



# University of Pittsburgh

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences  
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TO: Directors of Graduate Studies in Eligible Departments and Programs

FROM: Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

CC: Coordinator for Graduate Student Services  
Graduate Administrators in Eligible Units

DATE: November 20, 2019

SUBJECT: Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship Nominations for 2020-2021

Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowships (henceforth: Mellon Fellowships) are to be “awarded to students of exceptional ability and promise” who are pursuing a Ph.D. in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. The primary consideration in ranking nominees is therefore the nominee’s promise of achieving scholarly distinction in their field. In recent years there have been circa 100 to 120 nominations for approximately 50 Mellon Fellowships. Departments and programs eligible for Mellon Fellowships are:

**Humanities:**

Classics  
Communication  
English  
French  
History of Art & Architecture  
Hispanic Languages & Literatures  
Hispanic Linguistics  
Linguistics  
Music  
Slavic Languages & Literatures  
Theatre Arts

**Natural sciences:**

Biological Sciences  
Chemistry  
Computational Biology  
Computational Modeling & Simulation  
Geology & Environmental Science  
Mathematics  
Molecular Biophysics  
Neuroscience  
Physics & Astronomy  
Psychology  
Statistics

**Social sciences:**

Anthropology  
Economics  
History  
Political Science  
Sociology

Departments and programs are invited to submit two nominations more than the highest number of Mellon Fellowships awarded to students in the department or program in any of the previous five years. Each unit will be notified of their maximum number of nominations.

In addition, by the deadline each Department must send to the Office of Graduate Studies :

(1) a completed departmental spreadsheet (template attached to this memorandum)

(2) a rank-ordered list of nominees in memo format. The memo’s first section should explain the strategy the Department follows in determining in which year to nominate candidates and the rationale and specific criteria by which it selects and ranks candidates. Departments should carefully yet concisely outline the strategic function that Mellon Fellowships fulfil within their Department.

DGSes should explain the rank-order of nominees in relation to the strategic functions of the fellowship: why this student at this stage of a graduate career? Many departments and programs nominate candidates who are beginning to write their dissertations. In some fields, it makes sense instead to use the fellowship year earlier in the student's progress toward degree, especially to conduct research that might enable them to win external support in a subsequent year. One or two programs nominate strong incoming applicants for a Mellon Fellowship. There are other viable alternatives, but they each need to be explained and then followed consistently by the nominating unit. Effective memos also address any unusual features of a graduate student's record (e.g., time to degree, low grades, etc.).

This section should be followed by a brief paragraph on each applicant, addressing the following points (two to three sentences per point):

- summarize the nature of applicant's research, why the topic and /or approach are particularly innovative and potentially impactful in the field, and how their research will benefit from the fellowship (3-5 sentences)
- applicant's greatest strengths (2 sentences)
- applicant's progress in degree program relative to program expectations and cohort (2-3 sentences)
- feel free to highlight aspects of the candidate's personal journey or contributions to the department, peers, or field that the committee should consider in evaluating the dossier (2-3 sentences)

*Please note:* If a student has previously held competitive fellowship support from inside and/or outside the University, the ranking memo must address what the student has accomplished with the previous fellowship(s) and why an additional year of fellowship support should be considered for the nominee given the finite number of fellowships available for all graduate students. Please consider any two-term (or longer) competitive external or internal fellowships. If you are unsure if a student has received a fellowship that must be addressed, please do not hesitate to contact Abby Fire ([alf189@pitt.edu](mailto:alf189@pitt.edu)).

Students can be nominated for a second Mellon Fellowship year during their time in the degree program. Students who held a Mellon Fellowship during their first year of graduate study may be nominated for a second Fellowship year *beyond their second year* in the degree program.

Departmental rankings of nominees are taken very seriously by the committee but it is not bound by these rankings as members evaluate the entirety of materials submitted in the dossiers.

Both the ranking memo and the departmental spreadsheet must be emailed to Abby Fite ([alf189@pitt.edu](mailto:alf189@pitt.edu)) by **4 PM on Monday, January 13**.

There are three categories of students:

- Newly admitted students
- Continuing students who have never held a Mellon Fellowship or other competitive university or external fellowship
- Continuing students who previously held a Mellon Fellowship or other competitive university or external fellowship (*Please note:* a student can only be selected for a maximum of two years of Mellon Fellowships during their time in the program.)

For continuing students, the following documentation must be uploaded in the Mellon Application Tracking System (MATS) by **4 PM on Monday, January 13**:

- A CV (no more than two pages)
- A research proposal (no more than three pages double-spaced); must reference any previous competitive fellowship support
- A current Pitt transcript or academic record (does not need to be official)
- Three letters of recommendation

*Please note:* Letters of recommendation should be of reasonable length – no more than two single-spaced pages and preferably shorter. Long letters, apart from being less likely to be read as carefully, can make it seem as if the recommender is more invested and knowing about the project than the student whose statement is limited to three double-spaced pages. Letters should assess the originality and potential impact of a student’s research and the feasibility of completion within the fellowship period if the fellowship is for the final year in program and highlight pivotal factors in the nominee’s background, progress, productivity, and accomplishments.

For incoming students, the Office of Graduate Studies will directly access all required materials in GATS. Please do not ask the applicant for additional documentation.

Members of the selection committee will be provided access to ranking memos, spreadsheets, and application materials for all nominees before gathering to select the Mellon Fellows as well as ranked alternates.

The selection committee will be applying the rubric printed below. Research has shown that the use of rubrics can help evaluators compare different types of proposals using one set of metrics and can mitigate the effects of unconscious bias. As the selection committee evaluates nominees, members apply the appropriate rubric for incoming or continuing students and assign a separate score for each of the three categories specified. Please review and share the rubric with nominees and the departmental selection committee.

The 2020-2021 awards are expected to be announced by **Friday, February 14**.

**Rubric for Continuing Students:**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Pts</b>	<b>Evaluation standards</b>
<p><b>#1</b> The clarity and accessibility, especially to non-specialist readers, of the student statement</p> <p><b>4 points</b></p>	Student statement	<b>4</b>	The research statement is excellent, conveying clearly and compellingly the rationale for the research, the methodology to be used, and the potential impact of the research.
		<b>3</b>	The statement is clear and conveys to the non-specialist reader the rationale for the research, the methodology to be used, and the potential impact of the research.
		<b>2</b>	The statement fails to communicate well at least one of the three fundamental requirements, rationale, methods, or impact, and/or the statement is challenging for a non-specialist to understand.
		<b>1</b>	The statement does not fully communicate to a non-specialist reader more than one of the three fundamental requirements, rationale, methods or impact.
<p><b>#2</b> Originality and potential impact of the proposed and/or ongoing research</p> <p><b>3 points</b></p>	Student statement; recommendation letters; departmental memo	<b>3</b>	The proposed research is original and exciting. It seems likely that the research will have a substantial impact in the nominee’s field.
		<b>2</b>	The proposed research is original, and the impact is likely to be moderate to strong.
		<b>1</b>	The originality and/or the impact of the proposed research is not addressed in the available materials or the originality and impact are likely to be modest to moderate.
<p><b>#3</b> Additional factors<sup>a</sup></p> <p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress and productivity of the student in the field and degree</li> <li>• Aspects of the student’s background, skill set, or initiative that make the student an especially compelling candidate</li> <li>• Likely benefit to the student of the Mellon Fellowship, e.g., a student who has received nearly all prior support in the form of TA appointments, or a student who must do research off campus</li> <li>• In cases where the student has previously held a competitive fellowship, an evaluation of how well the resource was used</li> </ul> <p><b>3 points</b></p>	Courses history; grades; publications; recommendation letters; CV; departmental memo; student statement	<b>3</b>	The additional factor or factors make this student particularly outstanding or deserving relative to other nominees.
		<b>2</b>	The number and types of additional factors are typical of the very talented nomination pool.
		<b>1</b>	The number and types of additional factors are less compelling than typical students in the pool.

<sup>a</sup> A student need not have strengths in all of these areas (and other factors can be considered) to get the maximum score. One student with a very compelling additional factor could receive a 3 while another who has two or more additional factors might receive a 2.

**Rubric for Incoming Students:**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Pts</b>	<b>Evaluation standards<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>#1</b> The clarity and content of the statement <sup>b</sup>  <b>4 points</b>	Student statement	<b>4</b>	The application statement is excellent, conveying clearly and compellingly the nominee's background, interests, and reasons for applying to the program.
		<b>3</b>	The statement is clear and conveys the nominee's background, interests, and reasons for applying to the program.
		<b>2</b>	The statement is not written well and/or fails to communicate one of the three important themes, background, interests, and reasons for applying.
		<b>1</b>	The statement does not fully communicate more than one of the three important themes.
<b>#2</b> The student's accomplishments as an undergraduate and/or master's student  <b>3 points</b>	Courses; grades; publications; recommendation letters; CV; departmental memo; student statement	<b>3</b>	The student has been extraordinarily productive and successful in their prior career.
		<b>2</b>	The student has exhibited an impressive productivity and degree of success in their prior career.
		<b>1</b>	The student has exhibited a strong productivity and degree of success in their prior career.
<b>#3</b> Additional factors <sup>c</sup> <i>Examples:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of the student's background, skill set, or initiative that make the student an especially compelling candidate</li> <li>• Aspects of the student's goals that make this student a particularly good fit to the department to which they are applying</li> </ul> <b>3 points</b>	Courses, grades, publications, recommendation letters, CV, departmental memo, student statement	<b>3</b>	The additional factor or factors make this student particularly outstanding or deserving relative to other nominees.
		<b>2</b>	The number and types of additional factors are typical of the nomination pool.
		<b>1</b>	The number and types of additional factors are less compelling than typical students in the pool.

<sup>a</sup> Please keep in mind that incoming nominees have not purposely written the statement according to these criteria and do not know that they have been nominated for this fellowship; <sup>c</sup> A student need not have strengths in all of these areas (and other factors can be considered) to get the maximum score. One student with a very compelling additional factor could receive a 3 while another who has two or more additional factors might receive a 2.