Frequently Asked Questions

- What does PI stand for?
  Principal Investigator. It's an NSF term referring to Bo, Raj, and Andy. Bo is our PI. Raj and Andy are co-PIs.

- Who is the "Grant Administrator"?
  Currently, this is Dulcie Fisher. In the past, that was Nicholas or Amanda.

- Why do we keep talking about being "collaborative"?
  One of the key principles about our team culture is that this is a collaborative effort between Computing Security, Computer Science, and Software Engineering. Nobody should be working alone, and everyone should be valuing each others’ inputs. This is in contrast to a lot of academic settings where the environment is competitive.
  
  - Every SFS scholar is an accomplished student already
  - Every SFS scholar has proven themselves
  - Every SFS scholar lacks knowledge in some area
  - Get over it.
    - Never underestimate someone’s ability to learn.
    - Never assume you’re smarter just because you know one fact more than someone else (and vice versa!!)
    - Realize that you have enormous potential in leveraging each other’s skills, education, and experiences.

- What is the Lock Challenge?
  See The Lock Challenge

- How do I join Slack?
  Email Andy (andy@se.rit.edu) or Bo (bo.yuan@rit.edu) and they will invite you. Our slack resides at http://rit-cybercorps.slack.com

- How should I use Slack?
  We use slack for the majority of our communications. If you direct-message most people, it will be like a text message (and is usually totally welcome!).
  
  - We use #announcements for infrequent announcements. No discussion here, please.
  - We use #general for broad questions and discussions.
  - We use #resumes for uploading resumes and getting feedback from your peers. Please be constructive and helpful!
  - We have channels for individual projects too (e.g. #drones)
  - Feel free to request new groups and ideas.

- How should we use #resumes on Slack?
  
  - Always be constructive and helpful.

- How should I book travel?

- What can I do about health insurance premiums?

- Do I have to go to the SFS job fair?

- What are the expectations for the SFS Job Fair?

- What counts toward the 15 hours/week stipend time?

- I'm BS/MS, when do I become a graduate student?

- How do I handle the scholarship with income taxes?

- What if I want to combine my capstone or senior project with an SFS project?

- How do I join a research team? Can I change teams?

- What is expected at our weekly SFS meetings?

- Are there any jobs that are pre-approved by SFS?

- What should we include in Next Year's Plan?
Any time someone uploads their resume to #resumes we ask that you provide constructive feedback. Sometimes we'll ask everyone to participate as an activity.

Can I use this wiki for my SFS project?

Absolutely! It belongs to all of us. We might have forgotten to give you access - just ask!

What can I spend my professional development money on?

It's important to understand that the only money that is yours is the stipend. The other money in SFS is earmarked to you. Professional Development money spending is subject to the approval of the PIs.

Each year, we are required to have every SFS scholar fly out to Washington, DC for our career fair. (See below question for more info on that.) The cost of that trip will come out of your professional development fund.

All expenses must be pre-approved by the PIs and coordinated with our grant administrator. Sometimes we will need to do the purchasing, sometimes we will do a reimbursement.

Approved spending for professional development funds includes:

- Travel to security-related conferences (e.g. CCS, DefCon, Black Hat, etc.)
- Certification training
- Laptop
- Books, includes e-books and audio books that are not required for your courses (as long as they help you professionally)
- Other specialized hardware for specific SFS projects

The professional development money is recommended to be spent EACH YEAR. The new budget cycle begins at the beginning of each school year. Some years, depending on our funding situation and your graduation schedule, we have some flexibility about this date. Talk to Bo about this one.

Some hardware required by team projects can be purchased under PI supply budget and the hardware is intended to be shared among team members.

Can I get reimbursed for travel to Job Interviews?

In most cases, the employer will cover the cost of your travel and/or accommodation for job interviews. In the rare event that the employer does not cover your trip expenses, you may be able to use your professional development allowance. The PI's will consider expense requests on a case-by-case basis. Only travel for the purposes of attending security conferences and job interviews will be considered.

How should I book travel?

All SFS travel should be booked via our grant administrator, once you get approval from PIs. We have our own travel agency that RIT works with and we would rather not do reimbursement for things like flights.

For flights, send our grant administrator the flight information you want and he will make the arrangements for you.

For hotels and meals, still work with our grant administrator, although that may still be done via reimbursement.

What can I do about health insurance premiums?

- The budget also includes a health insurance premium reimbursement
- Can't be used for individual purchases, such as co-pays or deductibles.
- If you are on your parent's health insurance they may still be able to make use of this. You might be able to save them money. But, not every insurance plan has premiums. Talk to Bo about details.

Do I have to go to the SFS job fair?

Usually, yes. You are required to attend the job fair unless:

- You have secured a post graduation position by accepting an offer. Accepting a conditional offer is not considered secured.
- You have explicit approval by the PIs.

To clarify:

- You must attend the SFS job fair if you already have an internship lined up.
- You must attend the SFS job fair if you only have conditional offers.
- You must attend the SFS job fair if you have not signed an offer yet.

What are the expectations for the SFS Job Fair?

This is a mandatory trip for every SFS scholar, typically in early January. Job fair attendance is required even if you have offers already. We ask that you participate in the job fair by networking with the recruiters and support your colleagues.
Do not expect to go sightseeing in DC unless you've received prior approval from a PI.

Bring a suit and dress professionally. Expect interviews.

Expect to be there for the entire job fair (2-3 days).

What counts toward the 15 hours/week stipend time?

- Applying for jobs, updating resume, resume feedback
- Attending any cybersecurity seminars
- Attending CSEC-88
- Progress on research projects
- Approved certification training (e.g. BSidesROC)
- Learning a new technique or tool for an SFS research project
- The Lock Challenge

What does not count: classwork, extra curricular activities such as clubs sports, competitions, etc.

We do not count attending RITSec as part of stipend time.

We understand that there is a lot of overlap between your classwork, your extra-curricular work, and SFS stuff. Time spent on, say, learning Python, could be considered classwork or SFS if your project involves Python. We ask that you use your best effort to discern the difference.

I'm BS/MS, when do I become a graduate student?

The decision of whether or not you're a grad or undergrad is not up to the PIs, it's up to the registrar.

The rules of when a person is technically an undergrad or a grad is highly complex. Transfer credits, differences in programs, credit count, and AAR quirks all factor into it. The process of switching from undergrad to grad should be automatic, but sometimes the change does not get triggered. You can check your current standing in SIS. If that is not what you expect it to be, then work it out with the registrar. We have had scholars in the past work with the registrar to correct the record.

Your standing as an undergrad or grad matters in terms of stipend pay scale (i.e. grad students get paid more than undergrads). If you make a correction with the registrar, contact the PI (Bo) immediately so he can make the necessary adjustments.

How do I handle the scholarship with income taxes?

See this page at the IRS. The SFS stipend is considered taxable, but tuition, fees, and professional development is not taxable.

What if I want to combine my capstone or senior project with an SFS project?

We are open to this, but will figure it out on a case-by-case basis. Talk to the PIs about it.

How do I join a research team? Can I change teams?

- If you are a volunteer, then feel free to jump into a Slack channel and ask how you can get involved. All volunteers are welcome to our projects.
- If you are an SFS scholar, we prefer to not have a lot of team changes in the middle of a semester. Talk to a PI about your desire to change teams. Between semesters is when we prefer to change teams.

We want to encourage our scholars to focus on depth over breadth.

What is expected at our weekly SFS meetings?

Our weekly meetings are a form of collaborative teaching where we share and learn from each other week after week.

If you are a scholar, you will have one presentation each semester to prepare for. Check the schedule now!

Please come to these meetings planning on providing ideas and feedback to those who are presenting.

Are there any jobs that are pre-approved by SFS?

The SFS program, as well as the PIs, need to approve of all jobs that scholars register.

Currently, as of Fall 2021, SFS is pushing for jobs in agencies in the Executive Branch of the government, so those jobs are virtually guaranteed to be approved. Other jobs, such as FFRDCs, are less likely to be approved.

What should we include in Next Year’s Plan?
At the end of each semester, we need a brief plan. This can be an email to the PIs.

- Which SFS project(s) do you want to be on? Faculty shadowing, research project, outreach, etc.
- How many classes are you planning on taking in the fall?
- When was the last time you met with an academic advisor about your plan? (approximately)
- Any professional development spending we should talk about?
- What are your extra-curricular plans for next year?
  - Clubs (if leadership, include your role).
  - Competitions (include your role)
  - Non-SFS Travel
  - Conferences