**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – SFS Applications**

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1. *What application form should I use?*

For SFS, use the SFS application found on the CISA web page, including cover sheet. For CySP, use the CySP/IASP application found on the CISA or NSA web page.

1. *For CySP, should I use the form for New Students or for Returning Students?*

Use the New Students form (except if you are a current CySP student applying for a renewal).

1. *May I submit the application electronically?*

No, we do not accept electronic submissions.

1. *Because I am a UMBC student, or I have applied to UMBC, UMBC has copies of my official documents. Do I need to resubmit additional official documents?*

Yes, you must resubmit official documents – we do not have access to your application to UMBC.

1. *What are my chances?*

It is a competition, so it depends in part on the quality of the applicants. In addition to the requirements set by NSF, we expect candidates to have a high GPA (at least 3.25), high test scores (over 75%), strong coursework and experience in cybersecurity, letters of reference from faculty who speak to the candidate’s potential in cybersecurity, and a passion for cybersecurity. We consider all evidence, seek SFS scholars with diverse talents, and no one factor dominates.

We will consider all applicants with GPA at least 3.0.

Evidence of interest, experience, and potential in cybersecurity is a significant plus. Such evidence might include, for example, participation on a cyber defense team or research project.

1. *What are expectations of SFS scholars?*

In addition to the requirements set by NSF, we require each SFS scholar to take appropriate cybersecurity courses, join a cybersecurity research lab (e.g., UMBC Cyber Defense Lab) or cybersecurity team, complete a cybersecurity research project, and engage in cohort activities with other SFS scholars (including biweekly meetings). If your degree program has a track in cybersecurity, you must complete it. Each scholar must stay in touch with the program director and OPM, and they must keep their SFS information up-to-date (on the OPM web page).

1. *Must I be a current UMBC student to apply?*

No, but before a scholarship is awarded, you must have been accepted to a full-time UMBC degree program.

1. *I have not taken the SAT or GRE. Should I take one of these tests?*

Yes, we expect SAT and/or GRE scores. Applicants may still apply without test scores, but applications without test scores risk being viewed as less competitive.

1. *Whom should I ask to write letters of recommendation?*

You should ask people who know you well and can speak to your accomplishments and potential in cybersecurity. You must include at least two letters, and you may include more. If possible (and we understand doing so is not always possible), at least one letter should be from a tenure-track professor (preferably at UMBC), preferably from an upper-level course. Be sure the letters are detailed and describe specific accomplishments.

1. *May UMBC SFS scholars be part-time or distance students?*

*No. All UMBC SFS scholars must be full-time students in residence.*

1. *My GPA is below 3.0. Should I still apply?*

No, we will not make an award to anyone with GPA below 3.0, and we expect at least 3.25.

1. *I am not majoring in computer science. May I still apply?*

Yes, we accept applications from any field related to cybersecurity, including computer science, computer engineering, electrical engineering, information systems, mathematics, physics, policy science, education. While in the program, you must take appropriate cybersecurity courses and carry out research in cybersecurity.

1. *Are there any required cybersecurity courses?*

Currently there are no courses specifically required for SFS students. SFS students are expected to take appropriate cybersecurity courses. MS and PhD students are expected to complete theses with significant cyber content. A course requirement (e.g., cybersecurity research seminar seminar) might be added in the future. If your degree program has a track in cybersecurity, you must complete it.

1. *While an SFS scholar, am I permitted to work or intern during the fall or spring semester?*

No. SFS Scholars are not permitted any significant engagement of time outside of your studies. SFS scholars are being paid to be full-time students. Any employment (including any part-time work) or any other significant commitment of time outside of classes must be approved in writing in advance by Dr. Sherman.

Typically, cybersecurity employment up to 10 hours per week will be approved. No exception will be granted for non-cybersecurity related work. For students receiving an SFS stipend, as per SFS rules, no exception will be granted for over ten hours per week. Exceptions for greater that ten hours per week might be considered, if the student declines the SFS stipend.

1. *Does the scholarship apply to the UMCP or UMUC campus of the University of Maryland System?*

No. UMBC, UMCP, and UMUC are separate schools. The UMBC SFS scholarship applies only at UMBC.

1. *What should I do if I need more time to complete my BS degree?*

SFS support for BS students is limited to at most two years. If you need more time, you must apply to OPM for a possible educational deferment.

1. *May I continue my education under SFS support to purse a MS or PhD degree after I graduate with a BS?*

Possibly. There is a limit of at most three years of support total under SFS (e.g., two years for BS, and one year for MS). SFS support for the next degree is not automatic – you must apply. Also, after completing your first degree, you would have to apply to OPM for a possible educational deferment.

1. *If, upon graduation, I discover that I can earn much more money working for private industry rather than for government, may I get out of my commitment by paying back to UMBC the entire cost of my award?*

Doing so would be highly inappropriate, reprobate, and irresponsible—a failure of integrity. Each SFS scholar signs the Service Agreement in which they promise to work for government in return for the scholarship. We expect students to live up to their agreement. Such irresponsible action hurts UMBC and denies an opportunity to another deserving student.

1. *What new changes have happened?*

The annual stipends are now $25,000 (undergraduate) and $34,000 (graduate). For simplicity, the allowances for books and health insurance have been eliminated, and the professional development fund has been increased to $6,000 per year.

Each school is required to place at least 80% of its scholars in federal employment (summer internships and post-graduation job); for each school, at most 20% of the students are permitted to work for state, local, or tribal government. This new requirement has implications on permanent residents, who might have difficulty securing a federal job.

1. *How can I improve my chances of being selected?*

Participate on a cyber defense team, take upper-level technical cybersecurity courses, and engage in challenging cybersecurity projects. Seek letters of reference from people who can describe your technical accomplishments in detail.

**Reminders**

1. Clearly state for which scholarships (IASP, SFS) you are applying.
2. Clearly state when you expect to complete your current degree program.
3. Clearly state what degree program you intend to pursue at UMBC under an SFS scholarship. (e.g., PhD in CS, MS in CE, BS in EE, MPS in Cyber).
4. Submit your application on paper, printed one-sided. A separate application package is needed for each scholarship application (IASP, SFS). Do not email the application.
5. Letters of reference must be original, signed, and on letterhead; do not send by email.
6. Transcripts must be official, original.
7. Do not round up your GPA.
8. Include your resume.
9. Include all test scores that you have (SAT, ACT, and/or GRE). If you do not have any test scores, say so, and we can still process your application.
10. Do not include any staples, paper clips, binder clips, or folders.