



## Senior Program Officer Higher Learning

The [Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#) (“Foundation”) invites nominations and applications for the position of Senior Program Officer, Higher Learning. As a leading member of the Higher Learning team, this person will have the opportunity to collaborate with program colleagues and other thought partners to provide vision and oversight for the Foundation’s work in supporting higher education, which is focused at the intersection of the humanities and social justice.

The Foundation is a not-for-profit, grantmaking organization that, as the largest funder of the arts and humanities in the United States, seeks to build just communities where ideas and imagination can thrive. Through the [Higher Learning](#) program (“HL”), the Foundation assists colleges, universities, research institutes, and allied organizations in developing and implementing projects that elevate previously subordinated ideas and knowledge, promote demographic diversity within the academy, and facilitate broad and equitable access to humanities higher education. Higher Learning operates across all institutional sectors, including research universities, liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and community colleges; and it supports the intellectual and professional development of academics at all stages, from undergraduates and graduate students through postdoctoral scholars and junior faculty members to the senior professoriate and institutional leadership. At present, it especially values work that extends the reach of the humanities beyond academia per se and into the larger community, whether through educational programs for incarcerated students, through the implementation of place-based curricula for undergraduate and graduate students, or through research partnerships between higher learning institutions and community organizations.

The incoming HL senior program officer will be a leading voice on issues surrounding the role of higher education, particularly the humanities and liberal arts, in addressing some of the most difficult challenges facing society today. She/he/they must be conversant and comfortable within the many varied spaces of higher education, including institutions serving historically underrepresented groups, large research universities, small private colleges, comprehensive institutions, independent research institutes, and other education- and humanities-based cultural organizations. She/he/they must be bold and collaborative, providing forward-looking leadership that reinforces the role of the humanities in diverse and inclusive societies and supports those institutions and initiatives that creatively mobilize humanities scholarship in the service of social justice.

## **Leadership and Governance**

Since 1969, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has demonstrated an abiding commitment to the humanities and the arts. To this end, it supports exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable legacy of ambitious, path-breaking work. Since its inception, the Foundation has paid out nearly \$6B in grants. At the end of 2020, its endowment totaled approximately \$8.2B.

[Elizabeth Alexander](#) joined the Foundation as its seventh president in 2018. With more than two decades of experience leading innovative programs in education, philanthropy, and beyond, Ms. Alexander builds partnerships at Mellon to support the arts and humanities while strengthening educational institutions and cultural organizations across the world. Prior to joining the Foundation, Ms. Alexander served as the director of Creativity and Free Expression at the Ford Foundation. In this capacity, her work focused on the intersection among the arts, social justice, and mass incarceration. At Ford, she co-designed the Art for Justice Fund—an initiative that uses art and advocacy to address the crisis of mass incarceration—and guided the organization in examining how the arts and visual storytelling can empower communities.

A poet, essayist, and scholar, Ms. Alexander brings extensive experience in higher education to the Foundation. She was the Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University from 2015 until 2018. Between 2000 and 2015, Ms. Alexander taught at Yale University, where she was a professor in the departments of African American Studies, American Studies, and English, helping rebuild the African American Studies department while serving as its chair for four years. In 2015, she was appointed as Yale's inaugural Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry. At Smith College, she was the Grace Hazard Conkling Poet-in-Residence and the inaugural director of the Poetry Center. While assistant professor at the University of Chicago, she was awarded the Quantrell Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.

Ms. Alexander earned a BA from Yale University, an MA from Boston University, and a PhD in English from the University of Pennsylvania. She holds honorary doctorates from Yale University, Haverford College, Simmons College, and the College of St. Benedict. Ms. Alexander is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and serves on the board of the Pulitzer Prize.

An accomplished Board of Trustees supports the work of President Alexander and the Foundation broadly. The Board consists of eight to ten Directors, and Directors are elected at each annual meeting. The officers of the board include a Chairman, Secretary, Chief Investment Officer, and other officers as the Trustees may, from time to time, elect. The President of the Foundation also serves as a member of the Board in an *ex officio* capacity. Directors advise the Foundation on grantmaking priorities and bring a wealth of personal and professional experience with them. The current Directors include:

- [Kathryn A. Hall](#), Board Chair: Founder and Co-Chair, Hall Capital Partners LLC
- [Richard H. Brodhead](#): President Emeritus, Duke University
- [Katherine G. Farley](#): Former Senior Managing Director, Tishman Speyer
- [Joshua S. Friedman](#): Co-Founder, Co-Chairman, and Co-Chief Executive Officer, Canyon Partners LLC
- [Heather Gerken](#): Dean, Yale Law School
- [Thelma Golden](#): Director and Chief Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem
- [Kelly Granat](#): Managing Director and Portfolio Manager, Lone Pine Capital
- [Jonathan Holloway](#): President, Rutgers University
- [Sherrilyn Ifill](#): President and Director-Counsel, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- [Glenn D. Lowry](#): Director, Museum of Modern Art

## **Diversity**

Mellon's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and access dates back to its inception. In the 1970s, the Foundation supported programs such as A Better Chance (ABC), and in the 1980s, it established the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program. The Foundation has funded initiatives to diversify the professoriate, research that led to the founding of the Posse Foundation, and long-term support of post-doctoral programs aimed at facilitating the progress of early career faculty of color. Across its history, the Foundation has spurred diversification efforts in higher education, particularly in the United States and South Africa.

Prior to March 2019, the Mellon Foundation maintained a distinct program funding division specifically focused on such diversity initiatives. However, given that diversity has been and remains a key focus that cuts across all of Mellon's grantmaking in support of higher education, the humanities, and the arts, the Foundation merged the program with the program area in Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities (HESH), which has since been renamed Higher Learning. Within this merged unit, Senior Program Officer Armando Bengochea and his talented team continue to lead the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program, as well as the important portfolio of grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving entities. The formal integration of the Higher Education and Diversity programs makes the essential work of promoting diversity, access, and belonging even more central and prominent in the Foundation's work across the higher education sector. It also underscores that rigorous, discerning inclusion is critical to the Foundation in all of the sectors in which it works.

## **Programs**

Collaborative planning by the Foundation and its grantee institutions generally precedes the giving of awards and is an integral part of grantmaking, as the Foundation seeks to continue with programs long enough to achieve meaningful and measurable results. Through its grantmaking, the Foundation seeks to strengthen institutions' core capacities while promoting and defending the centrality of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and the well-being of diverse, fair, and democratic societies. To this end, the Foundation makes grants to support exemplary and inspiring arts and humanities work in the following four core program areas:

### **Arts and Culture**

The [Arts and Culture](#) program celebrates the transcendent power of the arts to challenge, activate, and nourish the human spirit. It supports exceptional creative practice, scholarship, and conservation of arts and culture, while nurturing a representative and robust arts and culture ecosystem. The program works with artists, curators, conservators, scholars, and organizations to ensure equitable access to excellent arts and cultural experiences. Thus, in supporting visionary arts practitioners and the participatory roles that they play across institutions and communities, it focuses in particular on exceptional organizations and artists that have been historically under-resourced, while also fostering experiments with new economic paradigms and institutional models that center equity, justice, and creative problem-solving in arts and culture.

### **Higher Learning**

Through the [Higher Learning](#) program, the Foundation assists colleges, universities, research institutes, and allied organizations in developing and implementing projects that elevate previously subordinated ideas and knowledge, promote demographic diversity within the academy, and facilitate broad and equitable access to humanities higher education. Higher Learning operates across all institutional sectors,

including research universities, liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and community colleges; and it supports the intellectual and professional development of academics at all stages, from undergraduates and graduate students through postdoctoral scholars and junior faculty members to the senior professoriate and institutional leadership. At present, it especially values work that extends the reach of the humanities beyond academia per se and into the larger community, whether through educational programs for incarcerated students, through the implementation of place-based curricula for undergraduate and graduate students, or through research partnerships between higher learning institutions and community organizations.

### **Humanities in Place**

[Humanities in Place](#) supports place-based projects and programs that promise to broaden and deepen our understanding of our histories and lived experiences. Working with media, historic and memorial spaces, didactic museums and other institutions, and conveners of public experiences—including the digital or the ephemeral—Humanities in Place strives to expand the public expression of the histories that have made us and the values we hold. In addition to resourcing mechanisms for optimally identifying, documenting, creating, and caring for our places, the program promotes the evolution and sustainability of civic, cultural, educational, and community institutions focused on advancing social justice through place-based approaches. Its objective is to help engender a more just present and future landscape that communicates more complete stories about who we are—in community with one another and in society.

### **Public Knowledge**

The program in [Public Knowledge](#) supports the creation and preservation of our cultural record—the vast and ever-growing historical archive that helps us explore and better understand our intertwined humanity. Its goal is to increase equitable access to deep knowledge—from scholarly texts to community collections—that helps build an informed, culturally diverse, and civically engaged society. Public Knowledge works with archives, presses, and a range of university, public, and other local, national, and global libraries that are foundational to knowledge production and distribution. It prioritizes grantmaking that supports the innovative maintenance of technology, tools, and infrastructure for content related to the Foundation’s social justice orientation, expands digital inclusion, and focuses on the preservation of materials from historically underrepresented and underfunded cultures and populations. In collaboration with its grantees and funding partners, Public Knowledge aspires to cultivate networked resources, services, and collections, and to ensure that more authentic, reflective, complex, and nuanced stories are revealed, preserved, and told.

## **Search for the Next Senior Program Officer**

An integral member of the HL program's leadership team, the incoming senior program officer will work closely with Program Director [Phillip Brian Harper](#), Senior Program Officer [Armando Bengochea](#), and Program Officer [Maria Sachiko Cecire](#), sharing with these colleagues responsibility for maintaining and strengthening the Foundation's relationships with a diverse group of higher education leaders. She/he/they will participate in meetings and policy discussions as a thought leader and supporter of innovative and progressive pedagogy, curriculum, and scholarship in the humanities. The senior program officer will also work collaboratively with other program officers and associates to help define, strengthen, and execute HL's grantmaking efforts and initiatives, ensuring that the Foundation maintains and enhances its commitment to preserving and promoting the societal importance of humanities scholarship and education. Additionally, the senior program officer will have the opportunity to:

- **Leverage the Foundation's relationships to identify and provide grant support to a new and diverse range of scholarly endeavors in the humanities:** Building upon the Foundation's sterling reputation throughout the higher education sector, the new senior program officer will be tasked with representing the Foundation to current and potential grantees and will regularly meet with presidents, provosts, deans, consortia directors, and others who seek or receive support from Higher Learning. She/he/they will especially champion grant opportunities for new initiatives and programs that have been historically under-resourced, further allowing the Foundation to propel inclusion and innovation within higher education and the humanities. Additionally, the new senior program officer will travel and present on behalf of HL and invite exemplary programs and initiatives to apply for the Foundation's support. She/he/they will then be responsible for evaluating submitted proposals and advocating for programs to the Foundation's Board of Trustees.
- **Anticipate the role of humanities education in addressing broader societal concerns:** With many pressing issues in the national and global consciousness, from climate change to mass incarceration, it is more important than ever to defend and promote the role humanities scholarship plays in the betterment of society. The next senior program officer will be uniquely situated to assist in identifying and supporting leading institutions and humanities initiatives that will give rise to potential solutions for some of the most fraught and important issues facing the world today.
- **Focus grantmaking opportunities toward programs that address diversity, inclusion, and access within higher education:** The incoming senior program officer will have the opportunity to collaborate with other HL program officers to enhance the Foundation's efforts to support minority-serving institutions and programs serving historically underrepresented groups. There will be myriad opportunities for this new senior program officer to leverage her/his/their higher education knowledge, experience, and scholarship to further grant opportunities that promote diversity within humanities faculty and institutional leadership, ensure access for students, and advance inclusive practices and pedagogy across the higher education spectrum.
- **Spearhead grantmaking focused on community colleges and higher education in prison:** Over the last few years the Higher Learning program has significantly expanded its support for initiatives that provide college-level humanities instruction to incarcerated persons, and for efforts to facilitate community college students' access to humanities study—especially through transfer to public four-year baccalaureate institutions. A new senior program officer who brings interest in and knowledge about these areas will have the chance to lead HL into its next phase of engagement in this work.

- **Lead and support discussions around specific challenges facing higher education and the humanities:** As a representative of the Foundation and a leader in the field, the next senior program officer will engage head-on with current trends and topics of concern within higher education. As institutions evolve and respond to external and internal pressures, including new technologies, changing student demographics, and financial constraints, the senior program officer will have the opportunity to lend her/his/their own expertise, organizing and leading discussion on the topics that are of interest to the Foundation and the institutions and disciplines it serves.
- **Assist with the management of day-to-day operations:** In consultation with a diverse and collaborative leadership team, the incoming senior program officer will work within Higher Learning to prepare grant recommendations, essays, and reports for the Foundation's Board of Trustees and will participate in quarterly Board meetings. Additionally, she/he/they will help oversee the monitoring and reconciliation of all grant narrative and financial reports, engage with other program officers on policy matters and cross-programmatic initiatives, and provide assistance with other programs' grantmaking initiatives that involve undergraduate and graduate education. The senior program officer will also work with the Foundation's Communications office in bringing the work of Higher Learning to the attention of the public, potentially contributing content for blog posts, newsletter stories, edited transcripts of public talks, and the like.

#### **Desired Qualifications and Characteristics:**

The Foundation's next Higher Learning senior program officer will possess expert knowledge of higher education and its current challenges and opportunities as well as a nuanced understanding of possibilities and perceptions surrounding humanities scholarship. Serving as spokesperson and champion for the impact humanities education can have on the public good, the next senior program officer will lead with boundless passion for the humanities and ideas for how new areas of education and scholarship can address the evolving needs of contemporary society. In addition to an experienced understanding of higher education administration and a desire to promote vision and creativity within HL, the next senior program officer will possess the following qualifications and attributes:

- A PhD in a field of the humanities with demonstrated intellectual breadth, familiarity with a range of critical and theoretical approaches used in the study of the arts and humanities, and an ability to work cross-disciplinarily;
- Significant experience at the college or university level as a tenured faculty member and administrator;
- Experience in managing large and complex programs;
- Ability to collaborate with a diverse group of colleagues and engage at a broader level with individuals from a wide range of backgrounds;
- Thorough understanding of processes, policy issues, and trends in higher education;
- Ability to imagine and address the broader issues nationally and globally that will impact higher education and the humanities;
- Deep commitment to diversity and inclusion and a record of leading and supporting programs that give voice to underserved populations;
- A strong record of publication in her/his/their field;
- Ability to work independently and possession of the excellent organizational and time management skills needed to meet quarterly deadlines;
- Proven competence in interpersonal communication, including public speaking;
- Exceptional editorial judgment and meticulous writing and copyediting skills;
- Demonstrated capacity for team building, mentoring, and leadership;
- Willingness to travel frequently both domestically and internationally; and,

- Commitment to a collegial work environment and to collaboration with colleagues in all of the Foundation's programs and functional areas.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION IS BASED IN NEW YORK CITY,  
AND THE SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER WILL WORK OUT OF THAT LOCATION.**

Evaluation of candidate materials will begin immediately and continue until a new senior program officer for Higher Learning is selected. Nominations and application materials (cv and thoughtful letter of inquiry/application) should be sent to: [SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER](#)

*The Foundation is an equal opportunity employer offering a competitive salary, generous benefits, and excellent working conditions.*