

DEMYSTIFYING THE FORD FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

Wed. Nov. 13, 2017 at 3pm, SRB Multipurpose Room

13 attendees

Panelists:

- Magda Garcia (Chicana/o Studies)
- Adrienne Tsikewa, (Linguistics)
- Professor Vilna Bashi Treitler (Black Studies)
- Rosie Bermudez (Chicana/o Studies)
- Professor Denise Segura (Sociology)
- Moderator: Professor Miroslava Chavez-Garcia (History; Faculty Dir. Graduate Diversity Initiatives)

Purpose of the fellowships: diversifying the academy

Advice on Personal Statement:

- Include how you are opening paths for others into academia, breaking down barriers.
- Don't just say what work you do – but why are you creating diversity into academia – why do you think this is important and connect it to your research
- If the foundation invests in you (\$\$\$) what is their return on their investment in you? What returns to academia, society, the planet – teaching? Activism? Community building? Mentoring? Rewriting state curriculum?
- How will you accomplish Ford's objective of diversifying the academy?
- Curate what you have done – don't just list it – and find the thread that ties them all together in order to maximize the limited pages allowed.
- Consider praxis and integrate examples of how you implemented ideas and strategies.
- Set yourselves apart – who are you? What is unique about you? What obstacles or barriers did you overcome to get to higher education?
- Make sure that other people are reading your materials to see if it makes sense.

Statement of Previous Research:

- Especially if you are applying for the postdoctoral fellowship – you have to show that you have a research agenda that you are following and that your ideas are coherent, regardless if not popular.
- What is the broader conversation, and what sub portion are you working on? Where do you or does your research fit into the academy or the larger conversation of research?
- Saying you have skills does not explain your research agenda, only shows research skills.
- If you are in the dissertation phase, you don't want to repeat research experience in this section that will be explained in the dissertation plan section. Use all sections to show new information about you. What other research lead you to the dissertation research?

Proposed Plan of Study

- Tell the reviewers what research you are interested in, what question(s) is your research exploring and how are you preparing yourself to do that research?
- Why are these questions important? What new knowledge do you hope to create?
- Be reasonable in your explanation of your plan. For example, there are some things that cannot be reasonably done as a predoctoral student or done in one-year (dissertation).
- Ok to have phases of your project: for example, MA – Phase 1, Doctorate- Phase 2 and Post-doctorate – Phase 3. This can show a reasonable timeline, if applicable.
- If pre-doc, explain the coursework you are taking and why. If you are in dissertation stages, discuss methodology, data collection, data analysis plan etc.
- Make sure your plan of study is theoretically relevant and methodologically rigorous, as well as why the research is important in addressing a social problem, condition, or concern.
- Identify faculty you are working with.
- When mentioning future impact, informing policy-makers is fine; and pure intellectual work is ok too.
- Again, make sure that other people are reading your materials to see if it makes sense.

Letters of Recommendation

- Ask letter writers NOW about requesting letters of recommendation for the application.
- Five recommendation letters are allowed. Suggested to submit all five.
- Make sure there are some people from your current institution writing those recommendations. Ok to have outside recommenders, but the committee also wants to know that you are grounded at your university.
- Make sure the recommenders know you really well and if helpful, provide them with talking points on what you want them to talk about in the letter.
- Make sure that the recommender is a good letter writer and can speak relevantly about you being able to carry out the research work.
- Luke warm letters do not carry well. Shows disconnection between faculty and student.
- Ok to ask faculty: do you feel confident in writing a strong letter of support on my behalf?
- Don't push yourself to get five letters – having three strong letters is better than having five average or luke warm ones.
- Again, Ask Faculty Now if you haven't asked them yet!

Dissertation Completion Plan

- Work very closely with your committee members regarding your dissertation question(s) and plan. This can ground you when writing the application.
- Mention research training that shows it will move you forward in completing the dissertation – methods training, archival trip?
- If interdisciplinary, be clear of the disciplines addressed or overlapping in your dissertation.

- The closer you are to finishing, the stronger the application must be. It will need more details – so, map out your chapters and give a timeline for your research progress.
- You can reapply for the Ford Dissertation Fellowship.
- Lay out explicitly what you are doing to complete the dissertation – what has already been done and what still needs to be done?
- If you already have a lot of findings – you need share your chapter framework.
- You can't be in explanatory phase; you need to be in the findings phase.

Annotated Bibliography (primarily for the dissertation application)

- Choose ten primary and secondary sources that are relevant to your work - which is/are the seminal piece(s)? Begin with primary sources and how those sources inform your work.
- Don't treat the annotated bibliography just like a list because this bibliography also demonstrates where your work fits in the field.
- This section also shows how you are talking about other work – agreeing/disagreeing etc. And that you are actively engage with the work and can contextualize your work within the broader landscape.
- NOTE: Recommendation is to cite your advisor.

Dissertation Abstract

- No more than one page.
- Give your argument, methodology, main findings, and contribution to the field.
- Don't just copy and paste. Use the opportunity to say something new or in a new way so your reader is still engaged with your work or application.
- NOTE: University of Maryland Baltimore website has video about abstract – a great resource. <https://www.umaryland.edu/writing/online-workshops/how-to-write-an-abstract/>

Q & A: Audience

- Do we list all our publications? It is part of the supplemental materials section; you can list it there. It is not a part of your personal statement.
- What about 3rd year students? You are in a weird position. Not quite predoctoral and not a dissertation application. You need to show that you have more coursework to do and not yet done with comprehensive or qualifying exams. NOTE: One of the panelists submitted in the 3rd year and received honorable mention. The following year the student got the dissertation award.
- I applied last year and got honorable mention but got dinged on work experience, which work experience is relevant – academic or professional experience – what are some examples? Anything you got paid to do. Can include leadership positions, mentoring. Be sure to frame any disparate work experience in a collective story about how you are focused on diversity.

- What about citations? Don't need to do citations. Use the space to talk about you, not other people. Parenthetical citations take up a lot of space. Don't wait until paragraph four to start writing about yourself.
- Do you put a hypothesis in the proposed research? If your field does that then ok. There is no one way to write the proposed plan of research.

FORD FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP – STEM Session
Wed. Nov. 8, 2017 at 3pm, Elings 1605

15 attendees

Panelists:

- Peter M. Homyak (Postdoctoral Fellow in Ecology, Evolution & Marine Biology)
- Ashlee Kalauli (Predoctoral Fellow in Mathematics)
- Prof. Miroslava Chavez-Garcia (Department of History, Past Ford Postdoctoral Fellow), moderator

NOTE: ABD Graduate Students to meet with Scholars Program (undergrads)

Purpose of the fellowships: diversifying the academy

Application Format: Whether STEM or non-STEM application is the same.

Advice on Personal Statement:

- Definitely use all the resources available – flyer handouts, sample submissions (at GSRC essay binders), online information.
- Add relevant information that fits the application regarding diversity – personal, volunteer, or academic experience.
- Share how you are serving underrepresented groups at your university. What have you done to make inclusive spaces? What have you done to help others make great strides in their academics and/or professional pursuits?
- Writing two-page statements is challenging – once you write it, send it to as many people as possible because others will share what you are not communicating well, what does not make sense.
- When all applications are very good, it may come down to that personal statement.

Statement of Previous Research:

- How does your research tie or contribute to broader global issues? Then frame into smaller research question. Find that connection and significance.
- Write for a broad general audience, not disciplinary jargon. For example, start broad then go narrow, and read again broadly – to see if it is reading well.
- Don't just list things – explain through connections and links how this becomes a broader academic or research trajectory.
- You will have a diverse group of readers – experts and non-experts.

Proposed Plan of Study

- Start approach with assuming a non-expert audience and draw the reader in with a statement or story that is universally understandable e.g. water from the mountains vs. phosphorous research.

- After the broader story then going to details e.g. phosphorous research, link it back to broader picture and diverse populations.
- Link also the resource expertise in your university or department because this explains why the research should be done by you and at this university.
- Be clear about the use of each application component; this application section would also be good for academic, professional goals in the field.

Letters of Recommendation

- If you haven't started, start now! You want to send all your materials (statements) to your recommenders.
- NEW! The Foundation used to only accept three letters. Now maximum of five, and four is recommended.
- Maybe each recommender knows different parts of your work – academics, research, community etc. ok to ask them all and the five letters explains the whole you.
- You want recommenders who can discuss you in current context especially your potential for the rigors of academia and research. Older (or undergraduate) recommenders are fine. But in general, they tend to be thematic in terms of liking the person or candidate – and not entirely on work ethic, academic performance or professional goals. Of course, if you find that undergraduate faculty member who can speak to those areas, definitely ask them.
- The review committee needs to know you and your recommenders need to be able to communicate who you are; don't pick people because of their notoriety in the field – that doesn't speak to you or about you.
- Pre-doctoral application has more wiggle room regarding curiosity for the field. And dissertation application definitely needs to focus more about research and work with recommenders.
- Quality over quantity – 3 solid ones are better than 5 average ones.
- Recommenders will get an email with instructions but definitely communicate with them about what to focus on or your relevant experience.

Dissertation Completion Plan

- The closer you are to finishing, the stronger the application needs to be in terms of convincing that reader that you know what you are doing and how you are going to do that, especially how you are going to finish.
- Obviously, explain your research question and how you are going to get to the dissertation completion.
- Include a timeline of what you are going to do that year to show your anticipated progress during that time.

Annotated Bibliography (primarily for the dissertation application)

- Ten sources that are relevant to your work. Primary sources.
- Look at annotated Bibliography samples.

Dissertation Abstract

- Don't just take the first paragraph of your research statement or paper and plug it in.
- You want to use all spaces and components to be clear about your work.
- You need another set of eyes to again, see if it is understandable.

Q & A: Audience

- How does this compare to the NSF GRFP? They are different. One is about the potential to be an expert in the field. The Ford Foundation Fellowship is about diversifying the academy.
- How does specific research (e.g. phosphorous research) link to supporting or advancing underrepresented populations? (I) shared that I would support sharing STEM activities that would help XYZ schools in diverse communities advance STEM learning.
- What about reference letters from companies vs. academia? Yes, research experience outside of academia is relevant. And if they can speak to your independence and leadership etc. that is a good recommender.
- As a reader or reviewer, can you share about acceptance rate? They are proportional to the number of applications received. Many who are waitlisted have a chance to receive the award or get honorable mention. Some other reviewers are returnees and may know the work or resubmissions. The acceptance rate changes each year because of the number of applicants.
 - (Awardees on the panel said) Ford Foundation is less than 5% acceptance rate from STEM. If the last 20% is great – you won't have control over how it got trimmed down to 5% - so don't take it personal.
- Should one apply to subject field or research area? Probably subject area. e.g. mechanical engineering or biomaterials? Look at the eligible field of study because there may not be a topic that specific as biomaterials.
- Are pictures allowed or recommended in the personal statement? Never seen pictures in the applications but I've seen reviewers Google the applicants. Don't lose space with pics for only a one-page statement. Figures are ok in research statement to break the text and if pics shows more.
- Planning to go to industry? Don't mention it. The foundation is focused on diversifying the academy.
- Publications? Yes, need it especially for postdoctoral because you will get out-competed by those that do have publications. For predoctoral – there is a supplementary materials section for listing publications or submissions; ok to list even if you are waiting for feedback.
- Do we get feedback on the application? There is a comment section. There is some hesitation for some reviewers to give feedback to everyone. But others do want to help the applicant.