

Einstein Fellowship Program Update



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Chandra Users Committee Meeting
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Einstein Refresher

- Postdoctoral Fellowship Program sponsored by NASA, administered by the CXC.
- Fellowships awarded to recent Ph.D.s for research into ‘Physics of the Cosmos’ Science: high energy astrophysics, cosmology, gravitational wave physics.
- Missions covered include Chandra, Fermi, Planck, WFIRST, LISA, future missions and related missions (e.g. XMM, SWIFT).
- Research conducted at U.S. host institutions.
- Other NASA “Named Fellowship” programs are Hubble and Sagan.

Einstein Refresher

- Typically 12 Fellowships approved and accepted each year. Highly competitive (~10-15x oversubscribed).
- New 2016 Fellows: 163 applicants, 19 offers, 7 Declined, 12 new Fellows
- Only one Einstein Fellow per Host Institution per year.
- Stipend of \$67,500, with benefits, and \$16,000 for research expenses

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Fellows Symposium Oct 18-19 at CfA
- Application deadline Nov 3, 2016 (typically ~150-180 applications).
- Selection panel (~14) reviews applications starting mid-Nov, meets mid-Jan. Offers made within 1-2 days. Acceptances settled by mid-Feb.

News

- Implemented employee/stipend **option** smoothly. Status can affect health insurance, taxes, visa status, leave, travel regulations, disability, workmen's comp, retirement, life insurance, paperwork. Eight current Fellows are employees (6 from the new Class, 2 who switched).
- Major updates to alumni database to include e.g., PhD year, host institution, current employment status, for all Einstein/Chandra/Fermi fellows back to 1998.
- NASA HQ is reviewing a possible descope of all NASA Named Fellowships (NNFs).

NNF Descope?

- NASA Astrophysics Division concerned about the size & cost of NNFs.
- Concerns presented to Astrophysics Subcommittee, July 20.
- From the public minutes available at <https://science.nasa.gov/science-committee/subcommittees/nac-astrophysics-subcommittee>

Since 1990, the total funding for these fellowships has doubled. Qualified individuals can apply multiple times, possibly receiving more than one fellowship, and the program is open to foreign applicants. The success rate is about 10 percent. APD wanted to rebalance support in the direction of fewer postdoc awards towards R&A opportunities because support for postdocs has increased faster than the R&A support over the past decade. Reducing the number of new fellowships by roughly 30 percent would achieve a corresponding 30 percent cost reduction within 3 years. The reduction would not affect current fellows.

NNF Descope?

- NASA proposes to
 - Decrease \$\$ to NNFs, but not to alter the science mix.
 - Combine the NNFs to a single application and review.
- *Note:* main increase since 1990 was in ~2006, when NNFs from individual missions were consolidated to cover the 3 different science themes of APS, and the program size was increased.
- *Note:* actual impact of ~30% overall funding decrease as proposed would be >50% decrease in new fellows/year.

NNF Descope?

- APS raised *many* questions and objections to the premise.
 - NNFs are highly competitive, successful, productive and prestigious.
 - Difficult to weigh the pros/cons, since no clear plan suggested for how these funds would be used.
 - Proposed NNF cuts would not make a significant reduction in R&A oversubscription; might fund 2 new rockets, or 1 new balloon payload per year.
 - Many R&A grants are used to fund postdocs in any case, and with higher overhead.
 - Debate about whether indeed the NNF salaries are high, how many Fellows obtain multiple NNFs.
- NNF CfPs just released reflect possibly reduced number of Fellowships, and do not quote specific salary figures.
- In late August, APS requested several statistics from NNF leads.
- Responses just provided to NASA:

NNF Stats Provided to NASA

- NNF salaries are at the mode for prize fellowships. (Mean is \$69k)
- >93% of NNFs still in astronomy. 66% are faculty.
- NNFs were numerically ~16% of U.S. PhDs at first, now near ~25%
 - Does NOT include that ~40% of NNFs have PhDs from non-U.S. institutions
- Fraction applying for both Hubble and Einstein (or Sagan) approaches ~70%
- <1% of fellows have taken both Einstein & Hubble fellowships.
- ~50% of all Fellows are hosted at a half-dozen institutions.
- *Further discussion, informed by these (and much more) data will occur at the next APS meeting Oct 3.*