



ASCEND^R

OPEN HOUSE



27 August 2026

Today's Open House

- **About ASCEND^R**
- **An overview of ASCEND^R programs**
- **What to expect in the next recruitment cycle**

About ASCEND^R

ASCEND^R OPEN
HOUSE



ASCEND^R

ADVANCING STEM CAREERS THROUGH EDUCATION,
NETWORKING, AND DEVELOPMENT + RESEARCH

A MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL STEM RESEARCH AND GRADUATE PATHWAYS INITIATIVE

ASCEND^R is a **Department of War-funded initiative** led by the Alliance of Hispanic Serving Research Universities (HSRU).

The initiative strengthens graduate pathways, faculty engagement, and collaborative research aligned with national defense priorities and warfighter needs.

ASCEND^R OPEN
HOUSE

ASCEND^R Programs

Four programs create a connected ecosystem for advancing research, developing talent, strengthening institutional pathways, and expanding engagement with the defense research enterprise.



Institutional advising and partnerships that strengthen student pathways to DoW opportunities.



Funded graduate research experiences with faculty mentorship and professional development.



Funding for faculty-led, defense-aligned research and graduate student engagement.



Faculty leadership development connected to research, innovation, and national defense priorities.

A background image showing two men in a professional setting, possibly a meeting or collaborative work environment. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a light blue shirt, looking towards the right. The man on the right is also wearing glasses and a light blue shirt, looking towards the left. The image has a blue overlay.

ASCEND^R Research and Leadership Program Overview

ASCEND^R Research

A faculty-led program advancing research aligned with DoW science and technology priorities through targeted funding, graduate student engagement, innovative solutions, and academic-defense collaboration.

- Up to \$200K award for one year of defense-aligned research
- Graduate student integration and development
- Faculty leadership development through the ASCEND^R Leadership Program
- Pathway to future DoW funding and partnerships

DoW Critical Technology Areas

01

APPLIED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

APPLIED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AAI)

Transforming the War Department into an "AI-First" organization, aligned with the White House AI Action Plan, to revolutionize decision-making and operational efficiency.

02

BIOMANUFACTURING

BIOMANUFACTURING (BIO)

Harnessing living systems to produce critical capabilities and substances at scale, eliminating supply chain vulnerabilities and enhancing resilience.

03

CONTESTED LOGISTICS TECHNOLOGIES

CONTESTED LOGISTICS TECHNOLOGIES (LOG)

Overcoming the challenges of disrupted or denied logistics to ensure seamless resupply and operational continuity in contested environments.

04

QUANTUM AND BATTLEFIELD INFORMATION DOMINANCE

QUANTUM & BATTLEFIELD INFO DOMINANCE (Q-BID)

Delivering advanced capabilities to maintain communications, precision navigation and timing (PNT), and electromagnetic spectrum maneuverability in degraded or denied environments.

05

SCALED DIRECTED ENERGY

SCALED DIRECTED ENERGY (SCADE)

Breaking through affordability and production barriers to deliver cost-effective, high energy solutions capable of neutralizing threats with precision.

06

SCALED HYPERSONICS

SCALED HYPERSONICS (SHY)

Fielding Mach 5+ hypersonic weapons en masse to strike targets with unmatched speed, precision, and survivability.

Research Applicant Profile

- **Early- to mid-career** research or tenure/tenure-track faculty at HSRU Alliance institutions
- Faculty prepared to lead defense-aligned research with **up to two Co-PIs**
- Research teams that **integrate at least one Graduate Research Assistant (GRA)**
- PIs, Co-PIs, and GRAs who meet the program's citizenship requirements (**U.S.-born or naturalized U.S. citizens**)

Faculty Leadership Experience

Participating PIs and Co-PIs develop the relationships and perspective needed to engage with the defense research enterprise.

- Connect with DoW officials, military leaders, and defense researchers
- Participate in defense-focused roundtables and innovation discussions
- Build capacity to mentor students and pursue long-term partnerships
- Visit operational units, laboratories, and defense facilities

Research Program: Looking Ahead

Anticipated Timeline

- **Early-October:** RFP and application launch
- **October-January:** *Limited submission competition process*
- **October-January:** Information Sessions
- **Early-February:** Application deadline

Additional program details and application requirements will be covered during the Research Program Information Session.

ASCEND^R Fellowship Overview

ASCEND^R Fellowship

A one-year, cohort-based fellowship supporting STEM doctoral students in building the research experience, professional networks, and knowledge needed to engage with the national security research enterprise.

- \$12,500 award for academic and professional development
- Faculty-mentored, defense-relevant research
- Cohort-based learning and professional development
- Networking with government, academic, and industry leaders

Core Themes

Communicating Research for Impact

Defense Enterprise and Career Pathways

Navigating DoW Systems and Processes

Building Strategic Networks

Professional Development Experience

Expert-Led Learning

Expert-led sessions on national security priorities, defense research, leadership, and career pathways.

Cohort Engagement

Structured discussions that support reflection, collaboration, and professional networking across the cohort.

Applied Practice

Guided activities that integrate insights from sessions through structured reflection and practical exercises.

Fellow Applicant Profile

- STEM doctoral students enrolled full time at an HSRU institution.
- Students approaching the dissertation stage with defense-relevant research.
- Applicants who meet the program's citizenship requirements (U.S.-born or naturalized U.S. citizens)
- Applicants with a minimum GPA of 3.5 and strong academic standing.
- Applicants with a faculty mentor and propose research aligned with DoW priorities.

Fellowship Program: Looking Ahead

Anticipated Timeline

- **Early-October:** Institutional opt-in letters
- **Late-October:** Applications open
- **October-January:** Information Sessions
- **Early-February:** Application deadline

Additional program details and application requirements will be covered during the Fellowship Program Information Session.

ASCEND^R Opportunity Advising

ASCEND^R Opportunity Advising

ASCEND^R Opportunity Advising focuses on strengthening how HSRU institutions connect undergraduate and graduate students with DoW-related opportunities.

Through collaboration across the Alliance and with DoW partners, the initiative will:

- Strengthen institutional advising, preparation, and student support
- Leverage expertise and resources across HSRU Institutions
- Develop shared, sustainable approaches across HSRU institutions



Washington, D.C. | September 28-30, 2026

The Think Lab will serve as the initial convening to inform the development and future direction of ASCEND^R Opportunity Advising.

Think Lab participants will:

- Examine how students currently identify, prepare for, and access opportunities
- Identify effective practices, institutional assets, and common barriers
- Explore a collaborative cohort-advising model and regional partnership pathways
- Recommend priorities and strategies for the next phase of the initiative

Information session dates and additional program details will be shared through the ASCEND^R website and newsletter.

QUESTIONS?