

Bylaws of the BioLAB Program

§ 1

General Provisions

1. Introduction:

The BioLAB Program is a unique program created by four academic/research institutions in the United States of America: University of Chicago (Chicago, IL), Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (Oklahoma City, OK), University of Virginia (Charlottesville, VA) and University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (Dallas, TX) in partnership with the Polish-U.S. Fulbright Commission.

The program offers 1 yearlong research internships (Visiting Research Graduate Traineeship) to outstanding students in biomedical sciences or related fields studying at the graduate level (Master's or PhD) at any of Polish Universities, irrespective of their citizenship.

The BioLAB Program does not provide individual awards directly to students; instead, it recruits students to specific laboratories as Visiting Research Assistants and offers stipends paid monthly by the Principle Investigator of the laboratory. **The BioLAB stipend holders do not hold the Fulbright Program grantee title.**

The students enrolling in the program must meet eligibility criteria and must be enrolled during the duration of the internship at a Polish university in a graduate program.

Recruitment takes place in four stages:

- a. Submission of application to the program by Feb 1st, which occurs before the exact projects and positions in the USA are identified;
- b. Initial triage of applications and identification of the most likely successful candidates (mid-February);
- c. Pre-selection of the preferred specific projects by those candidates (beginning of March);
- d. Interviews with the selected candidates to identify best fit for the students and best students for specific positions (mid-March).
- e. The results of this process are finalized and published by the end of April on the Fulbright Commission's website.

2. Basic terms and abbreviations used in the document:

- a. **Host institution** - any of the four institutions participating in the program: University of Chicago (Chicago, IL), Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (Oklahoma City, OK), University of Virginia (Charlottesville, VA) or University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (Dallas, TX).
- b. **Fulbright Commission** – the Polish-U.S. Fulbright Commission. It co-administers the BioLAB program in following aspects: promotion, recruitment, logistics and

communication of selection, assisting selected students in preparation for the program, and alumni engagement

- c. **Candidate** – a student individual who is planning to submit or has submitted an application for the BioLAB Program.
- d. **BioLAB Stipend Holder** – a participant of the BioLAB Program who received official approval from the host institution to participate in the program.
- e. **Selection Committee** - a body responsible for the selection of candidates, consisting of the representatives of host institutions, who will recommend candidates for specific positions at participating institutions. BioLAB internships are administered by host institutions and funded by the heads of respective laboratories.
- f. **BioLab Mentor** – the Principal Investigator, laboratory head at the host Institution, who is responsible for the funding of the internship, makes the offer and supervises the student during the course of the program.

3. **Language:**

The entire recruitment process and documentation will be conducted in English language.

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Eligibility criteria

1. **Candidates must be enrolled in a Polish University** in a program broadly related to life or biomedical sciences; examples include, but are not limited to, biotechnology, biology, chemistry, biophysics, bioinformatics, medicine, etc.
2. **Candidates must hold, or are about to receive prior to the interview process, an undergraduate degree (BA, BSc, BEng/licencjat, inżynier), and be enrolled in a Master's degree or PhD degree program** and maintain an active student status during the duration of the program.
3. Candidates must demonstrate **knowledge of English proficiency at the B2 level or higher**. A formal certificate is welcome, particularly at the early stage, but the final assessment of language will be conducted by the Selection Committee.
4. Candidates must **meet formal requirements of a F-1/J-1 USA visa**.

§ 3

Call for applications, application process, verification and triage

1. **Call for applications:**
 - a. The program is announced through an open call for applications publicly on Fulbright Commission's website, in November of each year.
 - b. The deadline for the application will be Feb 1st. The active link to the application system will be provided in the call for applications.

2. **The initial online application must include the following documents in the English language:**
 - a. Curriculum Vitae with a list of academic as well as non-academic accomplishments (template is provided);
 - b. Undergraduate diploma (licencjat/inżynier diploma if the studies were completed in Poland) and/or Master's diploma (if applicable), with transcripts from the entire course of studies.
 - c. Personal Statement expanding on the reasons why the candidate is seeking a position, future plans, interests, etc. (template is provided);
 - d. Consent for participation in the program and a formal leave of absence signed by the Dean of the Faculty from the candidate's home university as well as thesis supervisor (template provided).
3. After submitting the application, confirmation will be sent by the Fulbright Commission to the email address listed by the candidate in the application. Candidates are obliged to check the provided email address regularly and proceed in a timely manner during the application process. It is the candidate's responsibility to verify that the application has been successfully submitted.
4. In addition to the above, **two letters of recommendation** must be received from individuals with PhD degrees or higher, who have worked with the candidate and will attest to the candidates' academic standing and/or research experience; letters must be submitted through an online system available at the program's website; including letters in the application is not permitted.
5. By submitting the application, **the candidate affirms their acceptance of these Regulations**. Only applications submitted on time, complete and meeting all formal criteria are eligible for further consideration. If an incomplete application is received, the Fulbright Commission may request the candidate to submit the missing elements within 3 business days of sending the notice. Failure to do so will result in the rejection of the application. Verification of the compliance of applications will be conducted by the Fulbright Commission, and the results of the formal verification stage are sent out electronically to the email address provided by the candidate in the application.
6. **Review and triage of applications:**
 - a. The review and triage of all applications is performed by the Selection Committee, after they have identified specific projects and positions available in each host institution for the current edition of the program.
 - b. The criteria used by the Selection Committee for the initial triage are as follows:
 - i. Academic standing,
 - ii. Research experience,
 - iii. Letters of recommendation,
 - iv. Any relevant extracurricular activities such as travel abroad or work experience, attesting to the candidate's qualifications outside their own academic institutions,
 - v. Suitability of candidates for available positions.

- c. The triage process will identify a group of no more than 60 candidates, who will be asked to participate in in-person or remote interviews; the final number of candidates will be contingent on the number of positions available in a current year. Interviewed candidates who are not selected in the initial round of assignments may be placed on a wait list.
- d. The results of the triage process will be communicated to all candidates by the email address provided in the applications by mid-February.

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Preselection of available positions by candidates.

1. Details of the available research projects and BioLAB mentors from each of the hosting institutions will be sent to the selected candidates by mid-February by the Fulbright Commission.
2. Each candidate will submit an additional letter (free format) in which he/she will identify preferred projects that they would like to participate in and provide justification, including an explanation how they would benefit from the project, and how the host laboratory would benefit from their involvement. Candidates should also state which areas of research they would prefer not to be considered for, if any. They should also state if they are willing to participate in experiments with animals, i.e. mice, rats, zebrafish, etc.

§ 5

Interviews and final selection of candidates for available positions

1. **Interviews are conducted by the Selection Committee:**
 - a. Unless there are special circumstances, the interviews will be conducted in person in Warsaw and/or any other selected by the Selection Committee city in mid-March. In the event that travel is impossible, the interviews will be conducted remotely using ZOOM and the schedule will be set up by the Fulbright Commission.
 - b. Regardless of form of the interviews, each candidate will be interviewed by each of the members of the Selection Committee separately for app. 15-20 min. The purpose of the interviews is to establish which of the available positions is most suitable for a given candidate, and conversely, which candidates are most suited for the projects being offered.
 - c. The key criteria used by the Selection Committee in the interview stage include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Candidate's interests, knowledge and research experience in the fields in which the candidate seeks a position,
 - ii. Fluency of English; ability to convey and communicate research interests on subjects related to the scientific projects of interest to the candidate,
 - iii. Interpersonal skills.

2. **Following the interviews the Selection Committee will recommend the most suitable candidates to the prospective BioLAB mentors**, in accordance with the candidates' preferences. It is the sole decision of the prospective BioLAB mentor to move forward with the candidacy.
3. **The BioLAB mentors will perform final interviews by ZOOM, Skype or telephone**, or may waive this step if they are confident that the candidate is suited for the position.
4. **If none of the positions deemed particularly suitable for a qualified candidate after the interviews are still open, the candidate will be contacted by the Selection Committee to determine if he/she would like to be considered for any other available positions.** If no alternative positions are available, the candidate will be informed as soon as possible by the Selection Committee. If open positions are left after the placement process is completed, candidates on the waitlist may be contacted and offered remote interviews to ascertain if they are suitable for the openings.
5. **Final offers are issued at the discretion of the prospective BioLAB mentors**, and communicated to the candidates by email with a copy to the Fulbright Commission. The task of the Selection Committee is only to vet the candidates and make recommendations. The decisions of the BioLAB mentors are final and no appeal mechanism is possible.
6. **Neither the Selection Committee nor the Fulbright Commission provide justification of any decisions** regarding approval or rejection of applications at any stage of the process.

§ 4

Final Provisions

1. The selected candidates must accept or decline the offer within 72 hours by email. Failure to accept will result in the position being offered to another suitable candidate. There is no penalty for candidates withdrawing at the last moment, but it is assumed that every candidate operates in good faith and accepts the offer only if he/she is genuinely committed to the project, pending unanticipated circumstances.
2. Host Institutions will proceed with sponsoring F-1/J-1 USA visa applications, and the documentation will be sent to the candidates either electronically or as hard copies, depending on the legal process.
3. Candidates bear responsibility for the cost of the USA visa and the travel (the OMRF will reimburse the latter costs).
4. Candidates are expected to arrive in the USA prior to July 15th each year.
5. These regulations come into effect on November 1, 2021.