



2024-2025 James C Gaither Junior Fellows Program topical essay writing prompts

Instructions: Below is a complete list of the 2024-2025 programs that applicants can apply to and the specific writing prompts applicants should address in their 3-page (max) topical essay. Complete information on the James C Gaither Junior Fellows Program and the application process is available at <https://iris.wisc.edu/funding/students/gaither/>.

- A. **Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program.** Choose any two countries in the world, from two different regions, including at least one from the Global South. Explain how political developments in those countries in the past five to ten years embody what you believe are some of the most important elements of the global democratic recession. Be sure to give some indication why you have chosen the countries you focus on.
- B. **American Statecraft Program.** America's role in the world is changing, whether it likes it or not. What are the 3-5 most important factors that will shape the context in which America conducts its foreign policy in the next two decades?
- C. **Nuclear Policy Program.** Which state without nuclear weapons do you believe is most likely to acquire them?
- D. **Technology and International Affairs Program (Please respond to just ONE of the two following questions).** When you read or hear discussions about 'risks of AI' what questions do you have that you do not think are being answered well? **OR** What technology issue will have the greatest impact on international stability in the coming decade, and why?
- E. **Middle East Program.** The Middle East region is going through a huge, agonizing and protracted transformation characterized by dwindling oil revenues, rising populations, failing governance structures and government services, rising extremism and sectarianism, and high youth unemployment. The current situation has enabled regional powers to intervene in each other's affairs as well as non-state actors such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State to emerge and spread new toxic ideologies. What do you see as one of the most difficult threats facing the region today and the underlying drivers of turmoil? Discuss the impact this has had on two

countries in the region and strategies that will help move these countries toward a better future.

- F. **International Security and Political Economy [to work with the International Security and South Asia Programs] (Please respond to just ONE of the two following questions).** Many scholars argue that the world is experiencing a worrying period of democratic backsliding, while skeptical voices suggest that backsliding concerns are overblown. With reference to existing data sources and democracy ratings, which position do you find more compelling and why? **OR** Should the United States end its ambiguity over defending Taiwan?
- G. **Asia Program.** To what extent are states in Asia "forced to choose" between the US and China? Consider political, economic, security, and other factors to substantiate your analysis.
- H. **Russia and Eurasia Program.** The U.S.-Russia relationship has plummeted to unprecedented post-Cold War lows amid the war in Ukraine. Can this downward trajectory be arrested? What are the key dangers in the current situation and how might the White House seek to prevent things from getting out of hand?
- I. **Africa Program.** Narratives about Africa's future often oscillate between unrealistic optimism and blanket pessimism. Clearly the truth lies in a more nuanced middle. Compare and contrast the recent trajectories of two African countries—including both their economic and political dimensions—to help illuminate a nuanced picture of Africa's current direction.
- J. **Global Order and Institutions Program.** The UN Secretary-General has depicted the world as "gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction." What accounts for the failures of many multilateral institutions, and what—if anything—can be done to improve international cooperation in addressing major global challenges?
- K. **Sustainability, Climate and Geopolitics Program. (Please respond to just ONE of the two following questions).** After 30 years of UN climate conferences, the multilateral approach to climate mitigation has a poor record by the most important metric: global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise each year, even as climate impacts become more noticeable and severe. This poor record raises doubts about the "bottom-up" logic of voluntary, national climate pledges as embodied in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Has this bottom-up logic failed, and if so, what should replace it? **OR** Imagine it is the year 2040 and you are working for a major international organization. Your teenaged niece, who is about to begin studying for a bachelor's degree in Climate & Geopolitics, asks you to summarize how the climate crisis and the responses to it have transformed international affairs since you were a student. In the interest of time, she asks you to focus on 2-3 of the most important developments. What do you tell her?

- L. **Europe Program (Please respond to just ONE of the two following questions).** The war in Ukraine has galvanized European defense efforts and revived a “braindead” NATO. Looking at the recent successes of transatlantic security cooperation, some have questioned the continued relevance of European “strategic autonomy”. At the same time, the war has revealed the gaps in European defense capacities and the degree to which Europe still depends on the US for its security. After decades of foot-dragging, European governments are now finally investing in their defense budgets. How should they spend the new money? And what else is needed to put the transatlantic defense relationship on a more sustainable footing? **OR** With the Trade and Technology Council (TTC), the US and Europe have established a new mechanism to coordinate policy on crucial questions related to democratic technology governance. How important is the TTC for the transatlantic partnership and its effectiveness in tackling both systemic and acute challenges? And what is one initiative or project you would recommend the two sides should launch at their next TTC meeting?