

# Middlebury Fellowships Watson Application Guidelines

## General Information

### Deadlines and Notifications

Note: See [Timeline and Checklist](#) for Middlebury Applicants for more deadline details and requirements.

- **April 15 Preliminary Application Deadline:** This is not a commitment and if you miss this, you can still submit a preliminary application later. Plan to submit by July at the latest to get feedback and be registered in the Watson Foundation online application system.
- **Middlebury Internal Deadline: Early September (9/10 at noon in 2019)** THIS IS A HARD DEADLINE. No nomination applications will be accepted after this date. Complete an abbreviated version of the online Watson application.
- **Campus interviews** for selected applicants will occur in September.
- **Nominee selection** for four nominees and one alternate will occur by early October.
- **Nominees will complete their applications** by working with the fellowships advisor, and members of the selection committee, to solicit letters of recommendation and revise their application for the final Watson Foundation deadline in November.
- **Watson Foundation interviews** for nominees will be conducted by a representative from the foundation on campus in late fall or winter. Nominees must participate in a mock interview prior to the formal interview.
- **Watson awards** are announced in mid-March and fellows begin the program in summer by August 1.

### Eligibility

Senior or super-senior in fall semester (February or May grads). There are no citizenship or GPA restrictions.

### Characteristics of Watson Fellows

Watson fellows are individuals of unusual promise. In assessing candidates, the program uses several criteria; not every fellow will possess each quality and fellows will not necessarily display the qualities in the same manner.

- Leadership
- Resourcefulness
- Imagination or Vision
- Independence
- Integrity
- Responsibility/Emotional Maturity
- Courage

### Important Notes about the Watson

- **Your application should really reflect YOU.** This is *not* an academic fellowship. It's about a deep, abiding personal interest you have and it's also about you as a deeply curious, independent, courageous person. The Watson foundation is looking for fellows who are independent, imaginative, resourceful, responsible, bold, and self-motivated. Your project is just that—your project and should embody, reflect a passion you have. It

does not have to be unique to you but definitely can be. It should grow organically from your life—things that you’ve done, explored, studied, wondered about, are inspired by—and should be personally significant to you. Watson priorities are person first, project second. It does not matter if this project is similar to something someone else did; what matters is that it’s the right project for you.

- **Selecting countries:** you should be choosing places that are new to you (the stretch factor). You may have been inspired by a period of study abroad or travel in a certain place but depending on the amount of time you spent there (more than 4 weeks total), you should not include that country/area on your project list. (And often there are ways to adapt a particular interest to a different set of countries/areas). Also, some countries are of such a broad and diverse scale, you may be able to justify a visit to a different part of that country. China or Russia might fall into the latter category. The Netherlands would not. Check additional country restrictions listed in the Fellow Expectations section at <https://watson.foundation/fellowships/tj>. Yes, country selections may shift between nomination and final application and during the course of a Watson year. Always think carefully about why this place is important for your project.
- **Contacts abroad may take some time to identify and connect with**, so definitely allow for that. What you want from them may differ according to your project, but they should provide a resource and a kind of grounding for you in the community/country/project focus. You may also be contributing to them as well—but make sure that your mission, your project is still your own.
- **Recommendations—if you are nominated, you will need 2. No recommendations needed for nomination.** If two, both can be from Middlebury or one from Middlebury and one external.
- **Language ability:** you will definitely propose going places where you do not speak the language—and you should. But do think about how you will conduct the work of the project in these spaces. Guides or interpreters may be essential in some cases.
- **In thinking about your personal statement and project proposal, you want to describe the following:** Your plan for the 12-month fellowship year, including a description of your project and details about how you intend to carry it out. (In addition to focusing on a topic you are passionate about, the project should be personally challenging (yet feasible), independent, and sustainable over 12 months.) Discuss why you chose your topic, how it developed out of previous interests or experiences, and how it represents a new challenge. You may also want to describe your background, your college years, your professional goals and aspirations, and your reasons for seeking a Watson Fellowship.

### **General Parameters for Successful Projects**

#### **Must be of deep and long-standing personal interest**

- Enough enthusiasm and excitement about the topic that you can sustain a year of totally self-directed activity toward exploring this topic.
- Must be evidence of long-term involvement in this topic—although it doesn’t need to be academic or formal.
- Evidence of involvement can be formally documented (membership in related groups, academic choices, summer jobs, etc.) and/or informal practices (long-term family traditions).

#### **Must be feasible**

- Need to have the appropriate skills to make your project logistically possible.
- Examples of feasibility issues to consider: language barriers, technical skills, access to areas on itinerary, budget limitations, equipment issues, etc.

**Must be compelling**

- Why is this the right project for you?

**Must involve travel to areas where the student has not previously lived, traveled, or studied for more than four weeks (certain exceptions apply)**

- Not U.S. or country of origin.
- No minimum or maximum number of countries.

**Must be focused**

- Objective must be clear and achievable within a year, and your itinerary and plan must be well designed to meet that objective from start to finish.
- Applicants should be able to clearly describe the steps they will take to achieve the goals of their project: a typical day or week; what questions will you ask to learn what you want to learn, and of whom? What logistical issues will you need to address?
- Consider rules of proportion re: depth of work and number of countries.
- Consider how order of countries influences your goals.

**Must be able to be pursued with great independence and adaptability**

**Must extend for a twelve-month period of time without interruption.**

- Cannot return home except for extreme personal or medical emergency; both require prior approval from Watson.
- Must depart by August 1 of year after graduation.
- Must be available for returning fellows conference in August following Watson year.

**Does not involve formal study**

- The project is an exercise in independent, self-directed inquiry.
- Can include short-term language instruction or informal course auditing.

**Must be safe**

- Cannot visit countries assigned a level 3 or 4 by the US State Department or a US Treasury embargo. Travel Advisories can be accessed through the U.S Department of State website at:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/> Non-US citizens may have additional restrictions based on their citizenship.

- If concerns about a particular country, have a back-up plan.

### **Must not replicate previous experiences**

- Should not be one more opportunity to do in a new place something you've already done.
- Must have the "stretch" factor: taking your interest in a topic to a new and more challenging level or expand it in a different direction.

### **Must reflect genuine inquiry**

- Should be characterized by open-minded exploration, not a search for evidence to confirm a pre-established position.

### **Writing the Proposal**

Successful proposals will be personally significant; compelling; creative, imaginative and flexible; feasible; and well written.

Watson Fellows often need contacts in each country. A contact is an individual or agency at the point of destination who has agreed to provide appropriate assistance to you. The proposal should indicate your contacts in each area, whether you have been or will be in touch with them, and how you plan to utilize them.

The proposal should be interesting to read: provide insight into you; describe the events, experiences or background that motivate you to pursue this topic; explain what you want to do, where you want to do it, and how you plan to do it; and speak to the skills that will enable you to accomplish your objectives.

### **The selection committee should be able to learn the following information from your proposal:**

- In addition to your overall project summary information, what exactly do you hope to do on a daily, weekly, monthly basis? It is helpful for the Committee to have a concrete sense of your actual activities beyond more vague terms like "observe," "immerse," "talk with," and "explore."
- What are the major questions you hope this experience will answer for you, and/or the primary experiences/accomplishments you hope to achieve?
- If you are traveling to areas where you do not speak the language, how will you deal with this?
- If your project is reliant on a certain skill set (photography, diving, interviewing, field research, data analysis, etc.), how have you developed those skills?
- In what contexts will you be interacting with people in host countries? Will you have access to the people and organizations you have identified as crucial to your project?
- What evidence is there that the topic of your proposal has been a long-term and abiding passion?
- Why is this project important to you, to the larger society, or both?

### **Some suggestions for developing your proposal:**

- Brainstorm a timeline of important moments/activities that pertains to your theme. When was the first time you became interested? How did your involvement take shape? Were there people, projects, classes, books, conversations, or experiences that influenced your interest? What did you learn along the way? Write them all down in sequence; this will help you to tell your story.
- Spend lots of time on the Web exploring your topic and the countries you'd like to visit. What organizations and individuals would you want to connect with, and why?
- Consider the logistical feasibility of your proposal. What logistical barriers—language, technology, access, etc.—might you face, and how will you overcome them?
- There are no requirements around the number of countries you can visit. The length of time you stay in each county is proportionate to the depth of the work you can accomplish there. Make sure your proposed itinerary takes this into consideration.
- Review the Watson website. How do you see the Watson goals reflected in these projects? Does this help you understand and shape your own project in any way?
- Contact Middlebury students, staff, faculty and alums, who are familiar with your travel regions or topic for advice and networking. Not sure if there are any students from your countries? Send an email to the presidents of any of Middlebury's cultural groups and ask.
- Share your ideas and invite feedback from friends, professors, mentors and family members who know you well; they are often able to pick out themes that you may not be able to see for yourself.

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