Intellectual Humility in Public Discourse

International Call for Research Proposals

With the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation, and subject to a final grant agreement, the University of Connecticut’s Humanities Institute announces a funding proposal competition of $2 million dollars to support research projects on intellectual humility and its role in promoting meaningful public discourse and other values.

Introduction

For the purposes of this RFP, intellectual humility can be understood to involve the owning of one’s cognitive limitations, a healthy recognition of one's intellectual debts to others, and low concern for intellectual domination and certain kinds of social status. It is closely allied with traits such as open-mindedness, a sense of one's fallibility, and being responsive to reasons. Traits and behaviors opposed to intellectual humility and its allied traits, then, would include closed-mindedness, overconfidence in one's opinions and intellectual powers, dogmatism, an exaggerated sense of intellectual autonomy, reluctance to pursue and consider new evidence, intellectual arrogance, and intellectual vanity.

The Templeton Foundation has recently funded a suite of empirical research projects that aimed to increase our understanding of the nature, causes, effects, and correlates of intellectual humility. And it has funded a set of projects on related philosophical and theological issues, projects that have focused on the value of intellectual humility, proper epistemic practice in light of peer disagreement and cognitive limitations, the role of deference to authority in intellectual humility, whether and how to practice humility in one’s moral and religious commitments amidst moral and religious diversity, and more. The themes of these two previous initiatives, as well as summaries of the various research projects that they subsume, can be found at the following two sites:

http://thethrivecenter.org/research/research-projects/the-science-of-intellectual-humility/
The aim of this new RFP is to build on the work of these previous initiatives, as well as on other advances in our understanding of intellectual humility, in an effort to develop and apply research that will promote the practice of intellectual humility in public discourse.

Topics & Application Instructions

We invite proposals to investigate one or more of the questions below. In keeping with the aim of the RFP, applicants are encouraged to propose projects that build on recent research on intellectual humility, especially research funded through one or both of the previous funding initiatives described above. Eligible topical foci for the questions are limited to the examples given in this and the previous section, and to the topics and themes covered in the various components of the previous initiatives. Although a small portion of funding may go to support individual research projects, proposals from teams of researchers, including teams drawn from multiple disciplines and fields, are strongly preferred. No project treating topics in bioethics, environmental ethics or sexual ethics can be accepted, as these are outside the boundaries of the donor funding category associated with this grant.

• **QUESTION 1.** What are the barriers that prevent people from engaging in open-minded, intellectually humble dialogue over socially and culturally divisive issues? How can these barriers be overcome? And what are the benefits for public discourse of overcoming them? Specific sub-questions eligible for funding include the following:
  - How might our implicit biases prevent us from engaging in constructive dialogue with those of differing scientific, moral, religious, or theological perspectives? What models might be employed to overcome such biases, and what benefits might result from doing so?
  - What specific sociological, educational and religious challenges and structures undermine intellectually humble discourse on relevant subject matters, and how might such challenges be effectively overcome?
• Is it possible to be intellectually humble (or exemplify allied traits) and yet remain deeply committed to some position on which there is persistent disagreement? Or does firm commitment on moral, meta-ethical, religious, theological, or even (in some cases) scientific matters in the face of disagreement render one intellectually arrogant (closed-minded, dogmatic, etc.)? If the former, why are people often inclined to think that humility is inconsistent with such commitments, and how can this inclination be overcome?

• While a great many religious adherents take scientific advances to be in harmony with their beliefs, it is nevertheless still common to see religiously motivated resistance to certain well-supported scientific theories, with evolutionary biology as a key example. How might the resistance to this theory by religious communities be mitigated? Relatedly, how might dialogue between these communities and other religious communities who are not so resistant be improved—in tone as well as in substantive practice?

• Discussions of the relation between science and religion are often strident and dismissive in tone. What obstacles stand in the way of more constructive, intellectually humble dialogue in this domain?

• How might public, religious, and/or media institutions be structured to promote more constructive, and less strident, dialogue over issues of ultimate concern?

• QUESTION 2. What new or existing methods and/or measures for investigating and promoting intellectual humility (or related concepts) could be applied fruitfully to the context of public discourse over divisive issues? A strong preference will be given to proposals for projects that concern intellectually humble dialogue or discourse addressing the sub-questions for RFP/Fellowships Question #1.
  ▪ What scalable models, networks or other interventions are or would be effective or ineffective in promoting more reason-based, intellectually humble dialogue?
  ▪ What metrics can be developed or used to determine when and why there is a lack (or abundance) of intellectual humility and meaningful public discourse over particular divisive issues?

Proposed projects are expected to demonstrate clear strategies for promoting intellectual humility in public discourse, overcoming the kinds of barriers
mentioned above to such discourse, and/or developing a scalable model for doing so, or assessing the success and impact of such models.

**Deadlines / Award Schedule**

**Letters of Intent**: will be due May 1st, 2016; with notification by July 1st, 2016  
**Full Proposals**: will be due on October 1st, 2016  
**Awards**: will be announced in January 2017.

**Letter of Intent Stage**

Letters of Intent are due **May 1st, 2016**. They must include the following items:

1. A description of the project (not to exceed 1,000 words) that states:  
   a. The goals of the project;  
   b. How these goals address one or both of the Questions above;  
   c. How the goals will be pursued, including a summary of hypotheses or the main line(s) of argument;  
   d. The expected outputs or deliverables;  
   e. The project timeline;  
   f. A brief statement of how the proposed project will help to promote cultural change.

2. A two page CV or résumé for each PI and Co-PI.

3. A statement of the expected total cost of the project, and a statement of any additional funding provided (or expected to be provided) for the project.


All Letters of Intent and supporting materials must be submitted electronically in either pdf or Word format to pdp@uconn.edu. *The phrase “IHPD Letter of Intent” should appear in the subject line.*

**Full Proposal Stage**

Those applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must provide:

1. A **cover letter** which includes project title, amount requested, estimate of project’s duration, and list of team members (if applicable);  
2. A **description** of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 4,000 words (not counting references). The description should include the central questions
of the project, the background and significance of the questions, identification of which questions in the “Topics” section will be addressed by the project, and a summary of the methodology and hypotheses;

3. A project **abstract** of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-specialists, and which would be published on the IHPD website and included in publicity if the proposal is funded;

4. A **timeline**;

5. A detailed **budget** with accompanying narrative explaining line items.
   a. (Overhead is limited to 15% and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases.);

6. **Approval**, if applicable, of the applicant’s department chair and home institution’s signing officials.

Full Proposals and supporting materials must be submitted electronically in either pdf or Word format to **pdp@uconn.edu**. The phrase “**IHPD Full Proposal Submission**” should appear in the email subject line. Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who have been invited to submit by the IHPD Principle Leader, on the basis of the Letter of Intent phase.

**Selection Criteria and Requirements**

Full proposals will be evaluated by topic-relevant expert reviewers with appropriate specializations. Selection criteria will include the following:

- Feasibility of the project in the specified timeframe;
- Prior research accomplishments of the project leader and other team members;
- Originality, innovation, and significance of the intended project;
- Relevance of the project to the themes of the IHPD project;
- Quality of the budget justification;
- Coherence of the intended research plan.

While additional funding from other sources is not required, applicants are encouraged to seek such funding and to list the amount and sources of additional funds in their proposals. All applications must be submitted in English and all payments will be in US dollars.

Funded projects must have their PL commit to the following requirements:
• Submit interim and final reports, as well as interim and final expenditure reports. The reports in both cases should not exceed 2 pages, and should detail the outcomes of the proposed project;
• Attend and present conclusions at one of the IHPD Capstone Events (expenses covered);
• Notify the IHPD project at pdp@uconn.edu of all conference presentations, papers and books that arise from funded research;
Follow stipulations for grant awards as communicated by the University of Connecticut.