

# Fellowship Programs – Yale Center for International & Professional Experience (CIPE)

## Essays for Fellowships for Postgraduate Study in the UK & Ireland

\*Be sure to visit our website ([www.funding.yale.edu](http://www.funding.yale.edu)) for advice on finding the right graduate program in the UK or Ireland and on putting together a strong application, as well as to subscribe to the Fellowships newsletter, find out about essay workshops, and how to make an appointment with an adviser to discuss essays.

### How to begin?

#### Start early!

- Deadlines start in early August... (and run through January/February)
- It takes more time than you might think to explore options, seek advice from busy mentors, and put together a good application, with the best possible letters and with application materials that have been written and re-written until they say what you really want them to say. (For advice on seeking letters of reference, drafting a résumé for fellowships, writing essays, and more, see <http://funding.yale.edu/planning/how-apply>.)

#### Do your homework:

- What do you want to do in the world, in the longer-term, over the course of your career? What kinds of training, skills, qualifications and experience do you need to do that? How might you start to acquire them?
- What are you proposing to do with the fellowship, where, and why? Have you found the right graduate program for you, your background, preparation, interests, and longer-term aims? Why do it in the UK/Ireland? Why not study in your home country? Why propose the university/degree course you have and not another? How will this help prepare you to do the work you've said you want to do in the world, and, ideally, prepare you to do it more effectively? (The right fit will make your applications stronger—not to mention make graduate study more fulfilling. If you cannot find the right fit, then do something else, that *is* right for you! There are lots of options out there...)
- What is the fellowship for? What is its history? What are the stated selection criteria for the fellowship? What is the audience for whom you're writing? (The answers to these questions will be clues to the kinds of questions a fellowship committee may ask of your application. The official websites of fellowships often contain a wealth of helpful information: take the time to read it carefully. Audience: usually a faculty committee on-campus; there are often faculty and other experts on national committees, especially for fellowships for graduate study, but national committees usually include former winners of the fellowship, who may work in any field.)
- What does the fellowship application request? What is the essay prompt? (Always answer the question asked!)

#### Think of your application as a whole:

- First: what are the points you really need/want to get across overall?
- Next, consider what will best be conveyed by which part of your application: the letters of recommendation, the transcript, résumé/cv, short-answer questions, and essays, as applicable.
  - What can be said only or best by you?
  - What might better be said for you by other people, your transcript, résumé, etc.?
  - Considering each essay prompt, what might you put into each answer?
  - Do essays/other pieces of the application complement one another to create a coherent narrative?
  - Be strategic about what is included. What sheds light on key points or advances your argument? What is interesting but not particularly relevant to the application/proposal, and therefore might be omitted at need?

#### As you go on, remember:

- **Audiences vary.** It is usually a good idea to aim a fellowship application at an intelligent, well-educated non-specialist, but remember that a specialist in your field might read your application, too. Moreover, some committees are more likely than others to contain specialists, e.g.: Churchill applications are read by people in STEM fields, and graduate school applications are read by the scholars who might be teaching you. In these instances, write for experts in the field.
- In general, an **application** should make readers want to invite you for an interview so they can hear more, and **should set you up to have a good conversation in an interview.** Your application is your first contribution to that conversation:
  - Does your application start the conversation going in the right direction and open up interesting possibilities for further discussion?
  - Does it open any subject you'd rather not discuss? (Be prepared to be asked in an interview to say more about *any* detail you include in your application, however minor. If it's in there, it's fair game—so it should be something it might be good to talk about in a brief interview...)
  - If there's an obvious potential weakness in your application it's often better to tackle it up front, in your application, so that concerns are defused and questions don't detract from your strengths. (There are different ways to do this: talk to an adviser about the best strategy.)
- **Proofread!** (Typos say that you're not taking an application seriously, so the reader needn't either...)

## Marshall Essays

Even if you're not applying for the Marshall but only for other UK/Irish fellowships, it is useful to develop good answers to these questions. (See the current application for up-to-date prompts; what follows is based on the one for study beginning in 2017.)

**Proposed Academic Programme** (500 words) This is usually the best essay with which to begin. It should be pretty straightforward and usually includes the following:

- Your proposed degree course and university
- Justification of your choice of university and course (scholars there doing interesting research in your field, unique curricular features, a cutting-edge research center, archives, etc.—esp. if you're proposing a popular institution like Oxford, Cambridge, or LSE you'll want to make a strong, specific case for it); if you're proposing a research degree and have been in touch with a potential research supervisor who's expressed interest, mention that
- Your qualifications (relevant course work/research/lab experience/even relevant extracurricular work)
- Outcomes (what you hope to gain from this course, why it is a logical "next step," how it fits into your longer-term plans)
- You may focus on Plan A for the term of the fellowship, but you must *also* say something at least briefly about why Plan B would also be a good option (a sentence or two might be all you need)

**Post Scholarship Plan** (500 words). All applicants must write this essay, but **one-year Marshall** applicants must explain why they cannot spend more than a year in the UK and must make an especially strong case for how they'd make the most of a Marshall Scholarship, during that one short year and far beyond.

**Ambassadorial Potential** *"Candidates should describe what "the USA-UK special relationship" means. They should also describe how they might strengthen ties between the USA and the UK in their field of study and through their extra-curricular activities, whilst in the UK and upon their return to the US."* (500 words)

Look at the [official Marshall selection criteria](#), to see what they're after. Together, the Post-Scholarship Plan and Ambassadorial essays are trying to get at your plan for making the most of an extraordinary opportunity, in ways which accomplish the Marshall mission. Use these two essays to complement one another and between them to show how you'd plan to make the most of your time in the UK in ways that meet Marshall goals: what kinds of connections do you plan to make? how might you plan to continue/build on those connections in your future life/work? how might having the chance to study in Britain make a difference to your immediate next step(s) and to the work you've said you want to in the longer-term—how might that work be different?

When you get off that plane, how will you engage with the community/get to know the people and the place? What experiences have been valuable in the past, to help you get to know people/a new place: are you looking forward to similar things in Britain? If they should give you this extraordinary opportunity, how might you try to give something back to the local community, through volunteer work or other types of community engagement?

There might be good professional reasons for studying/making contacts in the UK: don't assume that these are obvious or that readers will assume *you* know them. (Remember that there's a whole separate essay for your academic proposal; these essays should not cover that ground again but might provide context/the bigger picture.) Can you perhaps point to a past or current example of trans-Atlantic collaboration in your field leading to interesting work/creative problem solving? How might you hope to go about making connections and fostering similar good collaboration in future?

\*Avoid general arguments for why study abroad is valuable, or why the history of Britain is important for Americans—and do, please, avoid mentioning tea, tweed jackets, Harry Potter, etc. [Oh, and the Marshall committee *knows* the Churchill quote about the special relationship...] Lots of people could (and will) say these kinds of things—what can you say that someone else might not?

**Leadership** (new as of 2015) *"Candidates should describe a situation in which they recognized and responded to a need for leadership."* (500 words) Again, look at the official selection criteria to see what kind of "leadership" they mean. Choose a situation which shows your potential not only to have good ideas but also to translate them into change in the world. [Note that your [4<sup>th</sup> letter for the Marshall](#) "may primarily address your leadership and ambassadorial potential, and this need not be provided by an academic." One possibility might be to have someone who can support/expand upon what you write in your leadership essay.]

## Personal Statements

(Often capped at 1,000 words, but see the prompts and word limits for each application, as well as the selection criteria for each fellowship, as these vary a good deal. \*Essays for graduate school are not the same as personal statements for fellowships—see "other essays" below.)

A "personal" statement is **not just about you, but also** about the context for the application, what drives you, **the work you want to do/the change you want to make in the world**, and how what you're proposing to do with the fellowship might contribute to that/help you to do that better, more creatively, more effectively... Remember that fellowship committees are, in a manner of speaking, looking for a good return on their investment: if they give you this opportunity, what will you do with it and how might

that make a positive difference in the world—in ways that meet the goals of the fellowship? **This essay should make a persuasive argument for your case.**

**What a personal statement should do:**

- set the context/tone for your application
- give a clear sense of what you want to do in the world and why someone else might care about it [It's great if you're passionate about doing x, but you need more than passion to capture someone else's interest and persuade a skeptic that this is a) interesting and b) work worth doing.]
- give a clear sense of who you are, what drives you, what has shaped you/your values/your desire to make this proposal and especially your desire to pursue the work you hope to in the world [Beware reciting your résumé! The personal statement should be a compelling, cohesive narrative: if an experience or activity helps make your case, if it explains/illustrates a point, it might fit into the essay; if not, leave it out. Let other parts of the application tell other parts of your story.]
- be honest: do not pad, but do not be falsely modest; do not try to guess what the selection committee might be seeking and try to give it to them (this will almost certainly not work anyway) [Be yourself: there is no formula for success. While good essays have common features, there are as many different kinds of good essays as there are good applicants. Your application and your essays should represent you!]
- be a pleasure to read, and well-written [Remember that these essays are often read in bulk, by very busy people...]
- begin with a "hook" to get readers' interest and give them an immediate signpost to where the essay is going [Think of a good newspaper article, which draws you in fast, gives you in the first paragraph or so a clear indication of where it might take you, and encourages you to read to the end—but beginning with an anecdote is not required!]
- Mitchell and Rhodes (and some other) personal statements should include a brief version of the proposed academic program (see above), typically no more than a paragraph.

## Rhodes and Mitchell

See above advice concerning personal statements, and note also the US Rhodes requirement as of 2014, that all applicants must be able to sign the following: "I attest that this personal statement is my own work and is wholly truthful. Neither it nor any earlier draft has been edited by anyone other than me, nor has anyone else reviewed it to provide me with suggestions to improve it. I understand that any such editing or review would disqualify my application." (<http://www.rhodesscholar.org/applying-for-the-scholarship/>).

As of spring 2015: the **Canadian** Rhodes has introduced identical language, and most other national competitions for the Rhodes have introduced very similar changes (see official rules available via [www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes-countries](http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes-countries)).

**The Mitchell Scholarship** introduced the same language into their applications beginning in 2014, so all the same rules apply.

**What this means** is pretty much what it sounds like: your essays for the Rhodes and/or Mitchell must be your own work. This has always been the case (and is true of *all* applications—see [Fellowship Programs' longstanding policy on academic honesty](#)), but now applicants for the Rhodes and/or Mitchell are no longer allowed either to seek or to receive *any* comments, feedback, or suggestions, from anyone. You will need to be able to sign the attestation in good faith, so it is your responsibility to adhere to this rule. Otherwise, your application will be ineligible. (However, you may—and indeed are strongly encouraged to—talk things over with advisers and mentors before you begin your draft. Advice on this handout still applies: with thought and effort these essays are do-able, fear not!)

What if a recommender asks to see a draft of my Mitchell and/or Rhodes essay, to help in writing a letter in support of my application? You may share a draft, but please make clear at the same time that you can receive no comments or feedback *at all*, or your application(s) will be ineligible.

**The new rule also means** that applicants for Yale's endorsement for these scholarships will be asked to upload final versions of their Mitchell and/or Rhodes essays to the official application system(s) before campus endorsement interviews in early September, and not to change them subsequently. [This is so that campus interviews cannot inadvertently provide "suggestions to improve" the essays.] Please plan accordingly—and at least it will be one less thing to have to do later on.

**What if I'm applying for the Marshall?** Did their rules change? No, the Marshall rules have not changed, nor have those of other UK fellowships, and you may still receive feedback on these drafts as in years past.

If I'm applying for Marshall and for Mitchell and/or Rhodes, does this mean I cannot receive feedback on my Marshall essays? No, it doesn't: you can still receive feedback on Marshall (and other) essays, but "While applicants may get ideas from other essays or personal statements they have written, they must write a separate and distinct personal statement for the Rhodes Scholarships" (from Attachment 1 to the 2014 notice to Institutional Representatives, on the US Rhodes website). The same rules apply to other Rhodes competitions and to the Mitchell.

\*You will need to be able to sign the Rhodes/Mitchell attestation in good faith, and you know your essays and your working style best, so it's up to you to draw the line. If there's too much potential overlap, don't seek advice on your Marshall personal statement (although you could do so *after* your application has been endorsed and your Mitchell/Rhodes essay has been finalized and uploaded, but *before* the final deadline for the Marshall). Other Marshall essays are less likely to have significant overlap with, for example, a Rhodes personal statement, and are unlikely to pose a conflict.

\*Yale applicants for the Rhodes/Mitchell should contact the Fellowships office with questions or concerns about these policies. (Email [fellowships@yale.edu](mailto:fellowships@yale.edu), call 203-432-8685, or [book an appointment in the usual way](#).)

## UK Fulbright

Since the Fulbright and Marshall programs have very similar aims and applicants for the UK Fulbright propose to pursue a degree course at a British university, the contents of applications for the UK Fulbright and for the Marshall are very similar (see Marshall notes above). Fulbright *does* require a different arrangement of the material, but there are few hard-and-fast rules about what should go where. Some tips:

- The **Statement of Grant Purpose** is, essentially, an expanded Marshall proposed academic programme, with elements (as appropriate) of the essays on “ambassadorial potential” and post-scholarship plan, and even perhaps of the Marshall personal statement. Don't worry about a timeline or addressing other issues relevant to other Fulbright grant proposals for independent projects: you're proposing a degree course, which should keep you on track and under the supervision of scholars in your field. Questions of feasibility for the UK Fulbright are more along the lines of: have you proposed the right university and degree course for what you want to do? what resources and opportunities make this exactly the right choice? are you prepared to undertake the proposed graduate work successfully? what are you hoping to get out of your studies in Britain and carry forward into your future work? how might this contribute to the Fulbright goal of fostering mutual understanding?
- A Fulbright **Personal Statement** should do the things other personal statements do, giving a sense of who is making the grant proposal and why. Also, if some of the things you're hoping to do to meet people/foster mutual understanding are unconnected to the academic proposal and professional contacts, they might fit better here. For example, a Biology major hoping to explore cutting-edge research in a particular lab and to make connections to facilitate future international research collaborations should probably include these things in the Statement of Grant Purpose; but if she also loves to sing and hopes to join a choral society, that might fit more naturally into the Personal Statement.
- Note that there is also a short-answer question about engagement with local community: *don't repeat content*, but let different essays complement one another.

## Gates-Cambridge

In addition to notes here (including notes on essays for graduate school, below, for essays in the first part of the GRADSAF, the essay about “reasons for wishing to undertake the course” or for the longer statements of interest required for some degree courses), see the very helpful Gates website ([www.gatescambridge.org/](http://www.gatescambridge.org/))—don't miss advice about “[the ideal candidate](#),” the [Gates personal statement](#) (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the GRADSAF), choosing the right person to ask to write the [Gates reference](#), etc.

\***TIP:** don't neglect also to put something in the essay box after the one for the Gates, the box for other [Cambridge Trusts](#), even if you don't find a named scholarship for which you believe you/your proposal are eligible; if you don't, you won't be eligible for, e.g., a Cambridge Trust scholarship for tuition...

## Henry and Paul Mellon Fellowships

These essays will look very like the essays described above. The Paul Mellon's two essays are not unlike the UK Fulbright essays, although without the distinctively Fulbright emphasis on mutual understanding. The Henry's one long essay is more like the Marshall “proposed academic programme”, but should also include some of the context and framing of a personal statement (an academic proposal in a vacuum isn't as persuasive...)—perhaps more like a UK Fulbright statement of grant purpose or like a statement of interest for a graduate school application (see below).

## Other essays

**For graduate school applications, especially for postgraduate degree courses in the UK/Ireland:** These are not personal statements like those you wrote to get into Yale College or for various fellowships. Graduate schools are not usually looking for well-roundedness, broad interests, leadership, or extracurricular activities. Usually, they want you to cut to the chase and to tell them:

- why you're interested in what they have to offer (be specific),
- what you're hoping to study (which optional courses interest you, what kind of research you'd like to do, what kinds of questions you're interested in exploring—tip: it really helps if what you want to study is what they do well)

- what relevant background and preparation you have for the proposed graduate work (aim this at the people who might be teaching you; relevant extracurricular experience *might* be included but the focus should be on academic preparation)
- something of what you're hoping graduate study might help you to do afterwards

**Research proposals:** There is no better source of advice than from a professor in the appropriate field. Seek advice from your academic mentors at Yale; they may also be able to refer you to helpful colleagues and potential research supervisors, perhaps even at a British or Irish university...

- While academic disciplines, word-limits, and other specific requirements differ, the Faculty of English at Cambridge offers an excellent general outline of what should go into *any* research proposal ([http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/research\\_prop.htm](http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/research_prop.htm)).

## Resources

- The Fellowships website, [www.funding.yale.edu](http://www.funding.yale.edu), especially “How to apply” and the [UK/Irish fellowships pages](#)
- The official website(s) of the fellowship(s) for which you're applying
- Campus application information available via the Yale Student Grants Database: <http://studentgrants.yale.edu>. See policies about academic honesty, deadlines, etc.: <http://funding.yale.edu/planning/fellowship-policies>.
- Information about choosing postgraduate degree courses in the UK and Ireland, <http://funding.yale.edu/fellowships/uk-irish-graduate-courses> and decoding UK degrees <http://funding.yale.edu/fellowships/decoding-british-degrees>.
- Advice from past Yale applicants: <http://funding.yale.edu/planning/hear-other-yalies>.

## \*About sample essays

- Make a serious attempt at writing your own first draft *before* looking at samples—it can be very hard to hear what *you* have to say when other people's voices are in your ear. (Note that the US Rhodes strongly discourages students from looking at samples at all.)

## People from whom you might seek advice about essays

- A Fellowships adviser at the Yale Center for International & Professional Experience: see [www.funding.yale.edu](http://www.funding.yale.edu) for [how to make an appointment](#) to discuss essays (in person or via Skype/telephone). At seasons of high demand, appointments fill up weeks in advance of a campus application deadline...
- Trusted mentors and/or those writing your letters of reference (not only will their advice help you, but talking things over with you makes it easier for them to write stronger, more specific letters of reference). Forward planning is essential!
- College Writing Tutors and the Yale College Writing Center: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing>
- Graduate Fellowship Affiliates (<http://funding.yale.edu/contact/graduate-fellowship-affiliates>) and [other past winners of fellowships](#)
  - Don't forget to be mindful of other people's time, and to thank them for their help...
- But don't forget: this is *your* application, and should be your own work and say what you have to say!
- Note recent changes to Rhodes and Mitchell competitions: any conversations about subjects relating to personal statements should really take place *before* you embark on drafts.

**Once again: proofread!** (Really. Even at the campus application stage. In tough competitions, small things can make a big difference and typos distract unnecessarily from the interesting things you have to say. If it's permitted, have someone who hasn't already read your application a million times proofread for you, too...)

**The final word:** yes, working on these essays takes a lot of time and energy, as does applying for fellowships, and yes, the odds are against winning. The good news is that, no matter what happens with your fellowship applications, the least you'll get out of engaging properly with the application process is a clearer sense of where you're going and why, and a stronger application—not to mention terrific letters—for graduate/professional school or for a job, that's a major victory!

All best of luck!

**Fellowship Programs – Yale Center for International & Professional Experience – [www.funding.yale.edu](http://www.funding.yale.edu)**