

Mellon Foundation -- Higher Learning Program

Foundation Link: <https://www.mellon.org/article/higher-learning-open-call-for-concepts-2026>

Notre Dame Limited Submissions Listing:

<https://research.nd.edu/our-services/funding-opportunities/faculty/limited-submissions-program/>

Submission Limitation per Institution: Up to Three (3)

Internal Expression of Interest Deadline: 2025-11-20

Registration Date with Mellon Foundation: 2025-12-01 by 3 PM, ET

Sponsor Concept Note Deadline: 2026-02-17 by 3 PM, ET

Scope: Notre Dame may submit up to three concepts to the Mellon Foundation for research and/or curricular projects focused on either of the following two areas:

- ***Unruly Intelligences:*** The emergence of generative AI has triggered a firestorm of techno-utopian promises and apocalyptic predictions alike. These reckonings often imply that AI is “intelligent” in the human sense, even though from the iconic use of this term in his 1950 “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” Alan Turing called this attitude “dangerous” and famously defined artificial intelligence only in terms of how well computers could imitate human thought. Are we now facing an existential abdication of human capacities to machines? Or the usual evolution of how we define intelligence in keeping with our shifting technologies? Meanwhile, the terms of human and more-than-human intelligences are also unstable, with greater or lesser value assigned to particular populations, species, and objects according to our historical, social, and ecological contexts. How might different forms of AI – generative, predictive, agentic, and others, including models that are currently still theoretical – complicate or exacerbate the inequalities that arise from these norms? With so much at stake, the humanities have an urgent role to play in shaping contemporary understanding of artificial and other intelligences – and in making practical, informed recommendations about how to regulate and/or adopt AI in our learning, work, and most intimate lives.
 - **Projects might investigate:**
 - the meanings of intelligence;
 - the effects of different conceptions of intelligence on (or their emergence from)
 - democratic processes, human subjectivities, probability and prediction, and aesthetic and cultural taste;
 - the social and cultural impacts of specific forms of AI, as seen through discrete analytical or disciplinary lenses (such as disability studies, gender and sexuality studies, environmental justice studies, and ethnic studies); or
 - any of the above, using comparative analyses that address how computational and non-computational understandings of intelligence take into account, for example, attention, dignity, embodiment, expertise, faith, justice, pleasure, serendipity, and surprise.

- **Normalization and Its Discontents:** The concept of normalcy is paradoxical. It entails the statistically average that is at the same time a moral imperative, a completely ordinary state that is nonetheless much to be desired, a cultural ideal. Moreover, the normal often functions as the ideal even when it is not numerically average. Despite the seemingly universal character of these formulations, the normal entered Western consciousness only in the modern era with the nineteenth-century efflorescence of statistics, bringing with it its opposite: the deviant, exceptional, aberrant, not normal. How does the concept of normalcy govern notions of human life, and when doesn't it? What are the structures and systems that keep it in place, in realms as disparate as the aesthetic, socioeconomic, psychological, physiological, political, spiritual, and ethical? What, if anything, does the historical knowledge of its recent invention – and vigorous social rejections – enable?
 - **Projects might investigate:**
 - comparative historical, geographic, and/or cultural treatments of the normal;
 - normalcy and political contestation;
 - the import of the normal within specific disciplinary approaches;
 - the unspeakable, the taboo, and other deviances surreptitiously produced by a norm; or
 - potential relationships between the normal and the utopian.

Award Amount: Awards will range from \$250,000 to \$500,000 for a duration of up to four years.

Eligibility: The Principal Investigator (PI) must be a faculty member and/or dean in a program or department in the humanities or humanistic social sciences.

Required Internal Application Materials: Upload the following information to the Google Form at <https://forms.gle/yf7XPD3Qnin3suRX6> by the internal deadline.

- **Principal Investigator (PI) Name**
- **Project Title**
- **Names of ND Co-PIs**
 - If relevant, please include name, department or unit, and specific role for any co-PIs in this project in three sentences (maximum).
- **Project Summary** — Description of proposed project and its alignment with one of the two program areas. Limited to two (2) pages, submitted in PDF format.
- **CV** — Limited to two (2) pages, submitted in PDF format.

Questions: Contact Colleen Cross Quinn, Ph.D., Director, Foundation Relations at ccross@nd.edu.

Unless otherwise noted, all internal applications are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Daylight Time on the internal expression of interest deadline.

Internal applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted.