

Merit Fellowship

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will select and award the Texas A&M University Merit Fellowships for FY26 (admission in Fall 2025). The goal is to recruit and matriculate the highest quality domestic Ph.D. and M.S. (thesis option) students with a clear career objective to pursue a Ph.D. Fellows will have the potential to make unique and diverse contributions to the College’s graduate programs. Master’s students currently enrolled at Texas A&M University who have not received a Merit or Excellence Fellowship previously are eligible for a doctoral Merit Fellowship. The offer letter must designate the recipient as a “*Texas A&M University Merit Fellow.*” Fellowship recipients must be enrolled full-time (9 hours fall and spring, 6 hours summer) and be eligible for 12 months of medical insurance. The Graduate and Professional School will invite awardees to attend the New Fellow’s Socials in the Fall and Spring semesters of their first year. The gatherings, meet-and-greet style events, provide an opportunity for TAMU administrators and staff to meet new Fellows. The New Fellow’s Socials promote interaction with other fellows and offer an opportunity to acknowledge their achievements.

Merit Fellowship

The College Graduate Merit Fellowship provides a minimum of four years of funding for PhD students enrolling for the first time in the 2025-2026 academic year. The College Graduate Merit Fellowship provides a minimum of two years of funding for master’s students enrolling for the first time in the 2025-2026 academic year. The minimum funding commitments are outlined below. Colleges/Departments must seek approval from the Grad School by January 15 each year to deviate from the described funding commitments. College and department support must be noted as a multi-year commitment in graduate student offer letters.

Year 1 (2025-2026) Merit Fellowship from the college includes a fellowship or research assistantship, tuition, required university and college fees for full-time enrollment, and health insurance (see below). College/departments are responsible for posting commitments using FY25 Graduate Merit (GM) allocation.

- Awardees funded with a Graduate Research Assistantship: After the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.
- Awardees funded with a stipend posted to the student account: the college/department will reimburse awardees participating in a Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) health insurance program for 12 months of medical insurance at an amount equivalent to the cost of the employer contribution for the same premium category on the A&M Grad Plan. For fellows participating in a non-TAMUS insurance program, the college/department will reimburse up to the cost of medical insurance at an amount up to the cost of the employer contribution for the student-only premium category on the A&M Grad Plan. If you enroll in a graduate student medical health insurance plan, keep your receipt and contact your department’s business administrator to learn how to be reimbursed.
- For **doctoral students**, a minimum \$30,000 stipend for the *Texas A&M University Merit Fellow* Graduate Research Assistantship or fellowship stipend. If the department’s base stipend is \$30,000 or higher, the Merit Fellow’s stipend will be at least 10% higher than the base stipend.
- For **masters students**, a minimum \$24,000 fellowship stipend for the *Texas A&M University Merit Fellow*. If the department’s base stipend for master’s students is higher than \$24,000, the Merit Fellow stipend will be at least 10% higher than the base stipend.

Subsequent years Assistantship: Departments will post commitments using department/research funds.

Years 2-4 (2026-2027 through 2027-2029) doctoral student *Texas A&M University Merit Fellows* will receive a **0.5 FTE assistantship** equal to the first-year fellowship or the department’s base stipend, whichever is greater, tuition, required university and college fees for full-time enrollment, 9 hours fall/spring, 6 hours summer (if applicable), and insurance¹. Except for the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays 12 months employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.

Year 2 (2026-2027) master’s student *Texas A&M University Merit Fellows* will receive a **0.5 FTE assistantship** at the same amount as first-year fellowship or the department’s base stipend, whichever is greater, tuition and required fees for full-time enrollment, and insurance¹. Except for the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays 12 months employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.

Department match: a) student with a master's degree pursuing a 64-hour Ph.D. – the department must fund years 2-4; b) students pursuing 96-hour direct to Ph.D. – the department must fund years 2-4; c) student pursuing a Master’s degree – the department must fund year 2.

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¹Awardees employed in a 9-month or 12-month Graduate Assistantship must remain eligible for 12 months of Graduate Student Employee health insurance.

Criteria and Selection

- Nominees must be a U.S. resident, U.S. Permanent resident, or an **eligible noncitizen** and enrolling for the first time in the 2025-2026 academic year.
- Master’s students currently enrolled at Texas A&M University are eligible for doctoral nominations.
- Final review and selection will be made by an *ad hoc* committee of the COALS Graduate Program Council or COALS graduate faculty.
- Merit Fellows cannot receive another large fellowship or assistantship of similar or greater value. Recipients may have the option of deferring other fellowships. In cases where the recipient is selected for a prestigious external fellowship or training grant, the College Merit Fellowship may be deferred for one year. In either case, contact Jamie Norgaard or Mary Bryk for additional information.
- While it is not required that nominees be admitted at the time of nomination, the nominating department is expected to offer admission to nominees and execute an “admit” decision code in the admission portal should they be awarded the fellowship.
- Preference will be given to Ph.D. students; a maximum of 15% will be allocated to MS (thesis option) students.
- Students have until April 15, 2025, to accept or decline but will be asked to respond within 2 weeks if possible.

Awards will be made on a competitive basis using a scoring rubric that considers:

- **Grades** (weight 20%)
- **Other Academics** (weight 25%): Based on the University or program the nominee attended, clarity of career objectives, statement of purpose, commitment to pursue a Ph.D., class rank, academic awards and honors, etc. This reflects your impression of the overall academic training and potential of the student.
- **High Impact Experiential Learning** (weight 20%): Based on research experiences (REU, honors research, graduate research, independent study, etc.), study abroad, internships, special projects, etc. Emphasis is on independent research experiences that resulted in presentations, posters, abstracts, publications, etc.
- **Demonstrated Leadership, Contribution to College Diversity, and other attributes that engender your strong support** (weight 20%): Based on leadership experiences, involvement in societies, organizations, departments/university (e.g., clubs, scientific societies, officer positions), contribution to diversity in the college, other attributes.
- **Strength of letters of recommendation** (weight 15%): Based on strength of letters of recommendation. Indicate overall quantitative (e.g., top 1%, top quartile, etc.) or qualitative ranking (e.g., best, above average, etc.).

Nomination link in AGLS InfoReady Portal: <https://tamu-agls.infoready4.com/#freeformCompetitionDetail/1959277>

Due date: January 31, 2025

The Scoring Rubric is provided for your information only; nominators should not complete the scoring rubric.

After the nomination package is submitted to InfoReady, your department’s associate head for graduate programs will complete the scoring rubric. If the associate head does not provide written comments to justify their scores in each rubric category, the nomination package will not be considered.

Additional Information (these documents are to be uploaded into the InfoReady Portal by the due date; templates for the nomination package are available in the InfoReady Portal):

1. **Nomination application entry fields** information on the nominee (entered directly into InfoReady).
2. **Nominee’s Statement of Purpose or Career Objectives** - Provide a Statement of Purpose from the Nominee.



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This may be taken from the student’s graduate school application, or you can request a Statement of Purpose from the nominee.

3. **Nominating Statement from Department or Faculty Advisor** - Provide brief evaluative comments describing why this individual is one of your top applicants. Include how the applicant will uniquely contribute to your department and the college. **DO NOT** exceed one page.
4. **Nominee’s CV.**
5. **Nominee’s Transcripts** from all colleges or universities attended.