



# McCausland College of Arts and Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



## **Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowship Administrative Guidelines**

This document details practices developed in the McCausland College of Arts & Sciences at the University of South Carolina for administering the Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowships in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Funds from the Bilinski Educational Foundation are used to provide financial support for top Ph.D. students pursuing research in the Humanities and Social Sciences as they complete their dissertations. Thanks to the continued generosity of the Bilinski Foundation, this year we will be able to fund a total of up to nine (9) Bilinski Fellowships.

A student who either holds a Presidential or a national graduate fellowship or is awarded and accepts another fellowship for the period July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027 will become ineligible for the Bilinski Fellowship due to the financial need eligibility requirement of the Bilinski Fellowship. Fellowship funds will be disbursed beginning in the fall semester following selection of the fellowship recipients. Fellowship recipients must be actively enrolled (on Z status) to receive payment. Fellowship funds will be distributed equally between fall and spring semesters, unless a special request is submitted to distribute over fall, spring, and summer semesters. Payment will be made to students on a semester basis at the beginning of each semester and consecutive summer term if desired. The funds may be used for the payment, partially or totally, of tuition, fees, books, materials, other educational expenses, and for necessary living expenses. The fellowship recipient is responsible for all University fees and charges incurred.

**Please note:** Selected Fellows may not hold concurrent graduate assistantships or student wage positions

since Fellows are required to devote full-time effort toward dissertation completion for each semester (including summer semesters) in which fellowship funds are provided. As such, the fellowship recipient must agree to devote full-time effort toward dissertation completion with no employment either outside or within the University of South Carolina for the entire period covered by the award, including summer terms, if applicable.

In no case will funds be awarded if a student's dissertation has already been substantially completed. Continued receipt of funding is dependent upon continuing to meet all fellowship criteria.

### ***Timeline for the application, evaluation, and selection process***

Information about the Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowships will be circulated via the McCausland College of Arts & Sciences website and through direct contact with chairs and graduate directors of Humanities and Social Science departments.

The initial call for nominations is sent out by the Office of the Dean to chairs and directors of eligible units in the McCausland College of Arts & Sciences. The intention is to give graduate directors, eligible doctoral students, and their advisors adequate lead time to prepare their application packages. Nominations of eligible, internally -vetted candidates are due to the College by **March 2, 2026**. (See **Appendix A** for the timeline for the entire process.)

### ***Eligibility Criteria***

Students are invited to submit applications based on the following eligibility criteria.

To be eligible to receive Fellowship funds, to be awarded a Bilinski Fellowship, and to remain a Bilinski Fellow, each doctoral student must meet and agree to ALL of the following criteria:

1. Be a full-time doctoral student in a graduate program in the humanities or social sciences, who has passed all qualifying examinations and course requirements at the University of South Carolina, and advanced to candidacy or will advance in the upcoming academic year;
2. Maintain good academic standing at all times;
3. Have demonstrated exceptional ability and potential in his or her field of study;
4. Be a student who needs financial support to complete his or her degree;
5. Commit to devoting full-time effort toward dissertation completion for each semester (including summer period) in which Fellowship funds are provided;
6. Not be employed either outside or within the University of South Carolina;
7. Understand and agree that the only fellowship they will hold during the July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 Fiscal Year will be the Bilinski Fellowship;
8. Abide by the University of South Carolina Academic Code of Conduct.

Note: Fellowship Funds will **not** be awarded to a candidate whose dissertation has already been substantially completed.

### Additional Eligibility Criteria

To be awarded a Fellowship and to remain a Bilinski Fellow, a recipient must – in addition to the eligibility criteria set forth above – be a United States citizen or a Permanent Resident eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Fellowship Application Materials***

To be eligible for consideration, nomination packets from departments of their selected nominees must be submitted to the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences by March 2, 2026. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. All specified forms can be found on the [Bilinski Fellowship website](#).

Each nomination packet should include the following components:

1. **The [Fellowship Application Cover Sheet](#)** signed by the applicant and the departmental graduate director. By signing this form, the graduate director certifies that the applicant has passed all qualifying examinations and course requirements and advanced to candidacy or will advance in the upcoming year;
2. **The [Financial Disclosure Form](#)**;
3. **A statement** (maximum one-page) of the applicant's professional goals;
4. **A proposal** describing the dissertation that includes the following, double-spaced sections: a proposal narrative (2-3 pages) and a timetable for completion (maximum 1 page);
5. **A curriculum vitae** containing information about the applicant's previous education, teaching and research experience, professional publications, and awards or honors;
6. **A letter of recommendation** from the applicant's dissertation director addressing the significance of the dissertation topic and the applicant's ability to complete the dissertation in the time period covered by the fellowship;
7. The **signed [Fellow's Agreement Form on Use of Bilinski Fellowship Funds](#)**; and
8. In addition, all nominees submitted by departments to the Office of the Dean must complete an **online FAFSA application**, filed no later than **February 15** at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>.

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<sup>1</sup> A Permanent Resident is an alien (immigrant) person who has been granted such status through an immigration process (now handled under Homeland Security), and has been issued a *United States Permanent Residency Card*. This card (informally called Green Card) must be carried at all times. Permanent residents may live and work in the United States, permanently, and males 18-25 must register for selective service system. They cannot vote, hold state or federal public elected offices, or hold federal government jobs. They may apply for citizenship after 5 years of residency (or 3 years if married to a US citizen) and be granted citizenship upon meeting all requirements.

## ***Two-Stage Evaluation Process***

### **Stage 1: Internal Unit Evaluations**

Chairs and graduate directors will solicit nominations from eligible candidates in their units. Each unit must establish a **deadline** for internal nominations to be submitted to the graduate director—ideally by February 2, 2026. The internal submission deadline should be early enough to allow the department to complete their evaluation and selection process before February 15, 2026.

Internal nomination packets submitted to graduate directors will include components 1 – 7 from the list of required fellowship application materials (see above). At this initial stage, nominees do **not** complete a FAFSA.

Departments should establish a committee for evaluating completed nominations on the basis of merit, using either the unit's Graduate Committee or an *ad hoc* fellowship committee formed for the purpose of evaluating and ranking departmental nominees.

Internal evaluations of merit should take into consideration the factors that are considered by the College selection committee (a sample of the College's **Merit and Financial Need Assessment Tool** is given in **Appendix B**).

Once a decision has been made about which candidates to recommend to the Office of the Dean, those candidates should be notified by the departmental graduate director and asked to complete an online FAFSA by the required date of **February 15, 2026**.

The nomination packets of the selected candidates (limited to 4 per unit) should be sent to the Office of the Dean via the [Bilinski Nomination portal](#) (each nomination should be a single pdf, labeled with degree program, student's last name, student's first name). Submit by **March 2, 2026**.

**When submitting multiple nominations, units need to include a separate cover memo, signed by the chair or director, that ranks nominees according to merit and includes a narrative justification of that ranking.**

### **Stage 2: College-Level Evaluations**

The Bilinski Selection Committee is composed of members of the Office of the Dean's Senior Staff, including associate deans who come from diverse academic backgrounds representing disciplines across the range of the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences.

The selection committee will meet shortly after the applications are received and roughly three weeks after the FAFSA filing deadline. By this date, the results (EFC scores) of the online FAFSAs filed by unit nominees will have been received by the USC Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, and these results will have been made available to the Office of the Dean.

## **Appendix A**

### **Russell H. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowship**

#### **NOMINATION PROCESS TIMELINE**

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>December 2025</b>     | ◆ Office of the Dean issues call for nominations.  |
| <b>January 2026</b>      | ◆ Units establish process for Stage 1 of the evaluation process.<br><br>◆ Units solicit nominees internally.<br><br>◆ Units work with nominees, dissertation directors, and directors of graduate studies to assemble nomination packets.<br><br>◆ Units evaluate nominations according to established process.  |
| <b>February 2, 2026</b>  | ◆ Unit nomination process should be completed. Units select no more than 4 nominations to forward to the College level.<br><br>◆ Units notify all nominees of internal decisions and instruct those whose packets will move forward to the College level to complete the FAFSA.  |
| <b>February 15, 2026</b> | ◆ Students whose nominations will be forwarded to the College level must have completed the FAFSA.   |
| <b>March 2, 2026</b>     | ◆ Units submit individual nomination packets electronically to the College. A single pdf for each nomination, labeled with degree program, student's last name, student's first name should be uploaded to the <a href="#">Bilinski Nomination portal</a> .<br><br>◆ In the case of multiple nominations, department chair or program director writes a separate letter ranking the nominees and including justification for that ranking. |
| <b>April 2, 2026</b>     | ◆ College notifies nominees and units of results.  |

## **Appendix B**



# **McCausland College of Arts and Sciences**

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## **Russell H. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowship Merit and Financial Need Assessment Tool**

*Instructions to reviewers: Fill out the form for each of the applicants assigned to you; bring a copy to the evaluation meeting.*

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Need (result of FAFSA): \_\_\_\_\_

Very High Need = EFC \$ 1,000 - 5,999

High Need = EFC \$ 6,000 - 11,999

Moderately High Need = EFC \$ 12,000 - 17,999

Moderate Need = EFC \$ 18,000 - 23,999

### **1. Financial Disclosure Checklist**

**Yes**

**No**

Does the applicant have the possibility of continued funding through their own department/ program for the next academic year?

☐☐

Does the applicant have a realistic chance of other grant/fellowship support for next year (based on a successful track record of getting external support?)

☐☐

Does the applicant have any special financial circumstances? (Use the comments section below to describe these.)

☐☐



**2. Applicant’s academic and professional achievements (Please select the checkbox)**

	Yes	No
Does the applicant have any peer reviewed publications (including articles, book chapters, conference proceedings)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the applicant have any non-reviewed publications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the applicant presented their work at regional-level professional conferences/ workshops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the applicant presented work at national or international level professional conferences/ workshops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the applicant received any significant awards/ honors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the applicant received any internal grant funding (do NOT include travel grants)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the applicant received any external grant funding (e.g., NEH, NSF)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. Nominee's departmental rank and justification of that ranking.**

**Endorsement from the dissertation director:**

- a. How innovative and original is the dissertation?**
- b. Does the dissertation make a potential contribution to the applicant's field?**
- c. Additional comments?**