Robert Morris Dissertation Support Program

The Department of Gerontology offers dissertation research support to its doctoral students on a limited basis. A description of the Dissertation Support program and the procedures for applying are provided on this page.

About Robert Morris

Dr. Robert Morris (1910-2005) was an internationally known scholar, a model of productive aging, and a long-time friend of the Gerontology programs at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His work, especially on long-term care and services for the elderly, had a substantial influence on policy development and academic scholarship. Trained in the field of social work, he served as Professor in the newly formed Heller School at Brandeis University from 1959-1979, when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70. During the 1980s he played an influential role in the establishment of the Gerontology PhD program and the Gerontology Institute at UMass Boston. Along with Scott Bass, Dr. Morris founded the Journal of Aging & Social Policy in 1989, and continued as co-editor until his death. The journal still remains at UMB under the editorial leadership of Dr. Frank Car, Professor Emeritus of Gerontology. Among his many accomplishments and honors received, Dr. Morris was president of the Gerontological Society of America in 1966-1967. [To read more about Robert Morris' life and career please see a series of essays included in the Journal of Aging & Social Policy, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2007).

Funding Levels

The maximum amount of dissertation support available through the Robert Morris program is $1,500 for any single project. There is no limit on the number of students supported in a given year; however, the combined value of the support will not exceed the total amount available. No obligation to spend all or any of the funds is implied. The amount of money available for the dissertation support program is subject to change due to budgetary contingencies.

Eligibility

Doctoral students in the Gerontology PhD program who have completed a concept paper accepted by all members of her/his dissertation committee and who have formally constituted a dissertation committee as approved by the Graduate Program Director and the Dean of Graduate Studies are eligible to apply for these funds. Students must have completed their course work and successfully completed the qualifying paper exam to receive an award. Students may receive dissertation support only once during their program of study.

Submission Process

Four copies of the application should be submitted to the Graduate Program Director (GPD). Students are encouraged to speak with their mentor or the GPD before submitting their proposal to get feedback on the application's potential competitiveness. In addition, the student and the student's advisor must read the application and sign the appropriate form. An online application form is available. The Review Committee may seek additional information from the student if this is necessary to make an informed evaluation of the request.

Students may apply for support funds to cover dissertation-related expenses retroactively, assuming they have not already defended their final project. However, students are strongly advised to apply for funds before expenditures are made.

Dissertation Support: Review Process

Review committees are appointed by the GPD. The Review Committee will consist of two core faculty members from the Gerontology PhD program. The Review Committee may not include members of the student's dissertation committee. In cases of a split decision, the GPD will cast the tie breaking vote. In cases where the GPD may have a conflict of interest with this process, she/he will appoint another faculty member to break the tie. If it is not possible to form an independent Review Committee, the faculty as a whole will evaluate proposals.

Deadlines for submission of applications are September 15 and January 15.
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Criteria to be considered by the review committee include scientific merit and evaluation of whether the budget is sound and appropriate to the project goals. Because the concept paper has already been evaluated and approved by the student’s dissertation committee, highest priority will be given to the appropriateness of the budget and availability of funds.

Examples of approved budget items include:

- travel to collect data or interview target individuals;
- purchase of computer software and/or hardware (most hardware purchases remain the property of the University and will be returned upon completion of the project or termination of association with the University);
- purchase of data;
- postage;
- office supplies;
- focus group expenses;
- telephone costs; and
- other expenses deemed appropriate by the review committee.

Funds may not be used for student income or as stipends or for travel (except as indicated above). Funds from this program may be combined with funds from other sources to support dissertation projects. Funds will not be provided to cover items that are paid for by other sources.

The decision of the review committee is expected by September 30 and February 1, respectively, and students will be notified as soon as possible after the relevant review period.