The Department of Defense (DoD) Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholarship-for-Service Program

As the 2021 scholarship season kicks off, degree-seekers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) will be hard-pressed to find an opportunity with better terms than this: full tuition plus stipend paid for a college and/or graduate degree, with guaranteed placement at a world-class research institution upon graduation. "People wonder if it's too good to be true," said Louie Lopez, Director, STEM, in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. "It's not. It's SMART."

SMART (an acronym for "Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation") is the Department of Defense's (DoD's) highly competitive, STEM-focused, scholarship-for-service program. The SMART Program makes full-tuition awards during any phase of a scholar's education in an accredited U.S. university or college, sponsoring undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral study in 21 academic disciplines that the Department has identified as critical to national security and DoD's future. Since its launch in 2006, the program has awarded over 3,000 scholarships, including 298 and 324 for the 2019 and 2020 SMART Cohorts, respectively.

In return for funding scholars' academic careers, DoD is assured a steady infusion of high-quality technical talent through the "service" facet of the SMART Program—a one-to-one DoD employment commitment for each year of funding (SMART awards range from 1.5 to 5 years of study). SMART scholars transition directly into employment as civilian scientists or engineers within DoD facilities. In preparation for that transition, scholars also engage in internships within their sponsoring DoD facilities, which allow the scholars to gain relevant hands-on research and work experiences, enhance their overall educational experiences, and form the beginning of strong relationships with DoD.

"It's a win-win," said Lopez. "Deserving scholars get a ticket to an elite STEM education, while DoD gets a workforce development program that strengthens the technical knowledge, skills, and abilities of our science and technology enterprise. For us, it's a strategic investment in human capital."

Facts and statistics confirm that the program's value. It has demonstrated a 91 percent success rate in scholars completing their service commitments. SMART recipients performing research, development, test, and evaluation have proven to be invaluable contributors to the DoD research mission, compiling patents, publishing journal articles, and earning accolades from their respective organizations and agencies.

They are also on the forefront of research and development, solving some of the toughest challenges facing the Nation today. As a prime example, the SMART Program recently recognized Mr. Wade Carr, a current SMART scholar in the 2019 cohort, for his contributions to COVID-19 response and relief efforts with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Mr. Carr, a full-time student at the University of North Dakota pursuing a master's degree in mechanical engineering, is serving in a key role in the USACE and Federal Emergency Management Agency's high-visibility mission to assess sites in the USACE Saint Paul District for use as alternative healthcare facilities. Mr. Carr is a member of one of four USACE teams deployed to inspect approximately 50 facilities in the Minnesota and North Dakota regions. Having worked previously at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Minneapolis, Mr.

Carr is applying his niche expertise in mechanical systems for health facilities to drive success in this vital mission. The SMART Scholarship-for-Service Program congratulates him for his mission-critical efforts.

The SMART Program's application window, for the 2021 cohort, opened on August 1, 2020 and will remain open for applications until December 1, 2020.

To apply and learn more about the SMART Scholarship-for-Service Program, please visit: https://www.smartscholarship.org/

To read about the latest SMART Program Outcome Evaluation Report, please visit: https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/s/sc/science-mathematics-research-for-transformation-smart-outcome-evaluation-report

To learn more about DoD STEM programs and opportunities, please visit: https://dodstem.us/