



April 25, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

As a graduating ARCS Scholar and PhD candidate in Earth Sciences, I'm deeply concerned about the state of federal science funding and what it means for the next generation of researchers. Federal financial support, especially from the National Science Foundation (NSF), is the backbone of research in my field. But recent cuts to NSF fellowships and layoff across federal science agencies are shrinking opportunities and destabilizing career paths for early-career scientists like myself.

The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program is one of the most prestigious and competitive awards for graduate students. It provides three years of financial support and plays a crucial role in allowing students to pursue research with faculty who may not have funding otherwise. While I did not receive this fellowship, I earned two Honorable Mentions, which recognizes strong applications but does not include funding. The number of fellowships awarded this year was slashed from ~2,000 to just ~1,000. That's a staggering shift. For many students, this may mean postponing or not pursuing graduate education entirely.

Postdoctoral fellowships have also been shrinking. In just the past few months, the NSF archived fellowships from the Office of Polar Programs, Ocean Sciences, and Directorate for Biology. One of my colleagues spent over two months writing a detailed, 10-page research proposal, only to learn days before the deadline that the fellowship had been cancelled. Another colleague submitted a full application, only to find out later that the program would not be funded. None of us currently have firm post-graduation plans.

The impact goes beyond academia. Federal workforce reductions have affected highly trained employees at NOAA, EPA, Department of Interior, and NSF itself including the Program Director for Polar Programs, whose temporary layoff jeopardized oversight of polar science. At the NSF Ice Core Facility, which archives samples of polar ice, staff layoffs threaten the curation of irreplaceable scientific records. Overall, these reductions mean that we are competing for employment with many highly skilled, highly educated workers for similar roles at places that are likely not hiring often.

Despite these fewer opportunities and the heightened competition, I remain deeply grateful. The unwavering support from the ARCS Foundation has provided the stability I lacked elsewhere. It allowed me to pursue creative ideas, to receive mentorship, and to contribute to advancing science. Thank you for recognizing the importance of science funding to create a better future for tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Austin Carter".

Austin Carter

5th-Year Ph.D. Candidate in Earth Sciences

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