Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowships
Administrative Guidelines

This document details practices developed in the 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 in the Humanities and Social Sciences as they complete and defend their dissertations. Support will be provided for a maximum of one year (from July 1st – June 30th). Students must already have passed all their comprehensive exams and have defended a dissertation prospectus to be eligible for nomination by their programs. In no case will funds be awarded if a student’s dissertation already has been substantially completed. Fellowship funding may be used by the student for payment, partially or totally, of tuition, fees, books, field research, materials, other educational expenses, and for necessary living expenses. 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 is circulated via the 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 dean’s office in mid-November to chairs and directors of eligible units in the College of Arts & Sciences. Nominations by departments and programs of eligible candidates are due to the College by first Monday of April of the following year. The intention is to give graduate directors, eligible doctoral students and their advisors adequate lead time to prepare their application packages. (See Appendix B for the timeline of the entire process).

**Eligibility Criteria**

Students are invited to submit applications based on the following eligibility criteria, also posted on the USC College of Arts & Sciences webpage:


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

1. Be a full-time doctoral student at the University of South Carolina in one of the relevant graduate programs who has advanced to candidacy, passed all comprehensive exams, and successfully defended a dissertation proposal;
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. For each semester (including summer period) in which Fellowship funds are provided, must devote full-time effort toward dissertation completion;
6. Abide by the University of South Carolina Academic Code of Conduct

**Note:** Fellowship Funds will not to 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, in addition to the eligibility criteria set forth above, a Recipient must be a United States citizen or a Permanent Resident eligible to apply for US citizenship.

**Fellowship Application Materials**

To be considered for a Bilinski Fellowship, nomination packets from departments of their selected nominees must be submitted to the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences by the deadline of 5:00pm on first Monday of April. Each nomination packet should include the following components. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed:
(Samples of the necessary application forms are given in Appendix A, Items 1-3)

1. The Fellowship Application Cover Sheet signed by the applicant and the applicant’s Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). By signing this form, the DGS certifies that the applicant has advanced to candidacy, passed all comprehensive exams, and successfully defended a dissertation proposal prior to the application deadline. (Cover sheet available online)
2. Financial Disclosure Form (available online);
3. A maximum one-page statement of the student’s professional goals;
4. A proposal describing the dissertation that includes the following sections: proposal narrative (2-3 pages) and a timetable for completion (maximum 1 page), all double-spaced;
5. Curriculum vitae containing information on applicant’s previous education, teaching and research experience, professional publications, and awards or honors;
6. Letter of recommendation from the student’s dissertation chair addressing the significance of the dissertation topic and the applicant’s ability to complete the dissertation in the time period allowed by the fellowship;
7. Signed Fellow’s Agreement Form on Use of Bilinski Fellowship Funds (form available online).
8. In addition, all nominees selected by departments to move forward to the Office of the Dean must complete an online FAFSA application, filed no later than March 15 at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Two-Stage Evaluation Process

Stage 1: Internal Unit Evaluations

Department chairs and graduate directors will solicit nominations from eligible candidates in their units. In large departments with multiple programs (such as the English Department, which has doctoral programs in English literature, Composition & Rhetoric, etc.), the chair and the graduate director will work together with program directors to identify all eligible candidates.

Departments must establish an internal deadline for nominations to be submitted to their departmental Director of Graduate Studies. It is recommended that this deadline be set early enough in the cycle to allow the internal evaluation and selection process to be completed by the first week of March.

Nomination packets submitted to graduate directors will include components 1-7 from the list of required fellowship application materials (see above). In other words, nominees do not at this stage need to complete a FAFSA.

All the complete nominations that are received by the internal deadline must be evaluated on the basis of merit by the departmental Graduate Committee or an ad hoc fellowship committee that is formed for the purposes of evaluating and ranking departmental nominees.

Internal evaluations of merit should take into consideration the sorts of factors that are considered by the College selection committee (A sample of the College’s Merit Assessment Tool is given in Appendix A, Item 4).

Once a decision has been made on which candidates to recommend to the Dean’s office, those candidates should be notified by the departmental DGS of the result and asked to complete an online FAFSA by the required date of March 15.
Along with the complete set of individual nomination packets that are sent forward to the Dean’s office by the deadline of April 3, a separate covering memo from the chair must be supplied that lists the names and merit ranking for each of the department’s nominees and that justifies the ranking (in the case that multiple nominations are being sent forward to the Office of the Dean).

With the exception of the Department of English, each eligible department may nominate at most three candidates for the competition at the College level. English, given the size of its graduate program, may nominate up to five candidates for the College-level competition.

**Stage 2: College-Level Evaluations**

The Bilinski selection committee is composed of members of the Dean’s Senior Staff, who include assistant and associate deans from the College and who come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, representing disciplines across the whole range of the Arts & Sciences.

The selection committee meets roughly three weeks after the FAFSA filing deadline, around the second week of April. By this date, the results of the online FAFSAs filed by departmental nominees will have been received by the USC Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid and these results will have been made available to the Dean’s office.

Prior to the decision meeting, pairs of committee members (“lead 1” and “lead 2”) will have been assigned to make detailed assessments of each of the applicants. They will make their assessments based on merit, using a standardized assessment tool. (A sample of the Merit Assessment Tool is given in Appendix A, Item 4). Whenever possible, at least one of the leads assigned to a candidate will be in a field close to the candidate’s own.

The actual decision meeting proceeds according to the following process:

1. (Approx. 5 min. per candidate). Presentations of each candidate by his/her “lead 1”, with “lead 2” filling in missed points. Candidates will be discussed in alphabetical order, by department and then by last name. The following information will be covered during these presentations:
   a. list name, program, how many years in Ph.D. program, proposed dissertation defense date;
   b. briefly restate main idea of dissertation;
   c. give gist of cv, highlighting regional/national level of presentations, publications, awards;
   d. describe case made by the letters of recommendation as to the significance and potential impact of the project;
   e. justify merit scores given by the two leads
2. After all presentations have been made, each selection committee member ranks all candidates according to merit, with “1” being the highest score. The chair of the selection committee tallies results of this ranking during a brief break and then present results to the group, with tallies visible on white board or projection screen.
3. Financial need of candidates is discussed, beginning with the candidate who has highest financial need, down the composite list. (This information is compiled prior to the decision meeting by the chair of the selection committee, based on the FAFSA results and
information from candidates’ Financial Disclosure forms, using the Financial Need Assessment Tool – See Appendix A, Item 5).
4. Decision on the final eight recipients of Bilinski Award.
Appendix A

- **Item 1**: Fellowship Application Cover Sheet
- **Item 2**: Financial Disclosure Form
- **Item 3**: Fellow’s Agreement Form on Use of Bilinski Fellowship Funds
- **Item 4**: Merit Assessment Tool
- **Item 5**: Financial Need Assessment Tool

Appendix B

**TIMELINE**

*Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Fellowships*

November 18, 2015  ♦ Dean Sawyer issues call for nominations.

December 2015  ♦ Units establish process for Stage 1 of the evaluation process.

January 2016  ♦ Units solicit nominees internally.

February 2016  ♦ Units work with nominees, dissertation directors, and directors of graduate studies to assemble nomination packets.

March 6, 2016  ♦ Units evaluate nominations according to established process.

March 15, 2016  ♦ Students whose nominations will be forwarded to the College level complete the FAFSA.

March 2016, last two weeks  ♦ In the case of multiple nominations, department chair or program director writes separate letter explaining the unit’s ranking of the nominees.

April 4, 2016  ♦ Units submit nomination packets to the College office. Ten (10) paper copies of the nomination packet should be delivered to Petigru 313 and electronic copies (pdf, labeled with degree program, student’s last name, student’s first name) should be e-mailed to Mary Ann Byrnes at byrnes@sc.edu.

May 1, 2016  ♦ College notifies nominees and units of results.