

*Erika S. Mesh – Eligibility Essay*

In reviewing the eligibility required for the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, I feel my current circumstances best meet the criteria outlined by the third choice in the application:

*Second year graduate student in the Summer or Fall Term 2012. I have completed no more than 12 months of full-time graduate study or the equivalent, or I have completed only part-time graduate study or a combination of full- and part-time graduate study with no more than 24 part-time semester hours or 36 part-time quarter hours, or I have completed a joint baccalaureate-master's degree program and have completed no additional graduate study by August 1, 2012. Participation in summer bridge programs is not counted in the 12-month period.*

However, I wish to explain my current situation more clearly. As my transcripts will show, I completed my B.S. in Software Engineering from Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in May 2002. Between May 2002 and September 2011, I completed four graduate level courses at RIT (a total of 16 part-time quarter hours). I then enrolled full-time in the M.S. in Software Engineering program at RIT.

As of August 1, 2012, I had completed 11 months of my M.S. coursework. My project-based M.S. degree was conferred in November 2012. While the criteria above do not refer to previous graduate degrees, the program solicitation indicates that a M.S. degree outside of a joint B.S./M.S. program is generally grounds for ineligibility. However, the M.S. program I completed was project-based, with no option for a thesis or research track. Although I had a gap of ten years between completion of my B.S. and M.S., the end result is as if I had completed a joint program. In fact, a joint B.S./M.S. was always my intent, but when I entered college in 1997, only RIT had an undergraduate SE program and there were no joint degree programs in the country.

Although my various undergraduate and graduate activities have exposed me to a wide array of research, my first opportunity for large-scale research came via my recent enrollment as a Ph.D. student in Computing and Information Sciences at RIT under Dr. J. Scott Hawker. Our work regarding software engineering process improvement for scientific research projects is a new and exciting effort for both me and RIT. I am applying for this NSF Graduate Research Fellowship to enable me to pursue my passion for software engineering research. Through this fellowship I also will support research opportunities for RIT SE undergraduate students and host SE workshops for scientific researchers from both academia and industry. Thank you for this exciting opportunity.