

The Mellon Foundation
JOHN E. SAWYER SEMINARS
ON THE STUDY OF
MAJOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES
IMPACTING THE UNIVERSITY

Purpose: The 30th anniversary of the Sawyer Seminars program arrives amid national turmoil over complex, existential topics that have the potential to affect university operations. Our present moment has created much uncertainty, but it also provides us with opportunities for deep thinking and intervention. Such opportunities are made possible through freedom of intellectual inquiry, which allows our society to think critically, dissent when necessary, and build more equitable, just futures.

In this vein, for the 2024 Sawyer Seminars, Mellon invites proposals that meaningfully engage faculty, other academic leaders, and visitors from a variety of fields in the study of academic freedom and democracy in the American university. We seek to support seminars that demonstrate through humanistic methods the ways in which a higher education system featuring a multiplicity of perspectives, thoughts, and voices is essential to a functional democracy.

Program Activities: Each seminar normally meets for one year, though some have continued for longer periods. To allow for planning, seminars need not be scheduled for the coming academic year. The seminar should be led or co-led by humanities faculty; however, the proposed seminar should be a collaborative effort involving participation by scholars and administrators from across disciplines and units, with varying perspectives on the problem being addressed. In addition, we encourage you to invite participants from nearby institutions, such as community colleges, liberal arts colleges, museums, research institutes, and local organizations to achieve interdisciplinary and community-engaged collaboration.

As Mellon reviews proposals, preference will be given to those that seek to:

- Bridge the gap between the socially equitable world envisioned in much humanities scholarship and the policies and practices characterizing today's universities;
- Empower humanists to be active participants in the strategic conversations and planning that many universities are engaged in or preparing to undertake;
- Imagine new and revised university structures that would enhance the growth of the humanities and promote the realization of more just futures.

Grant recipients would be expected to highlight and disseminate findings across campus units using a medium that best fits their campus context, such as a white paper or town hall.

Selection and Award Process: Mellon expects university administrators to convey the invitation broadly to members of the faculty and to inform their communities of the way one local proposal will be selected for submission.

Proposals should be submitted through Mellon's [online grant portal](#). Once a proposal has been invited, an institutional contact will then gain access to the application in the portal, as designated in the invitation letter. This person can grant access to additional contacts and remove themselves as necessary. The application consists of the following:

1. An executive summary (description of proposed work).
2. The rationale for raising the indicated problem/topic, the central questions to be addressed, and the potential significance of the inquiry to be pursued, including its impact on the institution.
3. A description of the cases to be studied and the humanities methodologies to be brought to bear on them; the thematic “threads” that will run through the seminar; and evidence of concrete buy-in and support from university administration.

Note: The text covering these first three components typically ranges from 3,000 to 6,000 words and must not exceed 8,000 words.

4. If support for a postdoctoral fellow and/or dissertation research fellow(s) is envisioned, the procedures to be used in recruiting for these positions. **Please note: hiring of postdocs or awarding dissertation research fellowships is not a requirement this year.**
5. A well-developed preliminary plan for the seminar that outlines the specific topics to be addressed in each session, provides the names and qualifications of the scholars and community partners who would ideally participate, and offers direction for developing a resource that summarizes and aims to institute the seminar's findings.
6. A budget and budget description, informed by the budget guidance below.
7. Short CVs (1-2 pages) for the principal seminar organizers. Information about other core participants should be limited to a few lines of text included as an appendix.
8. An endorsement letter signed by an institutional officer.

The proposal, budget, and budget description should be entered in the appropriate fields in the system. Each of the components outlined above will be entered into its own field, with the exception of the CVs, which should be uploaded as PDFs. There is an additional compliance section in the online application. While we do expect this to be completed, it is required for internal purposes, and will not be viewed by the selection panel.

All applicants will be notified of selection decisions by late February 2025. Selected finalists will work with Higher Learning staff through an iterative process to finalize materials that will be presented to the Foundation's Board of Trustees for approval in June 2025.

Following approval, funds are disbursed to the institution. Annual reports on the progress of the seminar are required for the grant term.

Budget: Funding requests should not exceed \$300,000 for each seminar. Budget periods should align with reporting dates that work for the institution, but **the first budget period must begin with July 1, 2025**. For this reason, the first period may be longer or shorter than 12 months. Funds *may* support: one postdoc; up to two dissertation research fellows (in the form of graduate tuition or supplemental funding); travel and living expenses for short stays by visiting scholars; costs associated with coordinating seminars, including meals, honoraria, consulting fees, and stipends. Unlike in previous years, there are no required expenditures. Funds may not be used to cover released time for regular faculty participants, rentals of university space, or indirect costs.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to Kris Choe (kmc@mellon.org), Program Associate in Higher Learning, and Ava McLaughlin (avm@mellon.org), Program Assistant in Higher Learning.