

U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor Participation

A Handbook for Working with Pakistan PHEC-Sponsored Applicants and Students

Background

The U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor is a collaborative program with the purpose of placing Pakistani students in U.S. universities. The Ph.D. portion of this plan, approved in 2017 and revised in 2020, aims to send 1,000 Pakistani students or current non-Ph.D. university faculty to the U.S. for doctoral study. Upon completion of the Ph.D., these students must agree to work in Pakistan for a minimum of five years. Any academic field is eligible, but only Ph.D. degrees are supported.

In May 2020, Ohio University signed a [Document of Agreement \(DOU\)](#) with the Pakistan Higher Education Commission (PHEC) setting the terms for our participation in this initiative. By the terms of that agreement, Pakistan will remit to OHIO an annual living allowance for each student, which the university normally disburses in the form of a stipend as part of a graduate appointment. OHIO is obligated to pay the students' tuition scholarship and to waive the non-resident surcharge.

Terms of the PHEC Scholarship

As of fall 2021, The HEC provides the following benefits for students:

- ~\$2,000 subsidy for travel to the U.S.
- \$5,000 in relocation costs
- \$19,200 per year living expenses (which we normally pay out as a stipend), for a maximum of 5 years [N.B.: this is larger than the amount in the DOU. The PHEC has increased it for all sponsored students]
- \$2,000 per year in health insurance subsidy
- \$2,000 for travel back to Pakistan at the end of the degree program

The following terms apply to students as conditions of a scholarship through the Knowledge Corridor:

- The student must be offered admission to a university on the list authorized by the PHEC. (This list consists of QS global-ranked institutions, land-grant universities, and schools with DOUs; it can be found [here](#).)
- The institution must provide tuition support.
- Students must complete their studies within five years of enrolling in the Ph.D.
- Students must obtain permission from the PHEC to leave the U.S. (It appears that students will not normally have permission to return to Pakistan for more than a month at a time, so summer U.S. residence should be assumed.)
- Students must return to Pakistan within a month of graduation. (Their agreement with the PHEC stipulates one month after dissertation defense, but it is unclear whether that will be enforced, given the point in the semester where the deadline for the defense falls in an OHIO semester.)
- Students may not have additional employment.

The full list of conditions appears in the Deed of Agreement found [here](#).

Students are expected to provide financial surety against defaulting on the terms of the scholarship. In many if not most cases, that surety is a lien on real property. It is possible for a student to be short-listed for the scholarship, accepted at OHIO, and only then discover that they do not have sufficient collateral to satisfy the PHEC requirements.

Students who cancel their scholarship agreements before they have completed their degree or who default on the agreement in some way must repay the amount spent by the PHEC plus a penalty (additional 25%).

Website

The Graduate College has developed a webpage specifically for PHEC students who wish to apply or have been accepted to OHIO. It is updated as information changes and can be found here:

<https://www.ohio.edu/graduate/resources-us-pak-knowledge-corridor-students>. Please direct students to it as appropriate.

Application Process

PHEC Scholarship Status

Students wishing to study on a Knowledge Corridor scholarship may take one of two paths toward qualifying for it.

Students Short-Listed by the PHEC

The majority of students apply first to the PHEC for inclusion in the program before applying to OHIO. Those who meet their minimum qualifications are short-listed for the scholarship; they will receive a final offer after they have obtained admission with full tuition support at an eligible university, have agreed to all the terms, and have provided financial surety.

In mid-winter (around the beginning of February), Ohio University receives from the PHEC a spreadsheet of shortlisted students whom the HEC has encouraged to apply to OHIO. The spreadsheet is extremely useful insofar as it provides a list of previous degrees with GPA/exam scores, either GRE or [HAT](#) scores, and a personal statement. On the other hand, it arrives late enough that the regular application deadline has closed for most OHIO programs, so students recruited at that point require a separate application process. In addition, many of the students we have accepted are currently in labs at OHIO that are not very closely related to the projects outlined in the personal statements.

Students who have been shortlisted also reach out directly to us prior to the compilation of this information for us. In that case, we have less information initially but do know that they met the HEC's minimum criteria and that they are nearly certain to obtain this external funding if we admit them.

Other Pakistani Students

Some students apply to U.S. universities at the same time as or before they apply to the PHEC for funding. While it is likely that these students will receive an HEC scholarship if admitted to OHIO, it is also possible that they will fall foul of one of the eligibility requirements (e.g., age).

Application Fee Waivers

Graduate application fee waivers at OHIO are program-specific. Although not in our signed DOU, the PHEC has told its shortlisted students that they will have application fees waived by partner institutions. OHIO has honored that expectation to an extent. Because the Graduate College has not been in a position to pay our third-party application vendor for all PHEC would-be applicants, we have asked departments

to pay the application fee for any students whose applications the program wishes to review (or for students they are fairly certain that they will admit).

As a result of this policy, PHEC students generally need an initial evaluation from graduate program directors before they submit their formal application. Any program that wishes to avoid this initial evaluation process and the large number of email inquiries it generates can choose to waive the fee for all PHEC applicants.

Graduate directors are responsible for supplying the waiver code to PHEC applicants. The Graduate College can provide a valid waiver code to any graduate director who needs one.

(The new Slate application system should simplify the fee waiver process and potentially reduce the cost to departments for waiving application fees. These new policies and procedures have not yet been developed, however, and practically speaking will probably have to wait until spring 2022.)

Application Opening and Closing

During the normal application period, the main complication for PHEC student applications (beyond those that accompany international student applications in general) is the fee waiver situation. For students recruited after the normal application window, either because they are invited to apply after the spreadsheet has arrived or because they make late inquiries, it is likely that the application for the appropriate term will need to be manually opened and then closed again by the Graduate College. Programs should request from the Graduate College that the application be opened for a specific, appropriate length of time and should advise applicants they have invited about when they can successfully access the application.

Admission and Offers

Always Recommend Full Admission with Funding

Admission recommendations for HEC-sponsored students should be entered as Full Admission with WITH FUNDING. Enter the stipend amount that will be paid by the PHEC (should total \$19,200 per year) and the full tuition scholarship that will be paid by the academic unit. Recording an admission recommendation for these students without funding can create a cascade of extra paperwork and snafus down the line. This may include:

- English proficiency admission complications: the student must have valid test scores or a valid waiver for admission. Admission with funding requires a higher level of proficiency (or a different waiver) from admission without funding. If admission is recommended with proficiency status/waiver at the wrong level, it will have to be corrected once the Graduate College realizes that the student is receiving a tuition scholarship from OHIO. This can happen before or after the admission is approved.
- Immigration complications: the Graduate College and ISFS rely on the funding recorded in GRADS to determine whether a student has the financial resources required to issue immigration documents. Without the information about the HEC scholarship, we will ask the student to show that they have access to substantial bank accounts, creating stress and confusion for everyone.
- Graduate appointment complications: If the admission is processed with too low an English proficiency status/waiver and it is not caught until time to create an OGA contract, the contract will have to wait on correction in the system.

GRADS does NOT interface with the OGA system and cannot charge any account code; it does not matter who is paying the stipend entered into GRADS.

Can We Just Give Them the Money as Fellowship?

Yes. The DOU makes graduate appointments with a work expectation normative, but the program may choose to offer the PHEC funding as a fellowship without work expectation instead.

PHEC Funding Confirmation and Admission Status

Please do not admit students conditionally upon their receiving funding from the PHEC. If the students are admissible with external funding, they should also be admissible with no funding. You may make clear that, should the student succeed in their application to the PHEC, Ohio University will proceed as outlined in our agreement with them, which includes a full tuition scholarship.

Offer Letter

A template offer letter for PHEC students is posted on the [Graduate College website](#). In addition to the normal expectations for these letters (e.g., make clear it is not a formal offer of admission, Graduate Catalog policies apply, etc.), the offer letter must include the following:

- The offer of a full tuition scholarship paid by OHIO while the student is on PHEC funding
- Clear expectations for the type of graduate appointment offered and that the living allowance from the PHEC will be paid out through the stipend portion of the graduate appointment
- Schedule on which the living allowance/stipend will be paid (i.e., whether it is all paid in fall and spring semesters or whether some will be reserved for a stipend in summer)

You may need to make clear that the offer letter is the official promise from OHIO to pay the tuition scholarship—students expect that to be included in the official admission boilerplate from the Graduate College and are concerned about not having the documentation they need to finalize the scholarship award.

Funding Negotiations

The PHEC scholarship imposes substantial restrictions on students' movement both during and especially after the Ph.D. program. In accepting the funds, many students are also betting their own and/or their parents' house on their academic success. So it is unsurprising that some accepted and continuing students have opened negotiations about funding from OHIO sources before committing to come.

Because there is an extensive communication network among current students and applicants with PHEC sponsorship, the decision about how to respond will set a precedent for other students in the same and other programs. Agreeing to provide department or research funding before the student has accepted admission and the same agreement after admission is accepted or after the student has begun in the program will have different effects. Ultimately, however, the academic unit has the prerogative to offer or withhold non-PHEC funding.

Graduate Appointments

Writing Contracts

Because of the accounting complexities around receiving and paying out the monies received from the PHEC, the appointment contract for the PHEC-funded stipends is written in the Graduate College.

The Graduate College hosts a spreadsheet of students requiring these contracts. (The link for the AY21-22 academic year is [here](#).) Graduate Directors are responsible for adding the names of their PHEC-sponsored students, along with other required information (name of supervisor, account code for billing the tuition scholarship and Worker's Comp, etc.). The program must also indicate whether the \$19,200 stipend is

being spread across all three semesters or will only be paid fall and spring and, if spread across all three terms, how it should be divided up.

If the program or advisor wishes to supplement the PHEC funds from another source, that supplement must be submitted as a separate contract in OGA, originating in the home unit (not the Graduate College).

Programs are responsible for keeping the spreadsheet up-to-date. In particular, make sure that the PHEC partnership coordinator is personally aware if a student is arriving late and make a note on the spreadsheet. (Late arrivals must be requested and evaluated by both the Graduate College and ISFS). If a student for whom the Graduate College has already written a contract defers enrollment or decides not to enroll, you must cancel the contract. Otherwise, the program will be billed for any stipend paid out.

Work Authorizations

Students funded by their home government study on J-1 visas, the category that also includes exchange students. Unlike students on (the usual) F-1 student visas, students with J visas must have a work authorization issued by ISFS before their appointment can be processed.

Work authorizations can only be processed after the student has arrived in Athens. Students secure a work authorization by uploading to the ISFS portal a letter *on department letterhead* that includes the following information:

- Employer name (this may be part of letterhead)
- Employer address (this may be part of letterhead)
- Title of student position
- Number of hours per week (no more than 20)
- Employment start date (for each semester in the AY that the student will be on stipend)
- Employment end date (for each semester in the AY that the student will be on stipend)

A Word on OPERS

While ISFS, HR, and the Graduate College all attempt to communicate with students about the retirement plan, the email from OPERS about plan opt-in/opt-out arrives in the midst of a great deal of other communication at the start of the term. Due to language issues and cultural/legal differences, this can be particularly confusing for international students. As always, Ohio University, including individual departments, cannot advise student as to what retirement selection they should make. You may, however, communicate to your students that membership in OPERS will result in 10% less pay each pay period and that the time limit for study imposed by the PHEC means that they will not be able to collect the university contributions. Please also communicate that if they do not respond to the OPERS email, they will be enrolled in the retirement system. **To be able to complete this form, international students must contact HR at (740) 593-1636 for a placeholder SSN.** Any other employment-related queries should go either to that number or uhr@ohio.edu.

Additional Expectations for PHEC-Sponsored Students

Under the terms of our DOU with the PHEC, OHIO is obligated to maintain a current Plan of Study allowing graduation within five years of matriculation for all students sponsored under the U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor. Students may not substantially alter their plan of study without permission from the PHEC, and the partnership coordinator at the Graduate College should be alerted if the student falls behind in a way that endangers timely graduation.

Other Things to Know

A Scholarship, not a Program

The U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor provides students with two things: a service to suggest possible matches between Pakistani students and doctoral programs and funding for five years' study. (There is also a GRE/IELTS preparation program, but this occurs before application to U.S. universities.) This is a different structure from some other government-sponsored programs to increase educational attainment by sending students to U.S. institutions. For example, Saudi students on scholarship abroad receive extensive assistance (and direction) for placement at an appropriate. Students sponsored by the PHEC, on the other hand, have the same experience in finding their way to Athens, locating housing, and navigating U.S. immigration and academic expectations as our non-sponsored doctoral students. At the same time, receiving their funding is more complex than it is for students on standard OHIO graduate appointments.

PHEC Expectations

The PHEC requires a large number of documents proving presence in Athens, enrollment at the university, enrollment in health insurance, etc. for students to obtain the full amount of their scholarship awards. The PHEC expectation for how these documents will look does not always perfectly align with OHIO practices. (See, for example, the section on offer letters above.) Nor are the students in the best position to translate PHEC documentation requests to the program or other university office: there is no reason why they should understand the relationship between PHEC expectations and our practices any better than the PHEC staff does. If uncertain of what the PHEC is asking for, ask the student to share with you their correspondence with the PHEC or ask the OHIO program coordinator to intervene.

Also as a result of the documentation required by the PHEC, students generally receive the \$5,000 relocation portion of the award a month or more *after* they relocate, pay the first month's rent and deposit, etc.

Communication about What Funding Covers

Students are arriving with inaccurate expectations of what their funding from Pakistan will cover. This is especially true of the insurance subsidy. The student health insurance currently costs \$2,825 annually, which means that the PHEC-sponsored students will have to pay \$825 out of pocket. What many have understood from the PHEC, however, is that their health insurance is paid for by the scholarship award. It is important to be clear in your communications with students about the fact that there are out-of-pocket costs (general fee, some insurance, college fees) and payroll taxes taken out of their stipend checks.

Cohort Effects

Over the next few years while the program is still sending students to the U.S., applicants will receive increasing amounts of information from students currently enrolled at OHIO. This may clarify many U.S. and OHIO expectations for applicants and incoming students. It also means that any changes in policy around appointments, application processes, or administrative arrangements must be clearly communicated to enrolled students as well as future students in order to prevent additional confusion.