

Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Handbook for Fellows

Bryn Mawr College



HISTORY AND MISSION

Established in 1988, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program (MMUF) was designed to help increase the number of faculty of color in higher education. Funded by the Mellon Foundation, the name of the program also symbolically connects the mission to the achievements of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays (1894-1984), an Black scholar and activist, mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and long-time president of Morehouse College. The goal of MMUF is to encourage, support, and train students from underrepresented minority groups (and students who are committed to eradicating racial disparities in academia) to pursue independent research so that they can apply to graduate school, attain a Ph.D., and become college professors.

Bryn Mawr College was one of the eight founding partners of MMUF. Since its founding, the program has grown to include 48 member colleges and universities and three consortia, including three South African universities and a consortium of historically Black colleges and universities within the membership of the UNCF. As of 2019, over 5000 students have been selected as fellows, more than 800 of whom have earned the Ph.D. and over 120 of whom are now tenured faculty members. The great majority of those who have completed the Ph.D. hold or have held an appointment in academia. MMUF continues to achieve its mission by identifying and supporting students of great promise and helping them to become scholars of the highest distinction.



REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

The MMUF Program requires that fellows have a serious interest in pursuing doctoral degrees and becoming professors. We recognize that it is difficult to know for sure what career pathway you want to pursue, so the program is designed to help you understand what an academic career entails. In weekly meetings, we cover a range of relevant topics—including How to Plan a Research Project, The Graduate School Application Process, Abstract Writing, Conference Presentations & Networking—and meet with graduate students of color and faculty of color to share strategies for navigating predominantly white institutions. The success of the MMUF program depends on consistent and engaged participation from all the fellows.

Fellows are required to participate in the following components of the MMUF program:

- Weekly meetings with the other fellows and coordinators during the academic year
- Regular meetings with their mentor(s), including reliably communicating with them
- Summer activities (orientation, research check-ins, *etc.*)
- Periodic one-on-one meetings with coordinators
- Presenting their research at the MMUF yearly regional conference and attending the conference panels, events, and meals
- Special programming and events (e.g., lectures, meetings with graduate students, dinners or cultural events in Philly, *etc.*)
- Responding to coordinators' emails and requests for information
- Senior presentations to the MMUF and College communities
- Lectures, events, and/or conferences your mentors invite you to

We recognize that MMUF is only one piece of your lives and your schedules, but it should be a priority because you are being paid to be fellows in the program. If you find that you are unable, for any reason, to meet the program requirements, we ask that you be touch with the coordinators immediately. We will work with you to determine an appropriate balance and to help ensure that you are not missing key MMUF activities. The Mellon Foundation recommends that fellows who do not meet their programmatic requirements be placed on probation, with the possibility of being suspended from the program. We strongly prefer to avoid this option but can only do so if you are in consistent communication with us.

Fellows must also demonstrate a serious effort toward academic excellence, including maintaining a solid academic record. The Mellon Foundation's guidelines suggest that fellows must maintain a GPA of at least 3.0. The program coordinators are available to discuss options if, at any time during the fellowship, you need additional academic support.

If at any time you realize that pursuing a PhD in one of the designated fields is *definitely not* aligned with your interests or that you no longer want to pursue your MMUF independent research project and invest the substantive amount of time the MMUF program requires of you and funds you to do, it is possible to leave the program.

MENTORSHIP

Guided research is the foundation of MMUF, since the fellowship is intended to prepare students for graduate study and to model life in an academic profession. It is important – as a fellow (but also in life) – to have multiple different kinds of mentors who support your work in different ways. Fellows have at least one formally designated MMUF mentor and oftentimes have more informal mentors. Students often choose MMUF mentors with whom they have already a relationship through coursework, advising, or other campus activities. Your mentorship needs may change as your project evolves and your research develops; thus, fellows occasionally switch or add mentors.

Choosing Your Mentor

These are several factors to consider when choosing a mentor, some of which are listed below. However, there is no one-size-fits-all version of effective mentorship. We recommend having honest conversations with possible mentors, telling them what your ideal mentor relationship would be like, and asking them questions. You can use the points below to help guide those conversations.

- *Specialization*
 - Do they work in an MMUF field? (See page 5 for list of Approved fields)
 - Do they have expertise or interest in your proposed research topic?
 - Do they have experience or interest in the theories and methods you plan to use?
- *Scheduling*
 - Are they scheduled to go on sabbatical or otherwise be away from the College during your two years as a fellow? If so, have a conversation with them about what mentorship will look like while they are away. Will they continue to work with you, and if so in what formats? Can/do they recommend a co-mentor?
 - Where are they in their academic career? Do they have tenure? If they are called an “Assistant Professor,” this means they do not have tenure but are on the tenure track, and you should have a conversation with them about their obligations and time commitments. How much time can they reasonably give you? Short-term faculty (Visiting Professors, Visiting Assistant Professors, Postdoctoral Fellows, Instructors) will most likely not be at the College for very long, which means they are likely not the best fits for your “official” MMUF mentor, though they can be wonderful co-mentors or informal mentors.
 - **As a general rule:** have an open and honest conversation with your proposed mentor about each of your expectations, time commitments, and scheduling. Plan to check in, at each stage of the fellowship, about your needs and goals.
- *Compatibility*
 - Think about what else is important to you personally. What kind of communication style works for you? Is the personal or political identity of your mentor important to you? Do you want a mentor who will work with you on big ideas, or give specific feedback on writing? Do you want to work with your mentor on their research projects? Everyone has different needs and priorities; make sure to discuss your specific priorities with your mentor.
 - Your needs will evolve during your time as a fellow, and there is nothing wrong with

that. You always have the option of changing mentors if your existing mentor relationship is not meeting your needs. You can also add additional mentors as you meet new faculty, develop new research interests, and evolve in your research style.

Working with Your Mentor

The MMUF program expects students to meet regularly with their mentors during the junior and senior years, and to be communicate with their mentors regularly while doing research over the summer. If you are planning to go abroad, you should make a plan with your mentor to remain in regular contact during that time. Some Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore professors are “veteran mentors” who have mentored many MMUF fellows over the years. These professors are well-acquainted with the program and its goals. But more often than not, MMUF mentors are new to the fold and want to learn about the program, its mission, and how they can best work with students over the course of the two years—and often more!—that they will spend as a mentor. If you have more than one “official” MMUF mentor, it is important to be in regular communication with both mentors, and to consult both on your semester and summer research plans.

While every mentor relationship works differently, many fellows and mentors find it useful to have a regularly scheduled meeting time. The frequency and content of your meetings may change, depending on the kind of work you are doing. For example, if you are senior fellow enrolled in a Senior Seminar, you might choose to temporarily lessen your mentor meetings since you are already having weekly, structured research meetings. On the other hand, if you are in the process of applying to graduate programs and are workshopping your application materials with your mentor, you may need to meet more often than usual.

The mentor-mentee relationship is a mutual commitment. While fellows should be keenly aware that they are investing a lot of time and energy in meeting with their mentors, preparing assignments for them, and engaging in discussions with them, mentors should also be aware that they should also be spending time and energy reading fellows’ work carefully, suggesting research resources, taking fellows to conferences if possible, helping fellows with internship and graduate school applications, and investing in fellows’ professional development in any way that they can.

While mentor-mentee relationship is an individual experience, that does not mean that you and your mentor are alone. The program coordinators are here to support you in your relationship with your mentor, including helping you figure out what mentorship style works for you and how to have difficult conversations with your mentor if needed. The coordinators are also available as a resource for the mentors, to provide support and guidance. Over the course of the fellowship, you should assess your mentor-mentee relationship and maintain communication with the coordinators about how to best strengthen and benefit from it.

Although MMUF emphasizes the role of your formal mentor, remember that mentorship takes many forms: unofficial mentors can be just as important to your time as a fellow. These can include professors in other disciplines working on similar topics to the fellow’s research, professors in one’s field who are personal mentors but may not have specific expertise on the project, graduate students pursuing a PhD in your field, MMUF alums, and even other students. As a senior fellow, you will serve as an informal mentor to the junior fellows and new fellows. These unofficial mentoring relationships, while not formalized within the structure of the MMUF program, are incredibly important to both a fellow’s professional success and their ability to thrive in the academy. As a

program, we attempt to foster and recognize these other forms of mentorship when possible.

RESEARCH

Each fellow is required to conduct an individual research project under the guidance of a faculty mentor during the junior and senior years. This research, which ideally becomes the senior thesis or capstone project, is the centerpiece of a fellow's participation in the MMUF program insofar as it prefigures graduate level research and dialogue. A fellow's project, their major department, and their mentor's department must fall under one of the following Mellon-approved fields of study:

Anthropology & Archaeology	History
Area/Cultural/Ethnic/Gender Studies	Linguistics
Art History	Literature
Classics	Performance Studies (theoretical)
Geography & Population Studies	Philosophy & Political Theory
English	Religion & Theology
Film, Cinema, & Media Studies (theoretical)	Sociology
Musicology, Ethnomusicology, and Music Theory	Theater (theoretical focus)
Foreign Languages & Literatures	Interdisciplinary Studies (with one or more Mellon fields at their core, subject to foundation approval)

Fellows are expected to dedicate time to their research every week, to maintain progress on their research and give themselves time for reflection and exploration. However, “research time” does not always look like writing, reading, or analyzing data. Part of the purpose of the MMUF program is to show fellows how all these tasks are components of academic life and, thus, legitimate “work.” Relevant activities include, but are not limited to:

- Brainstorming
- Compiling a reading list
- Reading relevant texts (or listening to relevant podcasts, watching relevant videos, *etc.*) and taking notes
- Reviewing journals in your field
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Outlining ideas or creating “concept maps”
- Freewriting about your topic
- Discussing ideas with peers and/or mentors
- Attending MMUF meetings
- Attending a lecture relevant to the major or the research topic in the Tri-Co or in the city
- Working on (writing or editing) a paper or a chapter of your thesis
- Contacting/meeting with scholars in your field in Tri-Co and beyond
- Attending a conference in your field (including the submission of abstracts and preparation of texts or posters)

The Bryn Mawr MMUF program asks each fellow to complete a research plan or syllabus every semester, as well as during the summer. These research plans, which you will develop in consultation with your mentor(s), will shift and evolve throughout your research. They will help you reflect on what “research progress” means to you, map out your fields/topics, develop expertise in your primary fields of research, and set concrete goals for yourself. During MMUF meetings, we will periodically conduct Research Check-Ins, which give fellows an opportunity to share what they are excited about; help each other troubleshoot, expand, and refine areas of their research; and learn about one another’s work. At the end of the senior year, fellows present their MMUF research to the community.

MMUF provides summer funding to enable fellows to work on their research each summer they are in the program. We strongly encourage fellows to participate in summer research institutes to develop and hone research and writing skills. We have a robust list of summer institutes available on Moodle, including MMUF-sponsored ones. Fellows should consult the individual program websites for specifics as well.

Fellows also have several other formal MMUF-sponsored opportunities to share their research. Bryn Mawr’s MMUF program participates annually in our MMUF consortium’s Regional Conference, which offers fellows the opportunity to present their work in progress to the broader MMUF community and gain experience with conferencing.

The Bryn Mawr MMUF program also encourages fellows to submit their work to the MMUF Journal, which has published an issue every year since 1995. Copies are distributed to all participating MMUF institutions in the United States and South Africa. More information about the MMUF Journal is available here: <https://uraf.harvard.edu/mmuf-journal>. Copies of previous MMUF Journals are available on the MMUF website and through the BMC MMUF Moodle page.

FUNDING¹

Summer Stipend (paid in advance)	Summer Stipend balance (paid in Fall)	AY Stipend (spread over 9 months)	Travel Funds (total per fellow)	GRE Prep Funds (total per fellow)	Research Funds (per senior fellow)
\$3,600	\$300	\$3,600	\$600	\$600	\$400

Academic Year Stipend

Each fellow is awarded a stipend during the academic year that is disbursed in regular monthly payments. This stipend, which totals \$3,600 over nine months, is intended to facilitate the opportunity to engage in research and ease the need to engage in other forms of paid employment. Research is work; your stipend is MMUF's way of recognizing (and formalizing) this fact.

Summer Stipend

The Bryn Mawr MMUF program offers a summer stipend of up to \$3,900 to allow fellows to participate in a meaningful research, learning, or work experience that will enhance and complement studies in their major and advance their MMUF research project. Approved summer experiences include summer institutes (including those sponsored by MMUF), field work experiences, relevant internships, intensive language courses, guided research, or individual research programs.

At the end of Spring semester, meet with your mentor(s) and the coordinators to think through your summer research plan, goal, and budgets. Newly selected fellows will have an additional opportunity to refine their summer plans, in conversation with the coordinators, during their summer orientation. When your budget and proposal is approved, the program will award ninety percent of the funds, and the remaining ten percent will be awarded once the fellow turns in a description of their summer activities at the first meeting of Fall semester.

Please note that because of College rules, students may not receive funds from multiple Bryn Mawr College sources. Changes in students' summer plans should be communicated promptly to program coordinators, so we can help ensure that your summer runs smoothly.

Travel Funds

Some travel funds are available to support fellows' participation in academic conferences or other activities that benefit fellows' research or career directions. You are eligible for up to \$600 in travel funds over two years in the fellowship. A program coordinator (specifically Vanessa Christman) will work with you to determine appropriate uses of your travel funds and arrange payment or reimbursement of approved expenses.

¹ Students who receive federal and/or College financial aid should be aware that MMUF stipends may affect their financial aid package. In most cases, the impact will be minimal, but fellows should be in frequent contact with an MMUF coordinator (specifically Vanessa Christman) and BMC financial aid officers to avoid any problems or misunderstandings.

Research Expenses

The Bryn Mawr MMUF program can offer each senior fellow up to \$600 in research funds to defray the cost of various research expenses, including but not limited to: computer hardware, book purchases, transportation to research sites, participant honorariums, research equipment (e.g., microphones or recording devices), and computer software (e.g., for transcription, GIS coding, quantitative analysis, organization, planning, etc.). If you wish to access your research fund, you should discuss your proposed expenses with the program coordinators. A coordinator (specifically Vanessa Christman) will arrange payment or reimbursement for approved expenses.

GRE Preparation Funds

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is the required standardized test for admission to graduate school. Each fellow may spend \$600 towards GRE preparation, whether that be towards a class, tutoring, or books. We offer a structured GRE course for fellows, which is usually offered as a Tri-Co course so Haverford and Swarthmore fellows participate as well. Students may not spend any of those funds on the test itself. If you have another idea for how to use your GRE preparation funds, you can discuss options with the coordinators.

GRADUATE SCHOOL BENEFITS

Loan Repayment

MMUF students who enter PhD programs in MMUF approved fields are eligible for repayment of their undergraduate loans up to a maximum of \$10,000. Research-based MFAs (as opposed to performance-based) may also be eligible for up to \$5,000 in loan repayment. The MMUF program requires that fellows begin graduate school within 39 months of graduating to receive this loan repayment. If more time has passed, you can apply for an exemption from the foundation, and these are nearly always granted. Only undergraduate debt accrued through Perkins, Stafford, or college loan programs qualify for repayment. If a student has undergraduate debt totaling less than \$10,000, the remaining loan repayment funds may be used to repay graduate loans upon completion of the PhD. The total amount of loan repayment funds will not exceed \$10,000 and may only be used toward designated educational loans from recognized lenders for graduate study.

Under the terms of the MMUF program, each undergraduate institution establishes its own procedure for facilitating the loan repayment process and record keeping. Bryn Mawr fellows access their loan repayments by communicating with a program coordinator (specifically Vanessa Christman) who will contact fellows annually for information about their loans. Bryn Mawr will send a check directly to your listed lending institutions and forward you a copy.

For more information on loan repayment visit: <http://www.mmuf.org/our-benefits/loan-repayment>

Mellon Mays Gap Assistance Program

Not all Fellows enter a PhD program immediately after completing their undergraduate degree. MMUF allows students to take up to 39 months to matriculate into a graduate program while still being eligible for their benefits. For Fellows who choose to take time off, the Gap Assistance Program (MMGAP) provides structured support for preparing and applying for graduate school. Fellows can sign up for either a six-month or Full-Year curriculum, which include coaching, GRE prep, discussions with peer and faculty, and assistance with application documents.

For more information on MMGAP visit: <https://woodrow.org/fellowships/mellon/mellonmaysgap/>

Research Funding

After you matriculate into a doctoral program, there are a number of MMUF-sponsored or MMUF-affiliated funding opportunities that you can access. As a graduate student, you are eligible to apply for research grants (including grants to support summer activities) and travel grants. These awards generally range from \$2,000-\$5,000. When you are writing your dissertation, you are also eligible to apply for a year's worth of funding (\$20,000 over a 12-month period).

For more information on the various available grants, visit: <https://www.mmuf.org/graduate-students>

Conference & Events

MMUF sponsors a number of different events throughout the year, for fellows at different stages of their careers. These include opportunities to share or learn about research, such as invited lectures and the annual Graduate Student Summer Conference. MMUF also offers professionalization seminars to help graduate students navigate through different milestones in their academic careers, such as the Proposal Writing and Dissertation Development Seminar and the Preparing for the Professoriate Seminar. Fellows are also eligible to apply for MMUF-sponsored retreats such as the Dissertation Writing Retreat.

For more information, on these specific opportunities visit:

- Graduate Student Summer Conference: <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/mellon-mays-graduate-student-summer-conference/>
- Proposal Writing and Dissertation Development Seminar: <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/mellon-mays-proposal-writing-and-dissertation-development-seminar/>
- Preparing for the Professoriate Seminar: <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/mellon-mays-seminar-on-preparing-for-the-professoriate/>
- Dissertation Writing Retreat: <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/mellon-mays-dissertation-writing-retreat/>
- Postdoctoral Fellows Retreat: <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/mellon-mays-postdoctoral-fellows-retreat/>

