Who Are Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellows?

They include remarkable people such as New York City’s first commissioner of immigrant affairs who went on to create the New America Leaders Project that helps promising immigrants develop leadership skills; a retired Marine Corps major general who devotes his post-military career to helping veterans succeed in college; a Cambridge University-educated, award-winning journalist turned novelist; a senior researcher at Oxfam America whose writings on income inequality were featured at the World Economic Forum; a documentary film maker, producer, writer, and director of the PBS special Edgar Allen Poe: Buried Alive; the founder and president of a leading U.S. public polling firm; a Harvard-trained lawyer and senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, who focuses on the same issues on which he advised the Romney presidential campaign: energy, environment, and the social safety net; the founder and president of the National Hispanic Institute that assists talented Latino youth in going to college; an award-winning journalist and founder and CEO of Her Agenda, celebrated by Forbes as one of the nation’s “30 under 30” leaders; and a winner of the Metcalf Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and prolific novelist whose view of the human condition has been compared to Kurt Vonnegut’s.

These are but a few of the 130 eminent professionals from across America and abroad who constitute the roster of the Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellows. Whatever their fields, Fellows demonstrate a passion for higher learning, an eagerness to share their experiences and insights with faculty members and students, and a desire to communicate important lessons to the wider public. Fellows are artists, actors, novelists, journalists, business leaders, government officials, civil libertarians, diplomats, military leaders, Wall Street investors, environmentalists, and human rights experts.

How Does the Fellows Program Work?

For more than 45 years, the Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellows program has brought prominent artists, diplomats, journalists, business leaders, and other nonacademic professionals to campuses across the United States for substantive dialogue with students and faculty members. Through a week-long residential program of classes, seminars, workshops, lectures, and informal discussions, the Fellows create better understanding and new connections between the academic and nonacademic worlds.

Instead of the one-day visit typical of the college lecture circuit, the Visiting Fellows program provides time to develop trust, explore complex issues, and establish ongoing relations. Through these extended visits, students and faculty members can explore how the classroom and campus relate to broader society. By their own example, Fellows demonstrate that there are challenging opportunities for those who want to build a better world through professional activities and as informed citizens.
We have hosted a variety of Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellows over the years ranging from an award-winning writer to an expert on Guantanamo Bay who serves as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force Judge Advocate General’s Corps Reserve. Our Fellows have not only been eloquent and energetic speakers but have discussed challenging and nuanced issues with great clarity. The program has had a positive impact on the Muhlenberg College campus community.

—Emily Orzech, Chair, Woodrow Wilson Committee, Muhlenberg College
The Fellows interact with students, faculty members, administrators, local civic leaders, and the media—both informally outside the classroom and in campus lectures and seminars. They discuss their areas of expertise, of course, but they treasure connecting with campus communities. Fellows report that spending a full week on campus fosters intellectual intimacy with campus constituencies, and host institutions report that the extended time with Fellows devoted to campus activities changes outlooks, brings new perspectives, and excites imaginations.

The goal of the program is to provide colleges and universities with an intellectual and cultural experience that will enrich the lives of all members of the campus community. As a group, participating institutions share the belief that a liberal arts education is the best preparation for well-informed and publicly engaged citizenship.

Which Campuses Are Eligible?

The Visiting Fellows program is available to all four-year public and private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the United States as well as Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) International Member institutions. CIC member campuses participate at a discounted rate. The cost is modest because Fellows care more about participating in the educational process than receiving financial reward.

Since the inception of the program in 1973, more than 300 colleges and universities have participated, many for several years.

How Are Fellows Selected for the Program?

CIC strives to match Fellows’ expertise with campus programming and to work with campuses to meet academic needs by helping to select the appropriate Fellow.

Fellows are selected for their professional expertise, personal enthusiasm for the goals of the program, interest in interacting with students, and ability to listen as well as to speak. They share their practical knowledge in such areas as journalism, politics, business practices, the arts, the role of the United States in global affairs, and the social and environmental impact of technological advances.

Over and over again we watched students edging closer to hear more, to linger when the class was over, to sign up for another event, to ask more questions, and to look differently at their roles as students and, perhaps, as future leaders and game-changers. Ernesto Nieto proposed a new plan for self-discovery. And the students listened. Ernesto’s question to the students: What are you going to do with your life beyond your educational degrees?

—Marie Louden-Hanes, Professor of Art History, The University of Findlay
We were thrilled to have Fellow Dwight Pitcaithley come to campus and share his wealth of experience and knowledge about the National Park Service, about the role of history in public spaces, and about the intersections between public places and parks and national identity. We all so much enjoyed talking to him, learning from him, and having him visit our classes and become part of our community for the week. People are still talking about his visit now, a few months later.

—Emily Mieras, Chair, Department of History, Stetson University
The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) is an association of 766 nonprofit independent colleges and universities, state-based councils of independent colleges, and other higher education affiliates, that works to support college and university leadership, advance institutional excellence, and enhance public understanding of independent higher education's contributions to society. CIC is the major national organization that focuses on services to leaders of independent colleges and universities and state-based councils. CIC offers conferences, seminars, publications, and other programs and services that help institutions improve educational quality, administrative and financial performance, student outcomes, and institutional visibility. It conducts the largest annual conferences of college and university presidents and of chief academic officers. Founded in 1956, CIC is headquartered at One Dupont Circle in Washington, DC. For more information, visit www.cic.edu.

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