their internships elsewhere without consulting with the SFS Program Office and the agency to which the student is matched.

21. What happens if the student leaves his federal position before he or she serves the required period?

The student must repay a prorated amount equivalent to the length of the period not served. For example, if the student received funds for two years and serves for one-and-a-half years, he or she must repay 25% of the funds received. Federal agencies must notify the SFS Program Office immediately when this occurs. That office is responsible for initiating the repayment process.

22. It is clear NSF funds the scholarships. Are there any program-related costs to the agency?

Yes! Federal agencies must pay the students' salary (and benefits, if applicable) during the summer internship and other periods of employment. Also, agencies must afford the student the opportunity to attend a one-week summer symposium. Hence, they must allocate the necessary travel funds for this required activity. We highly recommend the agency designate an official who will serve as the SFS contact and be responsible for ensuring the summer internship and symposium requirements are met. This official may also serve as mentor, or have the authority to procure and designate others as student mentors.

Additionally, it is expected that in virtually all cases, the positions participants will occupy and the areas in which they will work will require a security clearance. The Federal agency will bear the cost of the background investigation (if needed), case adjudication, and other expenses associated with obtaining the level of security clearance needed for the area where the student will work.