Selection Process
Prospective Presidential Fellows are nominated to The Graduate School by graduate directors after a student’s application is complete but prior to matriculation at USC. Nominees must have applied for admission to a doctoral or MFA program at USC and have met all unit criteria for acceptance. The Graduate Council’s Fellowships and Scholarships Committee reviews all nominees. Successful candidates have promising research agendas or creative projects, coupled with accomplished academic records and superior standardized test scores.

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CHASE W. NELSON, Presidential Fellow
The Presidential Fellowship

The Presidential Fellowship program is USC’s most prestigious university-wide award for promise of excellence at the graduate level. Unique among peer institutions for its reach across disciplines and focus on professional development, the merit-based program awards Fellows a supplemental stipend totaling $32,000 for doctoral students (awarded over 4 years) and $20,000 for MFA students (awarded over 5 semesters). This award is in addition to fellowships and assistantships students receive from their academic programs.

Interdisciplinary Advantage

USC Presidential Fellows comprise a varied group of more than 80 talented scholars from a range of institutions, disciplines and backgrounds. Current Fellows study in 9 colleges and schools and represent 29 doctoral and MFA graduate programs at USC.

Personal Engagement

The Presidential Fellowship program boasts a retention rate above 95 percent. Second only to its financial benefit, Fellows cite personal contact and a sense of community as the most valued facets of the program. Through an innovative progression of seminars (GRAD 801), Fellows benefit from community building outside of their discipline, a broadened understanding of research at USC, and collaborations with peers within and beyond their home departments.

An Award Winning Program

In 2013, USC was awarded the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS) and Educational Testing Service Award for Excellence and Innovation in Graduate Admissions for the Presidential Fellowship program. CSGS is a consortium of more than 200 graduate schools from the southern region of the United States.

A Diverse Community of Scholars

Diversity is cherished by the Presidential Fellows program. We welcome nominations of domestic candidates and women in the STEM fields, first generation college goers, veterans and underrepresented groups in all disciplines. About 1 in 6 Fellows is international.

Professional Development

As a Presidential Fellow, you can expect professional development and work-life balance initiatives designed to enhance your success and growth as a student and professional. Recent initiatives include:

• Consultations with a publisher-in-residence to advance personal publication plans;
• Visits from campus leaders to explore opportunities in academic research which extend beyond the classroom;
• Training in communication strategies for framing and explaining your research to an intelligent, but non-specialized audience; and
• Guidance from the Office of Fellowship and Scholar Programs to help you prepare a competitive application packet for national fellowship competitions.

Program Guidelines

• The award amount for the Presidential Fellowship is $8,000/year renewable for 4 years for doctoral students and 5 semesters for MFA students, contingent upon adequate progress toward the degree and regular participation in GRAD 801, a bimonthly seminar.
• Presidential Fellows also receive the greater of either a department’s standard assistantship or $8,000 of annual support from their academic program. (This amount can come from teaching or research assistantships, summer stipends or other fellowships.)
• Funds may be applied to tuition, fees, or stipends.
• The Presidential Fellowship is highly selective. All MFA and doctoral programs at USC are invited to nominate outstanding candidates.

Fellows meet twice a month to enjoy lunch and convene for GRAD 801, a professional development course which meets throughout the academic year.