

## 2015-2016 Watson Fellowship Application Instructions

### 1) **Timing**

Your completed application is due **via online submission** to the Watson Fellowship Committee by **Friday, September 25, 2015, at 3:00 p.m.**

### 2) **Procedure**

To apply for the Watson Fellowship, you must first contact the chair of the Bates Watson Committee, Georgia Nigro ([gnigro@bates.edu](mailto:gnigro@bates.edu)). She will enter your name and email address into the Watson Fellowship application web page, and you will be sent a link to the application site. Please note that this step cannot take place until the middle of August 2015, so please wait until then to contact the chair for this link. Once the site is open to you, follow the instructions to upload and enter your information. The application includes the following sections, most of which you should work on even before the application site is open to you:

- a. **A specific Project Proposal.** The proposal must be no longer than 1500 words and must be uploaded to the Watson Fellowship application page once the link is sent to you. Do not use special characters, as the text must be entered into the site. It is prudent to complete this proposal in Microsoft Word or other word processing program and then to copy and paste it into the site.
- b. **A Personal Statement.** The personal statement must be no longer than 1500 words and must be uploaded to the Watson Fellowship application page once the link is sent to you. Do not use special characters, as the text must be entered into the site. It is prudent to complete this statement in Microsoft Word or other word processing program and then to copy and paste it into the site.
- c. **Two letters of recommendation.** Letters should be from either two Bates faculty members, or from one Bates faculty member and one other person (e.g., Bates administrative staff, study abroad supervisor, employer, coach). Recommenders should be people who know you well and are comfortable assessing whether you are capable of carrying out your project. They should address the personal qualities you have that make you a strong candidate, and focus less on academics. Each letter must be uploaded to the Watson Fellowship site by the recommender. You must enter their names and email addresses as soon as it is open so they receive instructions directly from the web site with plenty of time to upload.
- d. **Transcripts.** All college transcripts must be uploaded to the site. This includes your Bates transcript and transcripts for any other college-level courses you have taken, including those taken abroad and during summer sessions. Follow the instructions on the web site.
- e. **Travel information.** All prior travel outside of the US must be documented on the site, as instructed.
- f. **Other information.** Fill out all of the questions on the application to the best of your abilities.
- g. **Passport-style photo.** A passport-style photo will be required should you be chosen as one of four Bates nominees to the Foundation. It is NOT required for the Bates application due in September.

### 3) **Structure of the project proposal/personal statement**

In the Watson Foundation’s words, the **Project Proposal** “should describe your plan for the 12-month fellowship year, including a description of your proposed project and details about how you intend to carry it out. In addition, you should discuss how you are prepared to undertake your project.” Keep in mind that this is not meant to be an academic proposal (no references needed/desired), but rather it should describe a project, in as much detail as possible, that comes from your heart, whether it is a long time interest or a new one you developed while on a project abroad during your junior year. The most important project criterion is that it suits the person you are.

The **Personal Statement**, in the Foundation’s words, “should discuss how this is your project—how it reflects your talents, concerns and commitments. You may also want to describe your background, your college years, your professional goals and aspirations, and your reasons for seeking a Watson Fellowship.” You will not get far if your Personal Statement is not personal.

As you can see from these brief descriptions, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two statements as cleanly as the Foundation’s guidelines suggest, but you should make the effort.

We do not make prior Project Proposals and Personal Statements available to new applicants because of the very personal nature of the [Watson Fellowship mission](#). We expect all applicants to be familiar with this mission.

### 4) **Acknowledgement**

Applicants will receive email acknowledgement of receipt of an application completed by the deadline. If there is a problem accessing the online material, a committee member will notify the applicant in question. Please check your email frequently following the deadline for any messages from the committee.

In late September or early October all applicants will receive an email message indicating who among the applicants will be interviewed by the Bates Committee. If there is some reason why the committee will have trouble reaching you during that time frame, please warn us. You may also want to keep the latter part of the first week in October as open as possible, as interviews are typically held then, approximately one week to ten days after the application deadline.

### **IMPORTANT:**

**Please note that your ability to follow these instructions does bear on how we evaluate your application.** We are looking for people who will impress the Foundation with their final application and interview, and be able to carry out a year’s independent research project effectively. Filing a correct application is the easy part, and should be a matter of course. Many years someone hurts their chances by ignoring required information or not adhering to the prescribed format. Please read all these instructions carefully, and save them for future reference!

## Supplemental Information

To repeat a couple of foundation rules that people routinely try to work around without success:

- 1) You must do your project OUTSIDE the territorial borders of the United States. Native Americans, refugees, immigrants, etc., are all worthy of study, but you must study them somewhere else. (Navaho in Canada are fine, but Navaho in Arizona don't qualify as Watson subjects, any more than do Russian emigrés in Brooklyn, or Chinese illegal aliens on a prison farm in California.) Puerto Rico, however, is a permissible destination, not being a state.
- 2) You must leave the country by the first of August the year of your graduation, and STAY GONE for a year. (Obviously, this rule can be waived in case of personal or familial emergency. However, coming back in four months for your parents' thirtieth anniversary, and back again three months later for your roommate's wedding, is definitely a violation of the terms of the fellowship.)
- 3) You may not return to a country in which you have already studied (see #5 below). The Foundation wants you to reach outside of your comfort zone and be challenged. Returning to a place where you know lots of people or have family doesn't fit their requirements. A prior two-week vacation to a country of interest would probably be fine, but a five-week short term is definitely not.
- 4) You must plan to do your project alone. Despite the benefits of an anthropologist and a biochemist working cooperatively on an ethnopharmacology project in the Amazon basin, the Watson Foundation will not fund such a two-person project. They will also reject projects that depend on specific service providers (e.g., a particular helicopter pilot who has agreed to fly you into the mouth of every volcano in Indonesia), whose backing out would leave you helpless.
- 5) You do NOT have to be a United States citizen — you only need to be graduating from a college that is a member of the Watson Fellowship Program. If you are a foreign national, however, DO NOT make the mistake of applying to go home, no matter how fascinating the opportunity you have found. That is not “independent study and travel abroad” for you, even if the same topic and location would be perfectly suitable for an applicant who has never been outside Maine before.
- 6) If you are a U.S. citizen, but reside yourself, or have close relatives, in another country, you may not submit a project that sends you there. The Watson Foundation wants, above all else, to make a difference in the lives of its fellows, not just to ease their way along paths that already lie open before them.
- 7) You may have noticed that many of the example projects listed on the Foundation website have involved more than one country. There is no rule that requires you to work in more than one country. Indeed, one of the easiest ways to make your project look badly planned is to

sketch out grandiose scenarios for which the time could not possibly be found in a year. On the other hand, the Foundation would rather have you reach for more than you can grasp, than see you play it so safe that there is no room left for flexibility and surprises. Once again, the golden rule in picking a location or locations is to make sure that your proposal makes sense in terms of who you are.

- 8) Neither the Bates Committee nor the Watson Foundation will knowingly help you destroy your life. If your project is obviously illegal, or guaranteed to send you directly in harm's way ("Participating in the Intifada"), we are not going to nominate you, because we don't want to endanger you recklessly, and we know the foundation will refuse to fund your project. DO NOT APPLY for travel to any country assigned a US State Department "travel warning" (see <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html>), or under embargo (<http://www.treasury.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/programs/>) or classified as CDC Level 3 (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/>).

The Foundation's rule has usually been to reject proposals involving Cuba, and this status will stay the same as long as Cuba is under embargo. This status may be changing with the new and developing relations between the US and Cuba, but currently Cuba remains off-limits.

- 9) Keep in mind that most countries have very strict definitions of visa status, and what activities can be legitimately pursued under specific types of entry document. You may be in a different legal category from a tourist who has a two-week permit to spend as much money as possible, although you will probably not qualify for professional researcher status. Find out enough about your proposed location to be reasonably confident that someone holding your passport can obtain a visitor status that will make it possible to carry out your proposal. The Foundation will not approach a foreign government on your behalf. Please be aware that many countries will not allow you to spend an uninterrupted calendar year within their borders—one of the reasons why many Watson proposals assume a change of scene after a number of months.
- 10) If you have previously lived for significant amounts of time abroad, think hard about how that is related to your application, and to the Foundation's objectives. If you plan a year within an African community that speaks only its tribal language, a language that can be formally studied only at the University of Nairobi, then your junior year spent studying this language in Kenya starts to look like a key part of your justification for your project. However, under the rules, you must work with tribe members living outside Kenya. If you went on a high school exchange program to Venezuela, a Bates Fall Semester Abroad to Venezuela, and a junior year abroad to Venezuela, make those Spanish-language skills a plus for your application by planning to go somewhere else where they will be of value.

When the program was created, undergraduate study abroad was the exception. Prior overseas experience is now the rule among Watson applicants. The Foundation is very conscious of this change, and understands the argument that previous experience and links may be almost essential to making the most effective use of the fellowship in some countries. However, after years of considering the trade-offs involved, the Foundation has decided to

impose an absolute ban on significant prior experience in the target area. (A Bates Short Term is “significant.”)

- 11) You may already have special contacts, relative to your topic or in your target location, and you should certainly start to look for them now if you don't, assuming that such things are relevant to your proposal. Our assumption is that any such ties will be in their beginning stages when we interview you, and, if you are one of our nominees, will have progressed somewhat by the time of the foundation application deadline (early November), and even further by the time of the foundation interview. These interviews may be very soon after that deadline, or as late as February of the following calendar year. If you are interviewed at the end of the cycle, in February, it will be expected that your plans are more fully developed. In the initial round, we are looking primarily at you as a person, and at the conceptual strength of your proposal, but evidence of planning is encouraged.
- 12) Keep in mind that your proposal does not exist in a cultural vacuum. Both the Foundation and the college committee try to approach each applicant with fresh eyes, but it is impossible not to be affected by one's social and intellectual context. Some time ago, we received an amazing number of proposals in the general area of ecotourism, none of which got an interview. This seems like a natural as a Watson topic, but it is a conceptually difficult subject, and each proposal managed to point out serious shortcomings in all the others. Unless you have done significant reading and thinking in relevant areas of anthropological theory, you would be better off leaving ecotourism alone, despite its many fascinations. Applications at Bates since then have not revealed an equally faddish subject (although climate change/sustainability proposals are getting there), but be wary of seizing on a topic that is in the air everywhere you turn, unless you have both specialized skills and a new perspective that will distinguish you from every other college's nominee with the same clever idea.

You are not the first person to have thought that it would be clever to have the Watson Foundation fund an extended ski trip (“Comparative Economics of Winter Tourism in France and Switzerland,” anyone?), or the chartering of a yacht (hmmm..., “An Ecological Survey of Small Caribbean Islands”?). Those applications just waste your paper and our time. We see the Watson Fellowship as a very special opportunity, and we want it to go to someone with a serious purpose even though the proposal should be on a topic very close to your heart.

## **Responsibilities of College Nominees**

Until 2001-2002, it was the practice of the Bates Watson Committee to advise our four nominees as to what the committee's members saw as the strengths and weaknesses of their projects. It was then up to the nominees to decide whether, and to what extent, they wished to implement our recommendations in preparing their final applications for the Watson Foundation. We saw this as placing responsibility where it belonged, with the applicant. However, events have forced us to change our policy.

Many, if not most, Watson colleges now have a fulltime dean who works with fellowship hopefuls to improve their application materials. This has brought a new level of professional polish to what is submitted. In contrast, the undergraduate individualism of the Bates applications has come increasingly to look undisciplined and careless. As a result, in 2000-2001, the Foundation simply rejected all our nominees for the first time in the history of our relationship with it, and warned us that our applicants were going to have to produce more thoughtful and appropriate documentation of their proposals.

The following steps are designed to improve your chances of success:

- 1) Please try to think through your project idea with a variety of people before you write your proposal this fall. Talk with your parents, friends, spiritual advisers, employers—whoever it is whose judgment and intelligence you trust. Give them the official criteria for the program, and encourage them to force you to justify your project on the Foundation's terms.
- 2) As you write up your preliminary application for the Bates committee, keep it in mind that this is merely the first step if you end up as one of our nominees, and that you will need to have taken your project to a higher level by the time you submit your final application a month later.
- 3) The Graduate Fellowships Advisor, Robert Strong (rstrong@bates.edu), is available to mentor students through the initial grant writing process, and will help prepare nominees for the national competition. We encourage you to work with him, and to seek guidance from the writing specialists at Bates. Remember to call early for an appointment.
- 4) Our analysis of your proposal's strengths and weaknesses will no longer be a number of suggestions, but rather a list of requirements that your revised proposal must meet. If, in our judgment, you fail to produce a final document with the appropriate revisions, we will revoke your nomination, and the Foundation will not consider your project. This will involve each nominee meeting with the member of the committee assigned to her or him both before and after the October Recess. If these meetings do not take place, that will be sufficient cause to revoke your nomination. In 2001-2002 and 2003-2004, we did not nominate a full slate of four people, because we were not convinced that we had four strong, well-prepared candidates, and the Foundation congratulated us on our good judgment and self-restraint.

Our conclusion is that if we allow sloppy, poorly thought-out applications to characterize the College's relationship with the Foundation, we are not only misleading you as to what is required for success in this kind of a competitive environment, we are also damaging the chances of future Bates applicants.

Nominees who are awarded Watson Fellowships may be asked by the Bates Watson Committee or the Dean of the Faculty to come back to the college following their fellowship year to speak to Bates sophomores about their experiences. Awardees are therefore asked to keep in touch with the college following their return. All expenses for such a trip to Bates will be covered by the college and/or the Foundation.

## **Seniors Abroad**

Occasionally, the Committee finds itself receiving electronic applications from seniors who are abroad during the Fall semester. These applications should meet the same guidelines described above.

Obviously, the Committee is not in a position to interview candidates in person who are off campus during early October. Our current method is to hold an interview on Skype or some other videoconferencing mechanism.

Given the tight scheduling of the process, any off-campus applicant will need to have frequent access to a reliable internet connection during the month of October. This is not a perfect solution to the problem of interviewing an absent senior, and the committee would be happy to consider suggestions for an improved process next year.

## **Materials Available on the Internet**

The Watson Foundation has a website at [www.watsonfellowship.org](http://www.watsonfellowship.org), which contains the official self-description and videos that include experiences of former Watson fellows. You should examine these materials carefully to determine whether you should apply to the College for a Watson Fellowship. Keep in mind that the power of the local Bates Watson Committee to select and put forward fellowship nominees from Bates is absolute, and where its initial application procedure differs from that of the Foundation, it is the Bates rules that govern your preliminary application, as described in this document. You may not deal directly with the Foundation, and attempts to do so will produce nothing but irritation at the Foundation's headquarters.

## **Other Available Guidance**

Keep your eyes open for an information meeting in early September. If you are a rising senior, you should already have made progress on your ideas and proposal by that time. Rising sophomores and juniors are welcome to attend.