Office of the Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies

Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship Guide

FOR STUDENTS, PROGRAMS, AND REFEREES

2019-20
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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

The Vanier CGS program aims to attract and retain world-class doctoral students by supporting students who demonstrate both leadership skills and a high standard of scholarly achievement. The Vanier CGS is valued at $50,000 per year for three years.

This guide has been designed to assist graduate students and programs with the preparation and submission of Vanier Scholarship applications. This guide is primarily concerned with the York-specific procedures for the internal nomination process and application development. No information in this guide is intended to replace the official information as published by the Vanier-Banting Secretariat (www.vanier.gc.ca), and in any place where the information in this guide and on the Vanier, CCV, or ResearchNet sites differ, the information published on those sites shall be taken as accurate.

QUOTAS

Each University is assigned a quota by the respective agencies of the Tri-Council. This quota is the number of applications York University may nominate, not the number of awards we will receive. Although the selection process is extremely competitive, York University has had a good record of support for students, and success with Vanier applications ranging from 4 to 6 award(s) in the last three years. The application quotas granted to York for the 2019-2020 competition, which runs through Summer-Fall 2018, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSHRC</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSERC</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIHR</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ELIGIBILITY

Please review the technical and subject matter eligibility criteria at: http://vanier.gc.ca/en/eligibility-admissibilite.html. All applicants to the Vanier program must carefully review their eligibility before preparing an application. In particular, please note:

- if you have received a doctoral-level scholarship or fellowship from the Tri-Council Agencies (CIHR, NSERC or SSHRC) at the doctoral level, you are not eligible to apply to the Vanier CGS.
- an applicant must not have completed more than 20 months of doctoral studies as of May 1, 2019, including doctoral studies undertaken at another university.

KEY SITES

Vanier Nomination Process on the FGS website: http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/student-finances/funding-awards/vcgs/

Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship: www.vanier.gc.ca

ResearchNet: https://www.researchnet-recherchenet.ca
The online system in which you will construct your application, and via which FGS will submit your application to the Vanier Secretariat for the national level of adjudication.

CCV: https://ccv-cvc.ca

The Canada Common CV site, in which you will construct your Curriculum Vitae for inclusion in your ResearchNet application. Please choose the “Vanier-Banting” CV type.

**KEY TIMELINES AND DEADLINES**

Please note that the dates are tentative and subject to change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps, events, tasks</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vanier competition announcement by FGS</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for students to submit preliminary documents to FGS</td>
<td>June 25, 2018 at 4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students notified of the result of the first round of nomination process. Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application.</td>
<td>By July 31, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline to submit full Vanier applications via ResearchNet</td>
<td>August 23, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and programs notified of the results of this round of nomination process. Final nominees will receive comments for revisions.</td>
<td>By October 2, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and program directors work to revise applications</td>
<td>Until October 18, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students submit revised applications via ResearchNet</td>
<td>By October 18, 2018 by 4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final review for completeness, communication of any final revision requests (if any) to students</td>
<td>By October 25, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final deadline for students to submit final applications in ResearchNet</td>
<td>October 29, 2018 by 8am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for FGS to submit nominated Vanier applications to the Vanier Secretariat via ResearchNet</td>
<td>October 31, 2018 at 8pm ET</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## NOMINATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS

### FOR STUDENTS

**Step 1: Preparing Preliminary Documents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read application and process information on the Vanier site and in this guide</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare and submit preliminary application documents (2 page research statement, 2 page personal leadership statement, 1 page research contributions statement, transcripts and CV) to FGS</td>
<td>June 25, 2018 at 4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* See more information on how to submit preliminary documents at: <a href="http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/student-finances/funding-awards/vcgs/">http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/student-finances/funding-awards/vcgs/</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* At this stage, <strong>the transcripts do not need to be official</strong> as long as they include your full academic records.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students notified of the result of the first round of nomination process</td>
<td>By July 31, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 2: Developing Full Applications (Invited Applicants Only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start your application in ResearchNet and required CCV through the CCV site</td>
<td>July 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request a nomination letter from your Graduate Program Director, to be submitted by August 23, 2018</td>
<td>July 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request reference letters, both academic and leadership, via ResearchNet</td>
<td>July 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic referees submit their references via ResearchNet</td>
<td>August 21, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Note that ResearchNet automatically sets the deadline to submit references <strong>48 hours before the student deadline</strong>. Therefore, the letters cannot be submitted after August 21, 2018.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership referees provide applicants with their reference letters.</td>
<td>By August 23, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student upload the letters via ResearchNet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the full application in ResearchNet, including all required attachments, letters and the CCV, and submit for FGS review. **By August 23, 2018**

Students notified of the result of this round of nomination process. Successful students receive feedback for revisions. **By the end of September**

### Step 3: Final Revisions and Submission (Final Nominees Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students request a full set of up-to-date transcripts (including York) and submit to FGS</td>
<td>Early October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Referees receive request to revise letters based on reviewer and FGS feedback as needed</td>
<td>Early October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Based on the feedback received, revise and improve your application, with the assistance of your graduate program director and/or supervisor</td>
<td>By October 18, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Revised applications and letters of reference due in ResearchNet, including the leadership reference</td>
<td>October 18, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Final completeness/technical eligibility review, any final revision requests communicated to students by FGS</td>
<td>By October 25, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Final submission of all revised documents in ResearchNet by students</td>
<td>October 28, 2018 by 8am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Final submission of all applications in ResearchNet to Tri-Council by FGS</td>
<td>October 31, 2018 at 8pm ET (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vanier CGS results notified to students and universities</td>
<td>April 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTORS AND ASSISTANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>GPD</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify suitable candidates for Vanier and encourage them to consider applying</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write nomination letters (Refer to the specific requirements of the letter p. 18-)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>By August 24, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit Graduate Program Director nomination letters to Scholarships and Awards Coordinator in FGS (or save to program folder in Graduate Studies shared drive)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>By October 21, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR APPLICATION

REVIEW EVALUATION CRITERIA

Before preparing any application materials, it is essential that you review the evaluation criteria to ensure that your application is strong in each of the categories. For the Vanier competition, the national adjudication committee reviews and ranks nomination files put forward by universities against the three equally weighted selection criteria, as below.

- **Academic excellence**, as demonstrated by past academic results and by transcripts, awards and distinctions.
- **Research potential**, as demonstrated by the candidate's research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research and its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, and any anticipated outcomes.
- **Leadership** (potential and demonstrated ability), as defined by the following qualities:
  - Personal Achievement:
  - Involvement in Academic Life:
  - Volunteerism/community outreach:
  - Civic engagement:
  - Other

WHAT YOU NEED

See the instructions on the Vanier website ([http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination_process-processus_de_mise_en_candidature.html#d3](http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination_process-processus_de_mise_en_candidature.html#d3)) for details. The application documents for the Vanier competition consist of the following:

1. **Application details**, including the title of your research and abstract – via ResearchNet
2. **Research proposal** (max. 2 pages) – upload via ResearchNet
3. **Project references** (max. 5 pages) – upload via ResearchNet
4. **Personal leadership statement** (max. 2 pages) – upload via ResearchNet
5. **Research contributions** (max. 1 page) – upload via ResearchNet
6. **Special circumstances** (if applicable, max. 1 page) – upload via ResearchNet
7. **Two academic letters of reference** – via ResearchNet

* Referees will be sent a link and asked to provide their assessment of candidate’s academic excellence, research potential, and demonstrated and potential leadership ability directly via ResearchNet.
HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR VANIER

The research statement must be clear, concise, and interest the adjudicating reader right away. Remember that the Vanier adjudication committee is multidisciplinary, so your research must be intelligible and engaging to non-specialists. In many instances students fail to declare their actual research question until the third paragraph, which is far too late for this purpose. Research statements must address the following in an active voice:

1. **Research Topic and Specific Question**: Be specific and avoid vague/huge questions. Articulate your research question early in the statement.

2. **Development and Justification**: Why is your proposed study important? What gap in current knowledge does it aim to address? Why does the gap need to be filled? What impact will answering this research question have on the field, on the community, on the world?

3. **Literature/Research Context**: Reference the most important scholarly literature on the topic in order to set your topic, question, and justification in its proper context. The trick, however, is to be brief and to state points succinctly. The context demonstrates that you know the terrain of your field and the place in which you seek to make an original contribution, and also provides non-specialist adjudicators with necessary background and context.

4. **Research Method (and/or Theoretical Perspective)**: It is critical that the research method and theoretical perspective you have selected demonstrate your superior research ability, potential and vision. Both must be appropriate to your field and project, and they must come across to adjudicators as realistic and doable in your proposed study. Adjudicators are looking to see if your research method/theory suits your research question, promises to allow you to effectively answer that question within the scope of a dissertation, and makes an original contribution to methodology or theory.

5. **Contributions/Goals**: Indicate the significance and/or implications of the research. In essence, “so what”? Why are you pursing answers to this research question, and why do those answers matter? To what or to whom do they matter, and what will change—in the field, in the community, in the world—once you’ve answered this question?

6. **Why York?** The fit between student and university is very important to the Vanier adjudication committee, and you should take the opportunity, toward the end of your research statement, to articulate your fit with York. Why have you chosen to pursue your PhD here, and why is York the best place to pursue your research question? What York faculty members, physical resources (i.e. equipment, archives, libraries),
courses, joint programs, research groups/units, or other opportunities makes York
the ideal university to pursue your research and your PhD studies?

RESEARCH STATEMENT OUTLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraphs 1 and 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A working title indicative of the investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The placement of your research project within a large general topic of wide interest which will immediately grab your reader and convince them of your project’s immediacy and relevancy (e.g. cancer, global warming, immigration, economic instability)</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Brief reference to literature I ( e.g. “one prevailing line of thought says X”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brief reference to literature II ( e.g. “critics 1, 2, and 3 have demonstrated Y.”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rationale or justification for why such an investigation/idea should/must be proposed, i.e., what is lacking in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o There’s a gap in the knowledge! (e.g. “However, scholars in these fields have not yet adequately addressed xxxxx…”) XXXX is the subject of your research. This “however” statement, although brief, is extremely important, because it makes very clear the originality and necessity of your research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o This gap is bad! (e.g. “Without such understanding, we are left with an inadequate analysis that perpetuates ill-informed policy decisions and a self-sustaining cycle of resentment and misunderstanding…”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Hero narrative: I will fill this gap! I am the hero who will save us from our problematic lack of knowledge about xxxx and all of the repercussions of that lack! (e.g. “My project will remedy this gap in the literature by examining xx and yy in zz context to more fully illuminate the previously unrecognized relationships between aa and bb.”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions to ask yourself as you think through this section and what you will write:

• Why does the topic merit study? Why does your research question need an answer?
• What drew you to the topic?
• What about it that matters to you, to your field, to the community?

• A very clear and direct statement of your research question and argument
“I am applying for a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship to support the completion of my dissertation on XXX. Through a close and fine-grained analysis of XXX, I will show that in contrast to previous assumptions, in fact xxxx is XXXXXX.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraphs 3 and onward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add substantiating evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Background information, location, history, context, limitations etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Brief literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical framework</td>
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</table>

So much of any study – its possibility, its validity – depends on the appropriateness, ingenuity, and accuracy of the methodology. Regardless of the discipline, the methodology tells readers how one seeks to derive the results.

Methodology may seem more explicit in the sciences since methods and techniques are foregrounded explicitly throughout the education process. Often in the arts and humanities, method is taught implicitly, embedded within the articulation of the project’s content and significance. Techniques in the fine arts are part of a method of production, but in graduate-level research, method moves into intellectual approach, analysis, and concept creation.

A frequent error is to assume that simply presenting the common names of theoretical approaches is sufficient to explain a methodology. To a multidisciplinary adjudicating committee, terms, such as “comparative historicist” or “deconstructive” may do little more than sound like tired jargon. Explain why you are approaching your research question this particular way, rather than in some other way. Explain how the method you propose is best suited to your research project, will allow you to effectively and interestingly answer your research question. In an ideal world, your method will be an innovative departure from those currently in common usage—have you transplanted a method from another field to great effect? Or revised some procedures to mitigate the limitations of a major method in your field? Or combined parts of two existing methods to create an innovative third?—and thus will itself be an original contribution to knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you plan on conducting this research?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- “X number of research participants interviewed in this way with data analyzed using these two programs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “These types of documents from these archives will allow one to cross-reference the existence of Q in relation to the literature of P.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A brief timeline, and an indication of the key resources you’ll call upon (equipment, archives, fieldwork, interviews, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final paragraph

- A strong conclusion
  - Your fit to the award and to York University
  - What your project will contribute to the field: “I expect this research to contribute to debates on XXXX and play an important role in shaping debates on XXXX and XXXX in the coming years.”
  - In addition, if possible, what your project will contribute to the community and/or the world

Sources: Dr. Thomas Loebel (Graduate Program in English, York University), Dr. Karen Kelsky (http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/)

HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP STATEMENT (NEW)

Starting in the 18-19 year Vanier competition, the application requires a maximum of 2 page personal leadership statement, replacing the previous requirement of 1 page leadership statement and a half page special circumstances document (optional). The personal leadership statement should explain the challenges and opportunities that have shaped your doctoral research. Specifically, the following points should be considered:

- **What led you to doctoral research? How has your relevant life experiences and personal circumstances (may include administrative responsibilities, maternity/parental leave, childrearing, illness, cultural or community responsibilities, socio-economic context, or health-related family responsibilities) shaped your academic, research, leadership choices, challenges, and successes.**
- **How has your personal life driven you to share and disseminate your research?**
- **How have you created opportunities to make change, and how have you overcome obstacles to your vision?**
- **How have you fostered your ability to lead others, and how have you leveraged that skill?**
- **Why have you chosen to undertake your PhD at the nominating institution? How does your nominating institution provide an environment that nurtures both your academic and your leadership skills?**
- **Leadership can take many forms. When crafting this statement, be sure to outline not just your accomplishments for the committee, but how those accomplishments required you to leverage your leadership skills to achieve your goals.**

Your academic transcript, your CCV and your reference letters will provide details of your commitments and accomplishments, but this essay gives you the opportunity to present the overarching narrative about your life, leadership accomplishments, and research goals for the selection committee.

It is important to note that the leadership statement and leadership qualities of the applicant are weighted equally with academic excellence and research potential in the
evaluation of your application. Spend as much time, therefore, on the leadership statement as on the research statement.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS DOCUMENT

The Research Contributions document asks you to expand upon the five most significant and relevant research contributions listed in your CCV. A detailed description of what to include in this document can be found here: http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination_process-processus_de_mise_en_candidature.html#d3.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DOCUMENT

The Special Circumstances document is optional and should only be used if you are registered in a combined degree program. More information can be found here: http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination_process-processus_de_mise_en_candidature.html#d4.

NOTE ABOUT THE CANADA COMMON CV

The Vanier application requires that the Canada Common CV (CCV) be created and attached to the application. The process of creating a CCV is lengthy and it is important that you start this part of the application early in the process. Once your CCV is created and validated for the Vanier scholarship through the CCV website (https://ccv-cvc.ca/indexresearcher-eng.frm), you will receive a confirmation number which you will need to enter on ResearchNet to link your application and CCV.

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF A REFERENCE LETTER

Reference letters are used to:

- Distinguish between first class applicants—every applicant for the Vanier has excellent grades, a strong research track record, and leadership skills, so the letters become crucial in setting you apart
- Gain a sense of the applicant as a person
- Ensure that you meet the selection criteria of the scholarship
- Confirm whether the applicant excels in all aspects of the selection criteria
- Confirm what you’ve indicated in your application—don’t get caught in a lie! Applications that fail immediately are those in which an applicant has indicated X and the referee mentions something that leads a committee to believe that X is untrue

FOR STUDENTS: HOW TO FIND ACADEMIC REFEREES

Reference letters form one of the most critical components of any scholarship application. But students rarely spend much time considering how to find a strong referee and when/how to ask for help. You need to explain to your referee the criteria of the scholarship award, the type of reference required by the adjudicating committee, and your suitability for the scholarship. One reason for explaining the scholarship, the type of reference required, and suitability is to allow...
potential referees to determine whether they will be able to write a strong and compelling letter on your behalf. Their honest response should be most important to you, since the ultimate goal is to obtain the strongest letters of reference possible. The following is meant to guide the process of finding a good referee and ensuring you attain the strongest reference possible.

Think Before You Ask

Most individuals seeking a reference believe that “title” is everything. They think that a reference letter from a “President” or “Distinguished Research Professor” or a “CEO” is the best thing to have in a reference. This couldn’t be further from the truth, although it is not recommended to seek reference letters from teaching assistants or, unless in exceptional circumstances, contract academic faculty. The most important thing in a reference letter is substance—a letter that shows that the referee knows you well, has plenty of experience working with, teaching, or supervising you, and can place your strengths and accomplishments in context. The best referee, therefore, is the professor, or supervisor who can provide a letter of substance. Ask yourself these questions when thinking about whom to ask for a letter of reference:

- Have I asked my two most recent research supervisors? Vanier requests that these people are, if applicable, your two referees. This will normally mean that your two assessors are your PhD supervisor and your Master’s supervisor. However, if your PhD and Master’s supervisor are the same person, or if you did a course-based Master’s and did not have a supervisor, or if you do not yet have a PhD supervisor, you will need to carefully consider the questions below in seeking a second academic reference.
  - How long have you known the person you are asking?
  - Can this person evaluate all or most of your academic achievements and research potential? Do they have extensive knowledge and experience of your achievements and potential?
  - Can this person speak to your ability to conduct the proposed research? Have they supervised your research, and do they know what your research plans are for your PhD?
  - Can this person discuss your leadership style, your ability to function in teams, your communication ability? Your academic referees must also speak to your leadership, and indeed are provided with more space to do so than they are to speak about your academic excellence and research potential.
  - If there are aspects of your academic, research, or leadership accomplishments that your referee does not have direct knowledge of (which will almost always be the case), do I believe that my referee can speak to these positively if I provide them with information about these activities?

Provide Information

Adjudication committees want to see letters that speak to the specifics found in your application. They assess how your qualities and experience align with the scholarship and look for a convergence in what you bring as an applicant and what they are looking for in the selection criteria. Vague letters, no matter how praiseworthy, are generally useless and can hinder a committee’s ability to judge the applicant.
It is important to provide your referees with all of the information they need to write a strong letter. You aren’t looking for a good letter; you’re looking for a strong letter that helps set you apart from the other applicants. Provide your referee with the following:

- Your CV
- Any statements you’ve been required to write (e.g., Research Statement, Leadership Statement, Research Contributions, Special Circumstances Statement, etc.)
- Selection criteria of the scholarship and applicable weightings, if available
- List of activities included under the Leadership category

What Should You Ask for From Your Referee?

It is critical that your referee demonstrate an alignment between your academic excellence, research ability and potential, leadership experience and potential, and the selection criteria. Ask them to highlight your strengths, especially with context. Are you the best student they’ve supervised in a 20 year career? Did you achieve the top grade in their course? Did you write one of the best Master’s theses they’ve read? You should also ask them to explain any weaknesses or missing components in your application. See below for more information on writing strong reference letters, which will give you a sense of what you should be asking for.

Mechanics of Submitting Academic Reference Letters

You will send your Vanier academic referees an electronic invitation to write a reference from within the ResearchNet system. This will generate an email to your referee which includes a link to the electronic reference form in ResearchNet. Once your referee has submitted his/her letter, the system will indicate that your reference has been submitted. Your letters will be assessed by the Vanier Nomination committee and your referees may be asked to revise their letters prior to the final deadline.

FOR STUDENTS: HOW TO FIND LEADERSHIP REFEREES

All of the advice on finding a good referee in the above section also applies to finding a referee to write the Vanier leadership reference letter. The leadership reference letter should be written by someone who knows you in a non-academic capacity and should describe how you have demonstrated and will potentially continue to demonstrate leadership. Faculty members may provide this letter, as long as they know you in a non-academic capacity and are addressing your leadership in a non-academic environment. You should choose a referee who has direct experience of your leadership work, can speak to that work in one or more contexts, and who you know thinks highly of you and your leadership. It is better to choose someone in a supervisory or management role rather than a colleague as your referee. Try to secure a referee who can speak to and has experience of your most significant leadership activities, the ones that are at the heart of your leadership statement.

FOR ACADEMIC REFEREES: HOW TO WRITE A STRONG REFERENCE LETTER FOR A VANIER APPLICATION
Writing a strong reference letter for a Vanier nominee can be a time consuming process. Students are often anxious in approaching professors and supervisors to be a referee, and often don’t know what to ask and what information they require in order to write a strong reference letter. When writing a reference letter for a Vanier nominee, you must refer to the student’s research proposal, statement of research contributions, leadership statement, curriculum vitae and the selection criteria for the scholarship. If you were not provided these documents by the students, then please ask for them.

The Vanier “Referee Assessment of a Candidate” form, to which you will have been provided with electronic access by the nominee, is broken down into three sections. Each of these sections corresponds to one area of the Vanier selection criteria. Important to note are the evaluation criteria used by the Vanier Selection committee: each of these three areas—academic excellence, research potential, and leadership (potential and demonstrated ability) - are weighted equally. Each candidate must demonstrate exceptional ability in all categories. The selection committee does not use exceptional achievement in one category to offset shortcomings in another. The committee is looking for referees to describe and support well-rounded potential Vanier Scholars who demonstrate excellence in academics, research, and leadership, and who have the potential to be leaders in Canadian research and society.

**Assessment of Academic Excellence**

Demonstrated by past academic results and by transcripts, awards and distinctions. (Maximum 2,250 characters)

- How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?
- How does this student’s academic ability compare to other students you have known during your academic career?
- Has this student received scholarships? Any internationally awarded?
- Does this student have an exemplary grade point average?
- Has the student studied at any noteworthy institutions? This might include universities or institutes with a national reputation, or the pursuit of degrees or courses at universities outside the student’s home country

“Anthony’s academic achievements, including his stellar A+ average in his Master’s degree, place him in the top 2% of the 60 doctoral students I have supervised over the past 20 years. He was awarded the NSERC Canada Graduate Scholarship for his Master’s degree, as well as the QEII scholarship in his second year.”

**Assessment of Research Potential**

Demonstrated by the candidate’s research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research and its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, the potential benefit to Canadians, and any anticipated outcomes. (Maximum 2,250 characters)

- How does this student’s research ability/potential compare with other students you have known and supervised in the past?
- How has the candidate demonstrated research potential and in what capacity do you evaluate this potential? Have you supervised the candidate’s research before?
• Does the student have publications in prestigious journals? Has the student presented papers or posters at major conferences?
• Has the student held any funded research positions (e.g. NSERC USRA)?
• Has the student won any awards for their research, either scholarships that heavily weight research contributions (e.g. Tri-Council awards), or awards for a specific research project (e.g. a thesis prize)?
• Is the proposed research original? Has the research topic been neglected in the field and published literature?
• Has the student established research collaborations with a diverse set of scholars?

“Anthony stands out among the 60 doctoral students I’ve supervised. His research contributions and the leadership in the lab make are closer to the level of an assistant professor than they are of a second year doctoral student. Part of his Dean’s Award-winning Master’s thesis was accepted for publication in Nature, and he has another article, a groundbreaking analysis of X, under consideration at Science. His proposed topic seeks to answer why it is that X happens when X, a question that still has no satisfactory answer despite much study. Given my own lab’s work in this field, I was immediately intrigued by the approach that Anthony is taking, because it combines X and X while using the X technique, which is, quite frankly, an approach that I failed to consider, and one that has already demonstrated great promise in Anthony’s early trials. Through Anthony, our lab has engendered a highly productive collaboration with his Master’s supervisor, Dr. X, one which has already produced three co-authored publications. Anthony’s exemplary results in the lab are not limited to his experimental ones— he has taken an active leadership role in supervising Master’s and undergraduate students, and spearheaded the new PhD-student-led series of monthly workshops to provide junior students with extra training in time and lab management, experimental design, and collaboration.”

Assessment of Demonstrated and Potential Leadership Ability

(Maximum 4,500 characters), as defined by the following qualities:

• **Personal achievement:**
  - Impactful involvement and achievement in professional programs/associations such as sports, arts, science, business etc.
  - Entrepreneurial achievement (start-up company); and/or
  - Foreign travel and study

• **Involvement in academic life:**
  - Mentoring/teaching;
  - Supervisory experience;
  - Involvement in student government and in the university community, including committees, teams, senate, boards, ethics committees, etc.;
  - Project management;
  - Roles in academic/professional societies; and/or
  - Organization of conferences, meetings, courses etc.

• **Volunteerism/community outreach:**
  - Community involvement in charity or not-for-profit organizations

• **Civic engagement:**
Parliamentary page positions and internships; Political activity; and/or Elected positions

Other

This list is not intended to include all possible categories and is provided for guidance only.

Despite the fact that you are an academic referee, it is critical to know a lot about the student’s leadership ability. Note that the leadership section of the letter is given nearly twice as much space as the academic and research areas—leadership is at the core of the Vanier selection criteria. A substantive and enthusiastic assessment of the nominee’s leadership activities and potential is paramount to the success of a Vanier application.

Please speak about leadership in an academic context, but if possible, do not make this the sole, or even the primary, focus of this section. Vanier adjudication committees look for a range of non-academic leadership experiences (e.g., team-leader with Habitat for Humanity, sport coach, volunteer director of plays, ) as evidence of a nominee’s initiative, breadth of knowledge and experience, and possession of transferable skills that will help their research have an impact in and beyond the academy. However, it is also critical that both academic and non-academic leadership activities be integrated within the leadership section of the reference letter to demonstrate a sustained commitment to leadership and exemplary ability and potential to lead.

In speaking about the nominee’s leadership, it is important to include mentions of the following:

- Goal achievement (which is in line with the nominee’s vision for change and improvement of self, the field, society)
- Self-management (the nominee’s ability to establish and set goals, prioritize tasks, self-improve)
- Social skills (the nominee’s good personal and business relationships, communication and negotiation skills, dependability, respect by the others)
- Other characteristics (creative, initiative, courage, commitment, strategic thinking, ability to solve complex problems, curiosity, artistic ability, etc.)

The text below is intended as an example; please also see the section on the graduate program director’s nomination letter for additional sample text.

“Anthony demonstrates his leadership ability through personal achievement, involvement in academic life, volunteerism and civic engagement. During high school and his undergraduate degree, Anthony was a volunteer coach with the Vancouver Accessible Sports Association, teaching soccer and life skills to teenagers with physical and developmental disabilities. Anthony’s ultimate goal was to replicate that model across Canada, and during his Master’s degree, Anthony founded the not-for-profit organization All Sport, which raises funds and provides training to help small communities across Canada create their own accessible sport associations and help to ensure that all young Canadians, regardless of ability, have equal access to sporting opportunities. Anthony and All Sport have met this goal, and to date have enabled the creation of 29 new accessible sport associations across Canada and have raised $4.1M. Anthony is himself a competitive soccer player, and was on the bronze-medal winning
2009 Canadian junior national team. The exemplary leadership and initiative that Anthony developed playing soccer, with VASA, and with All Sport has had a significant positive impact on the Graduate Program in Chemistry and on York University as a whole. In addition to developing my lab’s training program for junior scientists, Anthony teamed with his fellow PhD student Lina Davies to organize and host a two-day professional development workshop for graduate students in science, which was held this spring. It was attended by nearly 200 students, and included workshops and talks on social media, career development, oral communication, time management, and proposal writing by leading scientists and trainers from York and beyond. The event was so successful that Anthony has been asked to run it annually. It should be noted that Anthony maintains his commitment to mentoring and training other students, and to running All Sport, while achieving an A average, publishing regularly, and generating exceptional results in our lab. ”

FOR LEADERSHIP REFREES: HOW TO WRITE A STRONG VANIER LETTER OF REFERENCE

The leadership reference letter should provide the Vanier adjudication committee with a broader and more complete understanding of the nominee’s achievements and strengths. Please review the above section, for academic referees, and the below section, for graduate program directors, for guidance on writing a strong letter of reference. The same guidelines apply to the leadership reference letter. The key difference is that your letter will focus solely on the nominee’s non-academic and leadership achievements, and will place those achievements within a context that extends beyond the academy.

Your letter should be written on your corporate or personal letterhead, and should be a maximum of two pages. When the letter is complete, you should email it directly to the nominee, who will upload it to ResearchNet. You may be requested, after the entire nomination package has been reviewed by the University, to make amendments to your letter in order to ensure that the package is as strong as possible. If you would like additional guidance on writing a strong leadership reference letter, please see the contact page at the end of this document.

FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR: WRITING A NOMINATION LETTER

Overview

The Vanier Secretariat instructs universities that the candidates’ nomination letters be issued by their respective graduate departments, and at York University, graduate program directors will be asked to write them. The nomination letter will be the first document the national adjudication committee reads, and thus forms the adjudication committee’s first impression of the nominee. It must convince the adjudicators, from the beginning, of the nominee’s excellence and award-worthiness. The Vanier application requires that the nomination letter provide a high-level overview of the nominee’s academic and leadership strengths and accomplishments, and to frame the entire nomination package for the Vanier adjudication committee at York and at the national level.

The nomination letter must be a maximum of 2 pages and be printed on the York University’s letterhead. According to the Vanier Secretariat, the nomination letter should address the following points:
1. **Rationale for the choice of candidate:**
   - Highlight the factors used to determine why the student is deserving of a Vanier CGS. Clearly articulate the excellence of the candidate according to the three selection criteria: academic excellence, research potential and leadership (potential and demonstrated ability). Ensure that the letters focus on leadership potential and demonstrated abilities.

2. **Research training environment:**
   - Elaborate on the appropriateness of the supervisor in terms of resources, funding, publications, their research and training environment. Elaborate on the funding, facilities/resources and personnel that will be made available to support the candidate as they carry out their proposed research and develop their leadership potential.
   - Discuss how the research interests/background of the student and supervisor align with the institution's priorities (Ensure that claim about uniqueness of the research environment are accurate.)
   - Discuss how the supervisor’s commitment will be available to support the candidate in furthering their professional and leadership development.
   - If known, comment on the research group and/or faculty with whom the candidate will interact and how the Canadian institution will support the development of the candidate's leadership potential. If unknown, please address the reasons behind why the candidate has not selected a supervisor and research environment.

3. **Rationale of recruiting the candidate:**
   - Outline how the institution's research environment will foster the student's research interest and leadership skills.
   - Elaborate on the commitment from the department or university as to what kind of benefits they will offer the potential scholar.

4. **Recruitment and student mobility:**
   - Comment on how the institution's nomination of the candidate promotes the recruitment of new foreign or Canadian candidates to Canadian institutions.
   - If the candidate has completed a previous degree within your institution, provide justification for the lack of mobility and an explanation as to why it is in the candidate's best interest to stay at the same institution (i.e. research/paid institution (or its affiliate), supervisor or co-supervisor, availability of specialized equipment).
## CONTACT US

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<tr>
<th>Contact Name or Position</th>
<th>Type of Support Available</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yuko Sorano</strong></td>
<td>Substantive and technical queries from nominees, referees, Graduate Program Assistants, Directors and faculty supervisors</td>
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<td>Research Officer</td>
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<td>Faculty of Graduate Studies</td>
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<td>416-736-2100 x44168</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:fgsro@yorku.ca">fgsro@yorku.ca</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Richolette Freckleton</strong></td>
<td>Technical questions regarding eligibility, process and timelines from students, questions about document submission</td>
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<td>Scholarships &amp; Awards Coordinator</td>
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<td><strong>Graduate Program Directors</strong></td>
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