

Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans

www.pdsoros.org

Deadline: November 1

Fields of Study

Open. Graduate study in the U.S. for New Americans.

Description

The purpose of the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans is to provide opportunities for continuing generations of able and accomplished New Americans to achieve leadership in their chosen fields. To achieve this purpose, the fellowship program tries to identify and support individuals whose past accomplishments are truly distinctive in light of their background and whose future portends continuing contributions that will identify them as leading and influential figures within their fields of endeavor.

The Soros Fellowship provides a maintenance grant of \$20,000 and a tuition grant of one-half the tuition cost of the U.S. graduate program attended by the Fellow. The fellowship is granted for up to two years of graduate study in the U.S., with consideration given for a third year grant when necessary and appropriate. A Fellow may pursue a graduate degree in any professional field or scholarly discipline in the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences. Applications will not be accepted from individuals having only one semester remaining in a graduate program.

Criteria for Selection

Candidates must be not older than age 30 by the application deadline and must be a Green Card holder, have been naturalized as U.S. citizens, or be children of two parents who are both naturalized citizens. Candidates must either have a bachelor's degree or be in the final year of undergraduate study. Those who are already in graduate school may apply for fellowship support to continue that study. Candidates must also demonstrate the relevance of graduate education to their long-term goals and its potential in enhancing their contributions to society.

Successful candidates will meet at least two of the following three criteria:

- 1) **Demonstrated creativity, originality, and initiative, as demonstrated in one or more aspects of his/her life.** Creativity may be demonstrated in many ways. Creative approaches often involve an ability to question assumptions and redefine a problem; a capacity for identifying and committing to something the individual loves, and personal courage to pursue goals and strategies that may be widely considered unpromising or risky.
- 2) **A commitment to and capacity for accomplishment, as demonstrated through activity that has required drive and sustained effort.** Accomplishments are considered in relation to the personal, academic, and professional goals of importance to the individual. They seek individuals whose accomplishments represent something truly extraordinary in light of their background. Applicants have a tendency to exaggerate accomplishments; the screeners want to see evidence that the applicant has stuck with something, and accomplished it. This demonstrates a capacity for significant follow-through, not just resume-building and short-term commitments.
- 3) **Commitment to the values expressed in the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution.** Such commitment can be demonstrated through activities that include but are not limited to support of human rights and the rule of law, opposition to unwarranted encroachment on personal liberty, and advancing the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society. Fundamentally, this criterion is interpreted to mean that the candidate demonstrates that they take personal responsibility for improving this society.

In practice, when two candidates are roughly comparable on the first two criteria, the one who has strength in the third criterion will be considered more favorably.

In addition, the following questions also strongly influence review of applications:

- To what extent does the candidate give promise of continued contributions that will be significant, will reflect distinctive creativity, originality and initiative, and will mark the candidate as a leading and influential figure within her/his field of endeavor?
- To what extent is the individual's proposed graduate training relevant to her/his long term career goals and of potential value in enhancing her/his future creativity and accomplishment?
- What is the *trajectory* of the candidate or the *distance traveled* from the point of departure? Have they done much with little, and shown sheer grit and determination? If they have been extraordinarily recognized over a long period of time, what have they done with the advantages that they have had? The screeners are looking for people who will be leaders in the future, based on what they have done, given their background, and what they will be able to do with a particular graduate education.

The notions of trajectory and distance traveled are considered with regard to the context of the applicants' lives: their families, their cultures, their immigrant experience, their exposure to hostile or supportive environments, and their stage in life and in educational experience.

Criteria that do **not** influence selection include gender, national origin, and region of the U.S., undergraduate institution, or field of study. Financial need is not considered. The particular social, political, or ideological agenda that an applicant's achievements and promise may benefit is irrelevant. Creativity in the options market is given the same consideration as creativity in classical music or treatment of a debilitating disease. The exception, of course, relates to creativity and achievement that demonstrates a commitment to the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Academic achievement, by itself, is not enough, and an indifferent record may be compensated for by other factors. An individual with an extraordinary academic record without extraordinary creativity and sustained achievement would not be considered as a finalist. Conversely, an individual who persuasively demonstrates extraordinary creativity and sustained achievement and the relevance of projected graduate training at a program she/he is likely to gain admittance would be considered as a finalist. The previous academic record is not decisive, but it is still relevant because it influences whether a student would gain admittance to the graduate program for which support is being sought.

Application Procedure

Typically, candidates must complete the following:

- a completed application form (available on the web or by mail);
- two essays on specified topics, each 1500 words in length;
- a resume and other supporting materials, e.g. articles, papers, portfolio (optional);
- two reference letters, one from a faculty member familiar with the candidate's current academic work, and the other from someone familiar with the candidate in a work or project setting. Both should comment on the applicant's creativity, accomplishment, and commitment to the values of the U.S. Constitution;
- institutional status form;
- an official transcript from the undergraduate institution;
- documentation that the candidate meets the definition of "New American";
- scores from any graduate aptitude test (e.g., GMAT, MCAT, GRE, LSAT) required by programs to which the candidate has applied.

Students should begin work on their applications early, and discuss application materials with faculty and other mentors no later than September to meet the November deadline.

The essays are the crucial component of the application as screeners will evaluate the extent to which the candidate has presented a case for the unusual level of creativity and achievement in the areas related to their chosen field of study that would, given his or her background, qualify them as a finalist. Other parts of the application - letters of recommendation, exhibits, grades and graduate record scores – are evaluated to confirm, validate and elaborate on the claims of creativity and achievement in the essays.

Letters of recommendation are useful if the referee takes seriously what the Foundation asks for and directly addresses the evaluation criteria of creativity, accomplishment and commitment to the values of the U.S. Constitution. Candidates would improve their chances if they provide their application materials and the advice from the Foundation to the people who will write letters of recommendation. A generic letter of recommendation is unhelpful. Interview preparation is also important for finalists.

Each year's competition receives over 1,000 applications, perhaps 350 of which are identified as competitive with respect to the program's criteria, and given intensive review by screening panels in particular subject areas. Based on this review, about 80 candidates are invited to interviews in New York and Los Angeles. The interviews are held the last week in January and the first week in February, with an early March announcement of the 30 Soros Fellows. Fellows are required to attend a weekend event in New York City, to have a campus visit from a Foundation officer, and to submit a final report at the end of their award.

Additional Information

Paul and Daisy Soros were Hungarian immigrants who earned a fortune in engineering and shipping that enabled them to establish a fellowship program for New Americans with a \$50 million trust in 1997. (Minor footnote: Paul Soros is George Soros' older brother.) Paul and Daisy Soros wished to give back to the U.S. and felt that assisting young New Americans at a critical point in their education was an unmet need. The fellowship program also signals to all Americans the contributions of New Americans to the quality of life in the U.S. It is crucial for applicants to be able to say in an interview what it means to them to be a "New American."

From 1998-2003, the immigration status of Fellows has been 33% naturalized citizens, 20% green card/asylum, and 47% children of naturalized citizens. The proportions vary year to year. Fellows have ranged in age from 19-29, but the average age of finalists at the time of an interview has been 23-25 years old. Among the fields of study, 29% of fellows are studying medicine and 23% law. The Soros Foundation suspects that this is because the qualities that it takes to go to medical or law schools are similar to those required to succeed in the fellowship competition. However, the Soros wants to encourage proposals in subjects other than medicine and law, and relative to the number of applications, other fields have a better rate of success. The Foundation reports that the competition does not favor proposals for one-year master's degrees in the same subject at one's undergraduate institution. Among the other (non-MD/JD) winners, 60% are in PhD programs and 40% in Masters, which is in reverse proportion to the applicant pool. Students already in graduate school tend to do better in the competition.

The Soros Foundation recommends reading the **profiles of previous winners** on the Foundation website: www.pdsoros.org. The sketches focus on qualities and achievements that particularly influenced the positive judgments of screeners and interview panelists. The biographies on the website help to set the standard by which potential candidates should measure themselves and determine their prospects.