Intellectual Humility in Public Discourse

Residential and Non-residential Fellowship Program

Call for Applications

With the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation, and subject to a final grant agreement, the University of Connecticut’s Intellectual Humility in Public Discourse (IHPD) project will award both residential and non-residential fellowships in the academic, media, and non-profit sectors to support research and engagement initiatives that further IHPD’s goals of promoting new research on, and public discussion of, the role intellectual humility may play in public discourse.

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/
Residential Fellowships

The aim of the IHPD Residential (Visiting) Fellowship Program is to allow the Project Fellows the opportunity to develop and apply research that will promote the practice of intellectual humility in public discourse, in line with the main research questions of the project:

- **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 guiding projects 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 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 and that relate to 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?

**Residential Fellows are expected to propose projects that engage with one or more of these questions or subw questions.** 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.

Details on the IHPD project as a whole can be found on the project’s website.

In most cases, Residential Fellowships will be either for a single semester or an academic year, although proposals for shorter Fellowships terms will be considered. Fellows will be expected to pursue some research or engagement activity while holding the Fellowship and to be in residence at UConn for the length of the Fellowship’s term. Fellows will be provided a workspace, the use of a computer, and access to University Libraries. While in residence, Fellows will be expected to attend and present in an ongoing IHPD seminar.

Funding will vary depending on the proposed length of stay, with compensation totaling $25k for one semester and $50k for one academic year; support for shorter term Fellowships will be scaled appropriately.
Applications are due April 15th, 2016 and should be submitted in either pdf or Word format to **pdp@uconn.edu** with “Residential Fellowship Application” in the subject line of the email. The application consists of three parts:

1. A proposal narrative (1500 words maximum); The narrative should include the following information:
   a. The goals of the project;
   b. How these goals address those of the IHPD project;
   c. How the goals will be pursued;
   d. The expected outputs or deliverables;
   e. The project timeline.
2. A CV
3. Two letters of recommendation that speak to the quality and feasibility of the proposed project. *It is the applicant’s responsibility to contact these references.* Letters should be sent independently (by their authors) to **pdp@uconn.edu** by April 22nd.

**Non-Residential Fellowships**

The aim of the IHPD Non-Residential Fellowship Program is to allow journalists, publically-minded academics and artists the opportunity to write books, longform articles or theatrical pieces engaging with the main research questions of the project and aimed at a popular audience.

Nonp Residential Fellows are expected to propose projects that engage with one or more of the above questions or sub-questions. 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.

Details on the IHPD project as a whole can be found on the project’s website.

Funding will vary depending on the project proposed, but is not normally expected to exceed $20,000.

Applications will be considered on a rolling basis. Application” in the subject line of the email. They should be submitted in either pdf or Word format to pdp@uconn.edu with “Nonp Residential Fellowship Application” in the subject
line of the email. The application will consist of three parts:

1. A proposal narrative (1500 words maximum). The narrative should include the following information:
   a. The goals of the project;
   b. How these goals address those of the IHPD project;
   c. How the goals will be pursued;
   d. The plan for publication or production, including the expected venues for either;
   e. The expected outputs or deliverables;
   f. The project timeline.
2. A CV
3. The names of two references who can speak to the quality and feasibility of the proposed project and its potential public impact. It is the applicant’s responsibility to contact these references; letters should be sent directly to pdp@uconn.edu.