

**ENHANCING GRADUATE PROGRAM MERIT**  
***“Recruit and Matriculate the Best”***

**Merit Fellowship**

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will select and award the Texas A&M University Merit Fellowship for Fall 2026 admission. 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 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 Fellows’ Socials in the Fall and Spring semesters of their first year. The New Fellows’ Socials are meet-and-greet gatherings that provide an opportunity for Fellows to meet TAMU administrators, staff, and other Fellows and acknowledge the Fellows’ 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 Fall 2026 semester. The College Graduate Merit Fellowship provides a minimum of two years of funding for master’s students enrolling for the first time in the Fall 2026 semester. 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 funding commitments described below. College and department support must be noted as a multi-year commitment in graduate student offer letters.

**Year 1 (Fall 2026, Spring 2027, Summer 2027) 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 FY27 Graduate Merit (GM) allocation.

- Awardees funded with a Graduate Research Assistantship: After the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays the employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.
- Awardees funded with a stipend posted to the student’s 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 will be made for the *Texas A&M University Merit Fellow*. 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 **master’s 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 departmental or research funds.

**Doctoral Students - Years 2-4 (Fall 2027 through Summer 2030)** *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 insurance<sup>1</sup>. Except for the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays the 12-month employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.

**Master’s students - Year 2 (Fall 2027, Spring 2028, Summer 2028)** *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 insurance<sup>1</sup>. Except for the 60-day waiting period, the employing unit pays the 12-month employer contribution for the graduate student employee health plan.

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

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<sup>1</sup>Awardees 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 Fall 2026 semester.
- 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, 2026, 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, Unique Contribution to College, and other attributes that formulate your strong support** (weight 20%): Based on leadership experiences, involvement in societies, organizations, departments/university (e.g., clubs, scientific societies, officer positions), unique contribution to 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/1999760>

**Due date: January 30, 2026**

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



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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 updated CV.**
5. **Nominee's Transcripts** from all colleges or universities attended.