Dean’s Distinguished Graduate Fellowship

This program supports incoming PhD and MFA students with the promise of exceptional academic distinction; with a demonstrated interest to advance the public good; and who will contribute to the diversity and intellectual vitality of our university community.

2023 Fellows

Cristina Correa, Comparative Literature PhD
Cristina is a writer and educator from Chicago, where she served youth and Latine communities for more than a decade. She is the recipient of fellowships and awards from CantoMundo, Carolyn Moore Writers House, Hawthornden Foundation, Hedgebrook Foundation, and the Kenyon Review, among others. Her writing has been published, broadcast, and exhibited in venues including the Academy of American Poets’ Poem-a-Day series, Best New Poets series, Missouri Review, Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora, Prairie Schooner, NPR’s Latino USA, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and elsewhere.

Abbie Eastman, Political Science PhD
Abbie is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science focusing on methodology and international relations, more specifically in the diffusion and escalation of civil wars and political violence. Abbie earned a bachelor’s in international relations, and ethics and public policy, and a master’s degree in political science from the University of Iowa. During her time at Iowa, Abbie received a fellowship with the Society for Political Methodology and currently works with Texas A&M University to advance compositional modeling. In her free time, Abbie enjoys making jewelry, making stained glass art, watching horror movies, and cooking.

Jillian Lepek, Art History PhD
Jillian is a doctoral student in the Department of Art History and Archaeology with a focus on Contemporary art across North and South America and the Caribbean. Her research interests include ecocriticism, legacies of exploration and development within the land and oceans, especially as it pertains to the Arctic region, and the intersections between aestheticized landscape, personal and national identity, and the looming geopolitical catastrophe of climate change. Originally from Chicago, IL, she holds a bachelor’s degree in art history from the University of Chicago and a master’s degree in art history from Tufts University.

Danae Gaytan, Education PhD
Danae is a doctoral student in the Department of Education focusing on educational psychology. Originally from Los Angeles, she completed her bachelor’s degree in both Psychology and Political Science at Boston University. She worked as a research assistant in multiple labs and completed her Honor’s thesis, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Memory Functioning in Older Latines. Through her research and personal experiences, she discovered her passion for conducting psychological research with BIPOC populations. She hopes to study how one’s perception of their identities interacts with academic achievement. In her free time, she loves spending time with her family (including her dog, Luna).

Ziyan Li, Physics PhD
Ziyan is a doctoral student in the Department of Physics. His research interests encompass condensed matter physics, with a focus on developing theoretical models to compute properties in two-dimensional materials. Ziyan holds a bachelor’s degree in physics from Wuhan University. He hopes to make meaningful contributions to the ongoing discourse within condensed matter theory. In addition to his academic pursuits, he is passionate about fostering a collaborative academic community.

Office of Graduate Studies in Arts & Sciences at Washington University
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Carolyn Liu, *English PhD*
Carolyn is a doctoral student in the Department of English. Her focus is Asian-American poetry and poetics, specifically work that tends to be genderqueer and heteroglossic—the fluctuating perceptions of cultural and (inter)national identities, how these approaches shift over time, and the formal strategies writers employ to express what plain language often struggles to convey. More broadly, she is interested in diaspora studies, transpacific literatures, eco-poetics, and the intersections of creative and critical work. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania and an master’s of fine arts in poetry from the University of Iowa. In her leisure time, she enjoys sketching, reading novels, bookbinding, and occasionally dabbling in some amateur collage-making.

Marisa Stephens, *Classics PhD*
Marisa is a doctoral student in the Department of Classics. Her research interests focus on ancient medicine, specifically exploring the creation, implementation, and distribution of ancient rehabilitation, physical therapy, and athletic training methods in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. She holds a master’s degree in classics, and a bachelor’s degrees in kinesiology and classics from Texas Tech University. Having worked as an athletic trainer for several years and having completed other medical training/observation, she uses her modern medical understanding to examine and interpret the methods of ancient physicians and what these can provide for modern medicine. Marisa is passionate about allowing the texts from antiquity to converse with modern medical understanding, bringing the past to the present and the present to the future.

Emmy Sun, *East Asian and Comparative Literature PhD*
Emmy is a doctoral student in the Department of East Asian and Comparative Literatures, with a current research interest in memories and nostalgia in contemporary Chinese media, performance, and material culture. She earned a bachelor’s degree in history from Fudan University, and a master’s degree in East Asian Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. From her senior thesis on “hysterical women” in Republican Shanghai (1930s–1940s) to her master’s thesis on disco-dancing grannies in China’s early-reform era (1980s–1990s), her research projects aim to bring previously marginalized figures to the center of the academic discourse. With a passion for education, she volunteered as a docent at Shanghai Museum and has served as the TA for four undergraduate courses on Chinese language and culture. In her leisure time, she enjoys singing, watching musicals, and translating.

Tola Sylvan, *English MFA*
Tola is a poet from Massachusetts and a first-year MFA student. Her poems have appeared in Poetry Northwest, Vallum, and Poetry Magazine. She enjoys long walks and late nights dancing Brazilian zouk, and previously pursued her interest in perception and cognition at Brown University.

Maddie Valdez, *Psychological & Brain Sciences PhD*
Maddie is doctoral student in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. She earned a bachelor’s degree in neuroscience from Claremont McKenna College. She developed an interest in memory and aging research as an undergraduate. With a large and still increasing older adult population, it is imperative that we continue to explore unanswered questions about how cognition and memory change across the human lifespan. Her goal is to better understand these age-related changes in cognition and memory to then develop interventions and strategies that encourage positive age-related changes and mitigate negative ones. When not doing research, she enjoys soaking up the fresh air on walks or hikes, participating in local trivia events, and appreciating all the delicious food St. Louis has to offer.

Interested in supporting fellowships in Arts & Sciences?
Contact Director of Advancement in Arts & Sciences, Katie Merritt, at katie.merrit@wustl.edu