

THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION
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To: Scholars in the Humanities and Others Concerned with the Support of
Graduate Students in the Humanities

From: William G. Bowen and Harriet Zuckerman

Date: August 1, 2005

We write to inform you that The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has decided to suspend funding for its portable one-year Fellowships in Humanistic Studies as of the fall of 2006. There will be no competition in the coming academic year.

We are aware that this decision could cause concern about the Foundation's longer-term intentions, and we wish to allay any such concerns. At their most recent meeting, the Foundation's Trustees reaffirmed their strong support for scholarship and graduate education in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. Funds the Foundation provides for these activities will not be reduced but may be redeployed. This decision should be understood as a means of providing a "time out" for the Foundation's staff to consider new opportunities for supporting graduate education and research by young scholars in the humanities.

Over the last 12 years, the Foundation's annual grants for this program of Fellowships, administered with distinction by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, has provided a total of nearly \$34 million in student support exclusive of the costs of administering the program. From 1983 to 1992, the Foundation funded a predecessor program of multi-year fellowships for graduate students in the humanities, also run by Woodrow Wilson, resulting in a total expenditure of \$93 million on both programs over 22 years. Covering full tuition and stipends for entering graduate students during their first year of graduate study, the current program has aimed to encourage the ablest undergraduates to pursue PhDs in the humanities. The fellowships have been awarded in nationwide competitions marked by their intensity and rigor, and the fellows who have been chosen have been exceptionally promising young scholars.

Nancy Weiss Malkiel, chair of the Woodrow Wilson Board of Trustees, observes, "For 22 years, the Mellon Fellowship program has flourished, thanks to the outstanding leadership of three successive directors, Robert F. Goheen, Alvin W. Kernan, and Robert Weisbuch, and the dedicated service of scores of faculty members who have staffed regional and national selection committees. The program should be celebrated for its impressive achievements: it has modeled and encouraged more robust support for graduate education in the humanities at leading doctoral institutions, and it has drawn hundreds of talented humanists into the professoriate. The 2,055 Mellon Fellows bring enormous benefits not only to higher education, but to the vitality and strength of intellectual and civic leadership in the nation as a whole. The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has been proud to partner with the Mellon Foundation in such an important endeavor. We look forward to future collaborations as Mellon sets its new course."

The Mellon Foundation's decision reflects the significant changes in the conditions of doctoral education in the humanities over the last decade. The leading departments in the humanities (where Mellon Fellows for the most part decide to go) and many others as well have reduced the numbers of first-year students they admit so that they can fund those students who are admitted more generously. Many now provide new students with some form of multi-year funding "packages." By all reports, the overall quality of students applying to the leading graduate programs in the humanities is very high indeed; with reductions in the number of incoming students, programs have become ever more selective. These developments and others have led the Foundation to conclude that the rationale for these one-year fellowships needs to be reexamined in light of such changed conditions.

Strengthening the humanities has been a core commitment of the Mellon Foundation from its establishment in 1969. In the last decade and a half, the Foundation has undertaken a number of new activities in this area. Between 1990 and 2001, the Foundation sponsored a large-scale initiative to encourage more than 50 departments at 10 universities to address the organization of graduate study and funding practices in their doctoral programs. Approximately \$80 million was expended on this effort, which also involved annual collection of institutional data on the progress students made, faculty reports, and in 2004, a special survey of all matriculants in participating departments from 1982 onwards. Initial findings from the analysis of these data will be published in the near future and will inform future programmatic decisions. The Foundation continues to support a number of other graduate fellowship programs including dissertation fellowships, which are listed on our website (<http://www.mellon.org/programs/highered/research/research.htm>).

The Foundation also supports an array of programs that assist other scholars in the humanities. These include postdoctoral fellowship programs established at 26 research universities and 14 liberal arts colleges; fellowships at centers for advanced study, independent research libraries, and other specialized institutions; a series of programs intended to respond to the needs of faculty members at different stages of their careers (also listed on the Foundation's website at: <http://www.mellon.org/programs/highered/research/research.htm>); and initiatives focused on encouraging the development of promising lines of humanistic inquiry.

Although change can always be disconcerting, we think it is necessary for foundations like ours to reconsider the effectiveness of specific programs as circumstances evolve, in order to ensure that resources continue to be directed toward the most pressing needs in the areas in which they are active.

In recent years, the Mellon Foundation's support of the existing program of one-year fellowships alone has approached \$5 million annually, and we have an obligation to ensure that these funds are used as effectively as possible to address current needs of graduate students and young scholars in the humanities. In our view, the decision to suspend this program provides an excellent opportunity to consider anew the best ways of assisting scholars and scholarship.

Harriet Zuckerman, the Foundation's Senior Vice President, has had responsibility for the Mellon Fellowships and for other programs for research universities and humanistic scholarship and she will lead this review. If you have questions about the Foundation's activities in this area, or ideas that you would like us to consider, please contact her.