



Mission Statement & Philosophy

*“The **Thomas J. Watson Fellowship** offers college graduates of “unusual promise” a year of independent, purposeful exploration and travel—in international settings new to them—to enhance their capacity for resourcefulness, imagination, openness, and to foster their effective participation in the world community.”* --Mission Statement of the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship

“The philosophy behind the Watson Fellowship is to remove oneself from the comfort and stability of Home, exploring the world selectively in pursuit of one’s passion, and discovering along the way one’s potential for humane and effective participation in the world community. The Watson journey is to be lived independently but shared broadly with humanity. This is the “Spirit of the Watson.”
--Philosophy of the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship

The Experience

The Thomas J. Watson Fellowship is a one-year grant for purposeful, independent exploration outside the United States, awarded to graduating seniors nominated by one of 41 partner institutions.

Watson Fellows conceive original projects, execute them outside of the United States and embrace the ensuing journey. They decide where to go, who to meet, and when to change course. Many Fellows, decades later, attest to the Watson Year being the most impactful year of their life – the year that they integrated their interests, values, and strengths, at a critical life stage, framed a powerful vision, and embraced it on their own terms.

Fellows receive a 12-month stipend (currently \$40,000), health insurance reimbursement, travel funds to attend the Watson Returning Fellows Conference, enrollment in comprehensive international travel and risk engagement services, and, as required, student loan assistance—the equivalent of 12-months of payments on eligible institutional and federally guaranteed loans.

Following the Fellowship Period, the greater Watson Fellow Community becomes a source of inspiration and support, and Watson HQ continues to engage fellows with professional guidance, recommendations, and reference letters.

Today Watson Fellows comprise leaders in every field. They have argued seminal education legislation before the US Supreme Court, reimaged Broadway, contemporary music, and data science, made important contributions to international peace, and build influential models about the earth’s formation.

Selection Criteria

Strong Watson Nominees exhibit a collection of Person markers that, together, evidence “unusual promise.” Only after being convinced by the Person does the Selection Committee look at the other side of the equation, the Project. This differs from many academic fellowships in that the Foundation fully expects the Project to change in new contexts; indeed, no formal research output is required.

The Foundation investment is in people, not projects. To make the point, a board member once said, “We’re not looking for a polio vaccine; we’re looking for Jonas Salk.”

Taken together, a strong Person and Project make for good Fit and an excellent Watson Nominee. This 3-marker approach – Person, Project, Fit – is applied to every nominee during the selection process, with the recognition that markers will present differently across a wide range of students and projects that are the Watson Application Community. Below are the Person, Project, Fit markers. Each Person marker includes a supporting *question*.

Person Markers

- ❑ **Leadership:** The capacity to command a following for what one thinks, does, or creates. The individual has—often with others, not always—brought a significant action to sustainment. Beyond managing processes, they see opportunities in challenges and motivates solutions. Leadership may also be seen in authorship. Because Watson’s Vision is to create more humane and effective leaders, this is the **first marker**. *What has the individual done/created/organized that would not have happened without them?*
- ❑ **Responsibility:** The ability to follow through on commitments without supervision. The individual is accountable to themselves and others. *How has the candidate shown ownership in their work or community?*
- ❑ **Integrity:** Strong ethical character and trustworthiness. The fellowship is an honor-bound program that requires a high-degree of self-governance. *How has the individual exhibited honest and principled behavior?*
- ❑ **Emotional Maturity:** Inner stability, a grounded individual. They are thoughtful, relate well to others, and are honest with themselves. *When faced with difficult personal challenges, how does the individual respond?*
- ❑ **Imagination:** The power of framing new and striking conceptions. The individual has the vision to integrate ideas into forward-thinking action. *How does the individual think beyond apparent boundaries?*
- ❑ **Independence:** Self-reliance; freedom from the influence, guidance, or control of others. *When has the individual carved a personal path to a meaningful end?*
- ❑ **Resourcefulness:** The ability to deal effectively with problems using what is available. They do a lot with a little and achieve more than could be expected. *How does the individual advance when resources are scarce?*
- ❑ **Courage:** They show a boldness of spirit, and persevere in pursuit of a purpose. They are unafraid to support the underdog or unpopular. *How has the individual overcome moral, emotional, or physical challenge?*

Project Markers

- ❑ **Organic:** *The project grows from the nominee’s background, interests, and activities. The most organic projects show deep, tangible investment.* We are not looking for the project to have been completed once before but **we need to see convincing engagement in the themes that underpin their interest.** Recent topics bubbled up from a junior-year class or recent activity require applicants to “catch us up,” that is, show depth and capability without the benefit of longstanding interest. It is possible, but we do not see many of them.
- ❑ **Inspiring:** The project is deeply meaningful to the individual’s life and will provide the energy to sustain and propel the nominee through the ups and downs of the year.
- ❑ **Open:** We often say that “Watson is wide.” The project should take advantage of the Fellowship’s unique latitude, its flexibility and permission to stay curious, even fail. The project should reject linear achievement and professional advancement as its central aim.
- ❑ **Bold:** Provided a project is realistic, applicants are encouraged to push the envelope. To stretch. Stretch will look different for everyone. Someone who has lived abroad several times for extended periods, exploring aspects of the topic, independently, should be able to convey how the Watson would be a significantly new—transformative, not just additive—experience.
- ❑ **Realistic:** Without institutional affiliations, Watson Fellows have little support structure in the field. Given this independence, the project must balance boldness with pragmatism. The project should demonstrate that the nominee is not wearing rose-colored glasses and is thinking in feasible terms. *“What is achievable, given my subject matter, my preparation, my contacts, my funding, my skills?”*
- ❑ **Connected:** While the Watson Year is independent, the project is intended to be experienced with others. As part of the application process we strongly advise candidates to contact inspiring institutions and thought-leaders, as well as communities and individuals in country, to build connection and insight. The committee should see that nominees have a plan to thrive during the year.
- ❑ **3-Dimensional:** A Watson project should convey a broad approach with multiple plans. These plans may be conveyed through a diversity of questions, cultures, groups, sectors, people, functions, and novel ways to challenge the project topic.

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| Three Project Types* | <i>The foundation and partners have identified three project types that require a second-level of inquiry.</i> |
| Identity | Some projects are self-focused. The project seeks others like the nominee. If the project narrowly seeks personal understanding, it is important to discern whether wider views will be explored. Could the project be completed in the nominee’s home country, or hometown? |
| Justice | Some projects are motivated by justice, but the Watson is not a social change or development grant. Nor does the Watson lend itself to biases about what should be “fixed” in other cultures. If the project seeks to right a wrong or if there is a clear agenda, will the nominee stay open and embrace disparate views and people? |
| Pain | Some applications are conceived from painful personal experience. Some projects seek the hardship of others. Is the nominee prepared to engage with their own pain or the pain of others for a year, in unfamiliar communities? Does the nominee have the emotional maturity to connect with others while keeping their own health and safety top of mind? |

*These are NOT THE ONLY Watson Fellowship PROJECT TYPES. Just the ones that require a second-level of inquiry.

Fit Marker

❑ The Fit is expressed in two ways,

- How well the Person fits the Project: The more organic the better.
- How well the Person fits the Watson Mission: The fellowship must be in service to creating more humane and effective leaders.

Imagine Your Watson

What is your deepest interest? What pursuit feeds your deepest hunger? What topic inspires your greatest passion? What dream sets your soul on fire?

How would you transform your deepest interests into a project of purposeful independent exploration?

What do you want to do or discover through your project? What are your key questions?

What do YOU want to learn about yourself from a fellowship journey?

Why is a Watson Fellowship the means for what you want to learn from and experience?

How do your values, strengths, qualities, skills, and experiences inform a Watson year for you?

In what ways do you envision your transformation from a Watson year?



The Application

The Watson application process empowers students to turn their deepest interests into a course of action. Built as an online experience, the application does this by guiding students through a series of sections that results in a personal “blueprint,” and demonstration of Person, Project, and Fit.

The application is comprised of the following sections, with added *commentary* from Grinnell’s fellowship advisor.

- ❑ **Two Recommendation Letters:** Two recommendations, at least one from the institution (a faculty or staff member) must be submitted with the application. *Your recommenders should know YOU very well. They will have read your application prior to writing the recommendation, they know your project, and can speak to your person markers and also speak to your project and how well-suited you are to carry it out.*

Recommenders will be asked to answer specific questions that are important to assessing a Watson nominee. Review these questions carefully in selecting your recommenders and provide this full handout to recommenders upon confirmation.

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Directions: The following questions are especially relevant when selecting fellows for the significant year intended by the Watson mission. Please answer each question as fully as possible, elaborating as necessary. You may also add additional comments at the end of this form. We appreciate the effort required to write a thoughtful and personal recommendation. Thank you in advance for your candor and time.

Fellow first name:

Fellow last name:

1. How long have you known the nominee, and in what capacity? (100 word count limit)
2. In choosing fellows, we look for a collection of qualities that we call “Unusual Promise”. These characteristics include: Leadership, Imagination, Independence, Emotional Maturity, Courage, Integrity, Resourcefulness, and Responsibility. How does the nominee exhibit these characteristics? (200 word count limit)
3. What deep impression, if any, has this student left on you, your campus, or your community? (200 word count limit)
4. What are the nominee’s areas for growth or improvement? (200 word count limit)
5. What evidence can you provide of the nominee’s investment in the proposed project beyond academic coursework? (200 word count limit)
6. Please share any additional thoughts that you would like us to know or consider. (200 word count limit)

- ❑ **Personal Data:** The applicant completes demographic and institutional questions. *For the Aspirations Statement —Share your professional interests. Upon reading your entire application, a committee member should be able to look back at these aspirations and clearly connect the dots. This does not mean your project leads directly to your professional interests, it means they can envision how the transformative experience of a Watson Fellowship will impact your interests.*
- ❑ **Biographical Abstract:** The Biographical Abstract provides a quick overview to the Selection Committee. This brief, 100-word limit abstract should express how the applicant’s project is rooted in their past and present lives and grew organically from their unique personal background. *Because Watson projects often grow organically out of who you are and what you’ve done, it is especially important for the biography to reflect such connections.*
- ❑ **Activities, Awards, Employment, Education:** The applicant shares their on and off-campus engagements, including type and duration.
- ❑ **Travel:** The applicant shares previous international travel including length of stay and purpose for each visit. This section is used to evaluate “no return” countries.
- ❑ **Languages:** The applicant shares languages spoken and proficiency level. We do not expect applicants to have a command of every language they may encounter during a Watson Year. However we do expect a convincing strategy for regions where they lack proficiency (e.g. working through English-speaking NGO’s, interpreters, translated materials, etc.).
- ❑ **Personal Statement:** This statement introduces the candidate and provides the backdrop for the entire application. The applicant should convey what has convinced them to apply for the Watson and how they hope to benefit from the year. *It can introduce the project topic yet the central thesis and project details should be saved for the project proposal. The reader should see why the topic was chosen, how it developed out of previous interests or experiences, and how it represents a new challenge.* It should be clear from the personal statement why, of all the project years that could have been proposed, the applicant chose this one. *Applicants may also want to describe their background, college years, professional goals and aspirations, and reasons for seeking a Watson Fellowship.* Personal anecdotes may be helpful, but most convincing will be authentic, invested experiences put into the applicant’s own words. The word limit is 1500 words.
- ❑ **Project Title:** The title is intended to be understood by a wide audience. Convey what you intend to do on this year. *Be careful about being clever at the expense of clarity.* An 8 word maximum. Even *a, an, the,* etc. are counted.
- ❑ **Proposed Countries:** The Proposal requires a list of project countries. Some proposals shoot for a broad overview and, convincingly, propose six or more countries. Another will aim for depth and spend six months in just two countries. There is no right answer to the number of countries pursued on the Fellowship, though we will probe judgement if the number of countries and their rationale are not aligned to the project’s purpose.

A country plan should be clearly identified for the application, yet the country list is not fixed. It may evolve between the time of application and interview and during the Watson Year. Countries labeled Level 3 and 4 on the US Department of State Travel Advisories, on US

Treasury sanction, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Level 3 warning list are not permitted for travel. Country levels are subject to change so applicants should stay apprised of their countries up to the interview date so they are not caught off guard in discussion.

Carefully read the advisory chart, Country Information pages, Embassy Messages, etc. to understand the 4-Level system and the full travel advisory, and to gain insightful information about the country. Watson Travel Information: (select, control, and double click)

- [State Dept Travel Advisories](#)
- [CDC Travel Notice](#)
- [US Treasury Sanction List](#)

- ❑ **Project Abstract:** The application asks for a short project abstract that sums up the project for the selection committee. If awarded, the project abstract will be featured on the website.
- ❑ **Project Proposal:** Flowing from the Personal Statement, the project proposal should describe the applicant's plan for the 12-month year. *You should include a description of your project and details on how you intend to carry it out. In addition to focusing on a topic you are passionate about, the project should be personally challenging (yet feasible), independent, and sustainable over 12 months.* It should detail the opportunities and challenges unique to the project and the applicant's preparation and strategy to address them. *Including a feasible and realistic language plan.* Health and safety should be top of mind when developing this plan. Please do not include a bibliography or footnotes. The word limit is 1500 words.
- ❑ **Contacts:** All applicants should provide convincing effort taken to secure contacts "on the ground" in their proposed countries. *This outreach demonstrates many person and project markers – including responsibility, resourcefulness, openness, boldness, realistic, connected, and three-dimensional.* A list of project-related names/institutions obtained from an internet search cannot substitute for real communication. Contacts should be referenced in the project proposal in relationship to the dimensions of the country. A full list of established and semi-established contacts and details will be prepared and submitted as a pdf for the campus deadline; and nominees will upload into the supplemental section.
- ❑ **Budgets:** (See also Stipend Guidelines) The cost of a Watson Year varies widely based on regional cost of living, duration of stay, project design, and other variables. All applicants should submit a budget that evidences the year can be achieved within the limits of the Watson stipend. The stipend is taxable. The stipend may be used to pay taxes, so the estimated tax amount can be included in the budget.

Your budget provides feasibility of the journey you propose. Prepare this document on one page in a clearly documented format with an appropriate font size. If you need more space, two pages will be the maximum allowed. It is submitted as a pdf for the campus deadline, and nominees will upload into the supplemental section. Budgets can be reviewed by the fellowship advisor in advance of the campus deadline.

The budget should be detailed and specific to each country: air fare, local travel, lodging, food, internet, cell phone, taxes, visa, vaccines, medication, additional health insurance (beyond the \$600 in funds TJW provides), and personal items. Travel books, maps, and clothing that is

necessary while on the Fellowship or in preparation for it may also be included in the budget. Language study or other types of training while ON THE fellowship year can be paid for by the Watson stipend. Research and include any U.S. Federal, state, and local taxes resulting from the award. You must live solely from the \$40,000 stipend.

You can allocate up to \$1,000 towards the purchase of capital equipment that is a one-time expense for equipment that is key to the Project and that the Fellow intends to bring home (mobile computing products, software, cameras, camping and backpacking gear, luggage, bikes, etc). If you require equipment that totals more than \$1,000 – please include everything you need. There will be extra steps of approval you would take with the TJW program if you are chosen as a Watson Fellow and have over \$1,000 in capital equipment allocation.

- ❑ **Personal Photo:** The photo is used to create fellows' official Watson photo-ID and is published to the Watson website. Photos must be in .jpg format, less than 800 kb, and high resolution (ideally 2" x 2" at 300dpi). Additional photo details may be found in the online application.
- ❑ **Transcripts:** We require transcripts for all degree-related work from **all** higher education institutions attended by the applicant. Official Transcripts must include the institution's name, applicant's name, courses, and grades. There are six spaces for applicants to attach transcripts. Acceptable formats: .png, .jpg, .jpeg. *The campus application process will accept an unofficial transcript from Colleague Self-Service.*
- ❑ **A note about GPA:** The Watson Fellowship does not have a GPA requirement. The primary purpose of the transcript is to see academic themes relevant to the proposed project, identify preparation in important project skills, and to spot flags. The transcript is also an interpretive tool; it helps us see how applicants have challenged themselves, the breadth or specialization of their work, as well as the detours they have taken. Average grades do not doom an applicant's prospects if the Person, Project, and Fit markers are otherwise unassailable.
- ❑ **Supplemental Material:** Applicants may submit supplemental materials in the form of web links. Such materials typically expand on activities, skills, or other personal strengths directly related to the proposed project. Supplemental materials include a contact list and budget. In the case of married or soon to be married applicants, supplemental materials include a statement of intent for the spouse. All materials should be concise, clear, and directly relevant to the proposal. Materials may not be added to the application post-foundation deadline, unless requested by the interviewer. *Please submit the contact list and budget via pdf for the campus deadline.*

Rules

HONOR SYSTEM. The Watson Fellowship is a rare window after college and pre-career to engage your deepest interest on a global scale. Despite the various rules behind a Watson Fellowship, which have evolved over time, the Watson remains largely an honor-bound agreement between Foundation and Fellow. We always hope that our careful selection process has identified Fellows who will appreciate and adhere to the Watson's rules in spirit and letter. We especially appreciate Fellows who consult with us in advance, rather than ask forgiveness later. We consider these interactions part of the Watson experience, as they build trust and rapport during the year.

TRAVEL POLICY. Fellows must abide by the Watson Travel Policy. In brief, Fellows may travel to countries labeled Level 1 and 2 on the US State Department, Travel Advisories. However, within these countries, they may not travel to regions labeled "do not travel" or "reconsider travel." Fellows may enter countries labeled Level 3 and 4 for Covid-19 only. Fellows will have to follow Covid-19 prevention guidelines in order to enter Level 3 and 4 countries. Information on these guidelines will be provided to them at the time of award. Fellows may not travel to countries on the US Treasury Embargo List. These restrictions are not open for discussion or negotiation.

NO RETURN RULE.

1—Returning to a country one has previously visited is not allowed without written permission from Watson HQ. Because the Watson encourages Fellows to have new experiences in new places, they may not travel to countries in which they have significant previous experience. Four weeks in a country is the general cut-off. Countries that Fellows have visited for a week on family holiday or during a two-week January term are permitted. Countries where Fellows have completed semester abroad programs or summer internships typically are not. We look closely at the necessity of being in return countries. Age is taken into account—time spent in a country as a young child is not counted in the no-return rule, if there has been no subsequent return.

Vast Lands: For large countries with significant internal diversity of language and culture (China, India, Russia, etc.), we are more flexible in interpreting the "no-return" rule, if the Fellow proposes a completely different region of the country. So, a semester abroad in Beijing would not rule out Hong Kong, for example, where Cantonese rather than Mandarin is spoken. Two months in St. Petersburg would not rule out Vladivostok. We typically say no to European country returns, though we make exceptions for overseas territories/departments.

The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and related island groups) is designated as a single country, *but a semester in Edinburgh, for example, would not rule out Watson travel to London.* (ITALICS, NEW EXCEPTION RULE TO THE WATSON TRAVEL POLICY. MAY 2020.)

A note about transiting through "no return" countries: While we appreciate that transit through a "no return" country may be the most direct course, Fellows should always err on the side of detour when possible. If transit through a familiar region is required, it should be just that: a transit without stopovers.

We are always impressed when applicants have strong back-up plans in case a proposed country is ruled "no return."

2—A Fellow may not return to their home country or the United States* during the Watson Year. Fellows may not return home for religious, cultural, or family holidays/occasions. Not for the holidays, birthdays, or weddings. Fellows may not return home for graduate school interviews. With planning this is generally not necessary.

*United States Territories are eligible to propose within the No Return policy.

The Foundation is sensitive to personal emergencies and tragic circumstances and will work compassionately with any Fellows in such a situation.

VISITS. Parents, family, or friends may visit or travel with the Fellow for up to two weeks. Visits must be on the Fellow's own turf and not visits that pull Fellows from their daily lives in the field.

LENGTHS OF A "WATSON YEAR". Fellows are expected to pursue their Fellowship for at least a full year (twelve consecutive months) without returning to the United States or their home country. Fellows may embark on their Fellowship immediately after graduation, but they must start their Fellowship no later than August 1. This date allows for a full year in the field, before the required Returning Fellows Conference in early August. A Watson Year could extend to approximately 14 months if funds suffice (e.g. departure in late-May and return in early August the following year). Any unspent funds, when the fellow returns home, must be returned to the Foundation. Note that Watson funds are not distributed to the schools until mid-May. Should Fellows require their stipend before this time they should contact Watson HQ.

RETURNING FELLOWS CONFERENCE. All Fellows are required, at the end of their Watson Year, to attend their Returning Fellows Conference. This conference is held at one of the partner institutions in the first week of August. The conference is an essential element of the Watson experience. After a year of independence, Fellows find the opportunity to meet others who have also just returned from the field to be a powerful experience. Many Fellows remark that, during this intense three-day period, they forge stronger relationships with other Fellows than they did over four years with most of their class in college. The conference is the Watson "capstone."

Much of the Conference is devoted to presentations. Each Fellow is provided with a short period to share their year—pictures, journal readings, a performance, etc. Fellows also meet in small groups to reflect on their year, discuss issues of reentry, and begin a bridging process that integrates the year into their next steps. During the conference, there is ample free time for Fellows to get to know each other.

REPORTS AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING. Fellows are required to provide three Quarterly Reports during the year, and a Final Report due by September 1st. Accompanying the Final Report, a financial accounting for the complete stipend must be provided.

Quarterly Reports are a combination of the Fellow's project progress, personal insights, and reflections. We often describe these reports as "long letters home" as opposed to formal research documents. All reports receive a personal reply from Watson HQ to help Fellows process their experience.

STIPEND GUIDELINES. The entire stipend will be sent to each Fellow's institution by May 15 to be distributed to the Fellow(s). Fellows may choose to receive their stipend in one lump sum or in two installments. Some Fellows may benefit by taking their stipend in two installments, each in a separate tax year.

Fellows are expected to live solely from the stipend during the Fellowship year. This is a matter of fairness, no Fellow should rely on a trust fund, personal savings account, or gifts from family or friends, nor accept paid employment or other contributions that would augment the stipend.

The Fellowship stipend is intended to provide for the maintenance, support, and travel expenses of the Watson Fellow, his or her qualified dependents, and no one else. We anticipate that Fellows will also use stipend funds to pay 1) any U.S. Federal, state, and local taxes resulting from the award; 2) the costs of medicine and vaccines for travel; and 3) the costs of travel essentials (e.g. research materials, clothing) required while on the Fellowship or in preparation for it.

Fellowship funds may be used for only one trip from and to the United States. Fellows should not transit through the United States during the Watson Year. Such transit is only permitted under special circumstances and should always be in consultation with Watson HQ.

Fellows may allocate up to \$1,000 of their stipend towards the purchase of “capital equipment.” A capital equipment purchase can be thought of as a one-time expense for an essential project product that the Fellow intends to bring home. Examples include mobile computing products, software, cameras, audio/video equipment, camping and backpacking gear and luggage. Clothing, medicine, and other travel essentials are not considered capital equipment and are not counted toward the \$1,000 limit. If a Fellow requires equipment that totals more than \$1,000, before or during the year, they must get prior written approval from Watson HQ. There are no supplemental funds. Receiving a Watson Fellowship does not imply permission for all capital equipment purchase requests, even if they were listed in the application.

Fellows may not use the stipend to support themselves while residing in the United States or in their home country.

Fellows may not use the stipend for language study undertaken in the United States, or for non-fellowship related expenses such as graduate school application fees, even if submitted while abroad and on the Fellowship.

Language or other training programs undertaken abroad during the course of one’s study may be paid for from the stipend, but we suggest a consultation with Watson HQ first as language and other instruction varies widely in time, cost and value. Some Fellows feel that formal language training is required for each new country, but this is rarely feasible.

At the end of the Fellowship year, Fellows must return any remaining funds to the Program Office by means of a check written to the “Watson Foundation.”

Under no circumstances can the Watson Foundation provide funds to the Fellow other than the original stipend award, the health insurance reimbursement, domestic travel funds to cover travel to and from the summer conference for returning Fellows, and any approved student loan payment assistance.

The Fellowship stipend is meant to cover living and project expenses for a year. Paid employment during the year is not sanctioned, nor is the sale of products (writings, photographs, artifacts, etc.). Such products may, of course, be sold after the Watson Year.

Fellows may not use their stipend to support other people, e.g. the travel/ accommodations of friends or family. No purchases may be made for a third party using the stipend funds.

Fellows may not donate Watson Funds to persons or organizations. Charitable contributions must be made from a Fellow's personal funds. Only if a person or organization is providing a service to the Fellow (housing, office/lab space, transportation, etc.) may donations, commensurate with the service in the local economy, be made.

AN INDEPENDENT YEAR. Fellows are expected to follow their own agendas. This is what the foundation means by "independent." We do not mean that Fellows must be alone or live in isolation. In fact Fellows engage and build many new communities during the Watson Year. The emphasis on independence:

- expresses our trust in the Fellows, that in turn helps Fellows trust themselves;
- allows Fellows to integrate their interests, strengths, and values in an authentic way, unmediated by other's expectations;
- gives Fellows permission to test and adapt the project, and themselves, to new cultural contexts;
- requires Fellows to define success on their own terms, and learn new truths about their project and themselves.

These themes are reinforced in the Quarterly Report exchanges between Fellows and Watson HQ.

*A note about **traveling with others**:* Ideally, Fellows connect with local cultures through unique relationships, as opposed to traveling with expats or friends which can quickly derail independence. We look for Fellows who, confronting a fork-in-the-road, have the courage to leave behind familiarity – even local hosts and companions – in the interest of purposefully exploring their project.

*A note about **working with others**:* Fellows may work with organizations during the Watson Year. The caveat is that such engagements may not be paid or force them to lose control of their agenda. Fellows should clarify their relationship with host organizations prior to engagement. Unpaid internships and volunteer work are also permissible, but only if the Fellow is working "alongside" the organization and can step away when necessary. Fellows should consult with Watson HQ if there is doubt about the appropriateness of an organizational relationship.

COMMUNICATION. Fellows must log their official departure date with Watson HQ. This date determines the Fellow's Quarterly and Final Report schedule. Fellows are also required to discuss any exceptions they seek to the Watson rules, such as a return home for an emergency or transit through a home country or the US.

A note on the use of media: Instant communication platforms, mobile devices and other fast, far-reaching technologies are the norm on campus. Watson's position on media is that the Fellowship is a place-based program. Fellows should be fully present in the place where they are, not tech-tethered to home or places where they are not. Many Fellows regard this position as a relief from the responsibility of daily updates to family and friends. That said, Fellows may use more communication media than ever during a Watson Year if it helps them get deeper in place, pursuing their project.

HEALTH AND SAFETY. Health and safety are the Foundation's top priority. We discuss health and safety issues with nominees during the interview and with Fellows prior to departure. We fund and ensure all Fellows have travel medical insurance appropriate to their year, and restrict travel to regions of the world that pose significant travel risk. Even so, an independent year abroad will be filled with unplanned events. These events may include personal, national, even international emergencies. For this reason, in addition to travel medical insurance, all Fellows are automatically enrolled in the international risk management services of Crisis 24: <https://crisis24.garda.com>. Crisis 24's services include: pre-travel intelligence; immediate assistance; and 24/7 hotline.

Watson HQ is kept apprised of all Fellow communication with Crisis 24.

In the event of a wide-reaching national or international emergency (e.g. earthquake, tsunami, terrorist act) Watson HQ will send an email to Fellows who may be affected to verify their health and safety. Fellows are also welcome to contact Watson HQ anytime whether for emergency reasons, clarification of Watson guidelines or other reasons. We confirm receipt and reply to all communication.

We encourage Fellows to register with their national embassy or consulate upon entering new countries. US citizens should enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a free online service that allows Americans to update their contact information as they travel so the Department of State can better assist them in an emergency: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>. International fellows should consult with their national embassy or consulate for similar services.

COUNTRY CHANGES, PROJECT CHANGES, AND NON-PROJECT TRAVEL.

Country Changes: The Fellow's initial country list, in the context of their project, greatly influenced the Selection Committee. That said, we understand that the Watson Year brings new encounters that may inspire new locations. In the event that a Fellow desires to change their country itinerary, they may do so by notifying Watson HQ prior to departing for that country. They do not need to ask permission, only provide notification. We expect that country changes (additions or deletions) will be made with the same thoughtful intent as the initial itinerary.

Project Changes: If a Fellow seeks to greatly alter their project they must contact Watson HQ in advance to obtain written permission.

Non-Project Travel: We expect leisure time to be fulfilled in the project country. That said, we appreciate that there may be periodic "must see" places and events that carry Fellows across nearby borders. These may be the equivalent of a long-weekend but should not be extended vacations.

SPOUSES OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANTS. The Watson Foundation provides an additional \$10,000 stipend supplement for married Fellows. Nominees who plan to be married at the time of departure must indicate so in their application and should be prepared to speak to this issue in the campus interview. The nominee may also upload a statement of intent for their spouse in the supplemental section.

An unhappy spouse is a significant impediment toward a Watson Year. We seek assurance that the spouse is open, resourceful, courageous, and has his/her own goal or project to pursue during the year. Fellows approved to travel with a spouse must submit a copy of the marriage certificate prior to departure. We recognize all legal marriages in accordance with the laws of the state in which they were conducted.

An additional \$10,000 stipend supplement stipend is available to Fellows with a documented disability or other physical challenge to support a personal care assistant. Applicants should be able to speak to their assistance strategy in the campus interview and make sure that any assistant(s) are fully aware of the project and travel itinerary and willing and able to complete the year.

DEFERRALS. The Fellowship may not be deferred, except for documented medical reasons or emergencies that would prevent a timely departure, or the Fellow's ability to pursue the project. Deferral requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. Under no circumstance will a Fellowship be deferred for more than 12 months.

TERMINATION. We all grieve when a Fellow has not adhered to the rules and guidelines, and the Fellowship must be terminated. Watson HQ will keep the Campus Advisor apprised of any termination decisions. The Foundation may terminate a Watson Fellowship if a Fellow:

- fails to graduate in the academic year in which the Fellowship is granted;
- fails to commence the Fellowship by August 1 in the year of award (unless written approval was provided by Watson HQ);
- fails to diligently pursue their project;
- fails to submit timely quarterly reports or other requested Fellowship information;
- returns to the US or their home country without the consent of Watson HQ (or without contacting us immediately upon return to the US or their home country, if prior notice is not possible);
- misappropriates any part of the Watson Fellowship stipend;
- violates any Fellowship rules or guidelines; or
- violates the criminal laws of the United States or of any other country.

All unspent funds at the time of termination must be returned immediately to the Foundation. The individual is stripped of the title, "Thomas J. Watson Fellow," and may not reference the Fellowship in personal/professional credentials or publications.

Typical Reflections – collected by Ann since 2005.

- ❑ A Watson year is seldom easy. Fellows, as they make their own way through new cultures, often confront stretches of self-doubt, loneliness, and cultural alienation. A true core passion for the exploration is what sustains most Fellows through difficult times. Passion is what keeps the Fellow trying, no matter what—after crucial contacts fall through, after a computer full of notes and data is stolen, after arranged housing proves to be vermin infested, after the project has run into one dead end after the next.
- ❑ If the topic was previously explored by others, the topic can still be explored with a fresh new perspective to find new and added significance by another individual.
- ❑ The Fellow must show commitment to the exploration for its own sake, rather than simply to get training, prepare for graduate school, string together volunteer opportunities, or otherwise to build one’s resume.
- ❑ Watson Fellows are self-sufficient and self-directed—creating, executing, and evaluating their own projects. Fellows **do not** affiliate with an academic institution, get a job, or conduct volunteer work for an organization as their primary activity. Some fellows undertake volunteer work to gain access to people they wish to observe or interview, but in such cases the fellow should feel that they are always in charge of their project.
- ❑ The Watson demands a unique type of person: someone who “knows themselves” who is comfortable with some solitude, but who can also engage with people. A Watson year balances personal independence with interpersonal engagement.
- ❑ Watson Fellows have moxie. They are unafraid (or able to overcome their reticence) to knock on doors, cold-call possible contacts, and ask for help on the street. When one door closes, they open another. When a language barrier exists, they find a work-around. When given a lemon, they make lemonade.
- ❑ The proposal must show that the candidate has what it takes for a feasible and purposeful exploration. One must demonstrate initiative, planning skills, and the ability to make useful contacts. Well-established contacts in the field are often helpful in demonstrating feasibility. Obviously, a core foundation in the topic of exploration is essential, as are the specific language skills when nuanced communication is essential to the project, but Fellows are not expected to be experts in their fields. The project must also be financially feasible, given the limitations of the Watson stipend.
- ❑ The foundation looks for a careful balance between a candidate’s **preparation**—*which makes the project feasible*—and **stretch**—*which makes the project challenging*.

For Advising and More Information

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Please use Handshake to make an Advising Appointment and use Email (landstrom@grinnell.edu) for questions with anticipated short responses.

TJW Website: <https://watson.foundation/fellowships/tj>