



2017 Summer Fellowships in Disability Policy Research

The 2017 summer fellowship program is an opportunity for graduate students in the social sciences and related disciplines to learn about the current state of disability policy, pressing policy issues surrounding the employment of individuals with disabilities, and how to conduct high-quality research in these areas. This opportunity is funded under a cooperative agreement between Mathematica Policy Research and the Social Security Administration (SSA), via its Disability Research Consortium (DRC).¹

During their experience in summer 2017, each fellow will:

- Spend the summer onsite at Mathematica's Washington, DC office;
- Select a policy research topic on which to conduct an independent research project and receive mentoring and guidance from a Mathematica researcher;
- Write a research prospectus that outlines the fellow's plan for a full research project (thesis or dissertation chapter) based on the literature review and other investigation completed during the summer. The fellow must submit the paper by the end of the program and present an overview to Mathematica and SSA staff;
- Participate with other summer fellows in a weekly discussion group on selected disability policy readings, facilitated by a Mathematica researcher;
- Meet with Mathematica researchers and SSA research and policy staff to discuss their research and other policy topics;
- Have the opportunity to attend policy and research forums on a range of topics at Mathematica and in the DC area.

The summer fellowship program will run from June 5 through August 4, 2017. Fellows will receive a stipend of \$6,500 over the fellowship period.² We expect to award up to four fellowships in 2017.

¹ More information about the DRC can be found at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/drc/index.html>.

² We cannot advise about the tax implications of this stipend; please consult with your tax professional.

Program Eligibility

Eligible applicants include students who:

- Are currently enrolled in or recently graduated (in the six months prior to the program start date) from a Master's program, or are students early in a Ph.D. program (prior to the dissertation phase) in a U.S. institution of higher education;
- Have a strong interest in disability policy and a background in economics, sociology, psychology, political science, public policy, public administration, special education, public health, social work, or a related discipline;
- Are available to be onsite at Mathematica's Washington, DC office from June 5, 2017 through August 4, 2017;

All eligible persons are welcome to apply. We strongly encourage applications from individuals with disabilities, students at minority serving institutions,³ and students from under-represented racial and ethnic groups.

Application Requirements

To apply, interested candidates should submit the following materials:

1. **Curriculum vitae or resume** with the candidate's contact information;
2. **Graduate transcript** (unofficial or official) from current program documenting progress toward degree;
3. **A letter from a faculty member or advisor in the student's graduate department** confirming the applicant's field of study, status in the graduate program, and reason why the applicant is a strong fit for the fellowship;
4. **Two-page (1.5-spaced) personal statement** detailing (a) educational and professional background, (b) reason for interest in disability policy, (c) proposed research topic (see next section for guidance), and (d) how the selected topic and/or summer fellowship opportunity relates to graduate study, future research, or professional portfolio. Please carefully proofread this statement and ensure that each of the topics mentioned above is fully addressed.

³ Including Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs), Tribal College or University (TCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSIs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Institution (AANAPISIs), and other minority-serving institutions as defined by the United States Department of Education.

Qualities of Successful Applications

Each applicant should propose a topic of study for their summer research along with its policy significance in as much specificity as possible given the space constraints. Research topics should be closely related to programs under SSA's purview and/or promoting employment for individuals with disabilities. For students who do not have their own fully formed research agenda, the following list offers topics of strong policy interest.

- Determinants of adult employment success for youth with disabilities, potentially including strengths and weaknesses of the current support system and/or how socioeconomic factors affect outcomes.
- The potential role of the federal/state vocational rehabilitation program in reducing the reliance on federal disability benefits through early intervention and return-to-work supports.
- The interaction between Social Security disability programs and other programs and supports including workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, and private disability insurance.
- The effect of the Affordable Care Act reforms on the employment, program participation, and well-being of individuals with disabilities.
- The role of program rules and work incentives in Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income on the return-to-work efforts of federal disability beneficiaries.
- Unique challenges faced by individuals with mental illness and psychiatric conditions in finding and maintaining employment, gaps in the support system, and promising practices for reform.
- The United States' support system for individuals with disabilities in an international context and reform proposals.

Candidates should be sure to use the personal statement to draw a strong link between their current program of study and proposed summer research project. This is especially important for applicants who select a topic from the list above or are students in disciplines not mentioned in the eligibility criteria; while other disciplines are not excluded from applying, there must be a strong case made for why this program would be a good fit in those instances.

Please see the proposals on Mathematica's website⁴ for examples of successful past fellowship applications. Most successful applicants in the past have already begun to conduct preliminary explorations of their topic at the time of application, but we do not expect candidates to have fully researched their topic prior to arrival. In the past, many fellows have deviated slightly from their proposed topic as their research project progresses, but the proposal should provide applicants with a solid starting point.

⁴ <https://www.disabilitypolicyresearch.org/disability-research-consortium/fellowships>

Research Project Goals

At the end of the summer, participants will have completed a research prospectus approximately 10 pages long, based on their proposed topic and guidance from their mentor over the course of the summer. The paper will include an abstract, statement of the problem and significance to disability policy, literature review, and plan for analysis. It is not intended that analysis will be started over the summer, but rather that participants develop a plan for how the research will be conducted. Please note that fellows will not have special access to administrative data for analysis as part of this program.

Participants will also prepare and deliver a presentation summarizing their summer research project to DRC and SSA staff in the final week of the fellowship program.

Submission Instructions

Individuals with questions or seeking more information about the program should email DRCSummerFellows@mathematica-mpr.com. Applications (with all supporting materials included as separate Microsoft Word or PDF files) should be **submitted via email to DRCSummerFellows@mathematica-mpr.com**. Complete applications must be received by **Friday, February 10, 2017 at 11:59pm EST** to be considered. A review committee will evaluate applications, and phone interviews will be conducted with finalists during early April. Selected fellows will be notified of their award on or around April 14, 2017.