

## **Summer Experiential Learning Fellowships in Disability Policy Research**

The 2015 Summer Experiential Learning Fellowship program is an opportunity for graduate students in the social sciences and related disciplines to learn about the current state of the disability policy debate, pressing policy issues surrounding the employment of individuals with disabilities, and to conduct high-quality research in these areas. This opportunity is funded by a cooperative agreement between Mathematica and the Social Security Administration (SSA) via its Disability Research Consortium.

During their experience in summer 2015, fellows will:

- 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 report summarizing their research by the end of the program and verbally present their findings 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.

Fellows will receive a stipend of \$6,500 for their efforts over the 8-week fellowship period. We expect to award up to four fellowships for summer 2015.

### **Program Eligibility**

Eligible applicants include students who:

- Are currently enrolled in or recently graduated (in the 6 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);
- 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 Policy Research in Washington, DC for approximately 30 hours per week from June 1, 2015 through July 31, 2015;
- At the time of fellowship award, selected graduate student researchers must be citizens or non-citizen nationals of the United States, or must have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence. Individuals on temporary or student visas are not eligible for stipend award.

Applications from minority students, students with a disability, and students attending a Minority Institution<sup>1</sup> are strongly encouraged.

### **Application Requirements and Selection Criteria**

To apply, interested candidates should submit the following materials:

1. **Resume** with candidate's contact information;
2. **Graduate transcript** (unofficial or official) from current program documenting progress toward degree;
3. **A letter from the candidate's advisor or department chair** 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. **2-page (double-spaced) personal statement** detailing (a) educational and professional background, (b) reason for interest in disability policy, (c) proposed research topic and (d) how the selected topic and/or ELF opportunity relates to graduate study or future research or professional portfolio.

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 are students in disciplines not mentioned in the eligibility criteria above; 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 carefully proofread this statement and ensure that each of the topics mentioned above is fully addressed.

We do not expect candidates to have fully researched their topic prior to arrival. Rather, we suggest selecting a topic that is relevant to the candidate's current graduate studies. Research topics should be closely related to programs under SSA's purview and/or promoting employment for individuals with disabilities. For students who have not yet narrowed their dissertation topic, we suggest selecting from the following list, ensuring that the proposed topic is linked to your current studies.

- 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 (VR) program in reducing the reliance on federal disability benefits through early intervention and return-to-work supports.
- The role of increasing obesity prevalence on rates of disability and predictions regarding future strains on the federal disability system.
- The effect of the Affordable Care Act (the ACA or "Obamacare") reforms on the employment and well-being of individuals with disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Including an Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Tribal College or University (TCU), Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), or Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Institution (AANAPISI).

- 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.

Individuals with questions or seeking more information about the program should contact Jody Schimmel Hyde at JSchimmel@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 13, 2015** at midnight to be considered. A review committee will evaluate applications, and phone interviews will be conducted with finalists during mid-April. Selected fellows will be notified of their award no later than April 15, 2015.