

CMU Distinguished Dissertation Award

Nomination window: April 27, 2026 - June 1, 2026

The purpose of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)/ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Awards is to recognize and reward dissertations representing original work that makes an unusually significant contribution to their field.

Two of four broad categories alternate each year:

- Even years: 1) Social Sciences, 2) Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Engineering
- Odd years: 1) Biological and Life Sciences, 2) Humanities

Current cycle: CMU can nominate one student doctoral dissertation in 'Social Sciences' and one in 'Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Engineering' to CGS. If a degree is multi- or interdisciplinary in nature, a significant portion of the work must be comprised of one of these two broad fields.

Programs at CMU that may have students with **Social Sciences** dissertations include Applied Experimental Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Neuroscience, School Psychology.

Programs at CMU that may have students with **Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Engineering** dissertations include Earth and Ecosystem Science, Mathematical Sciences, Physics, Science of Advanced Materials, Statistics and Analytics.

Eligibility for 2026 Award:

- The dissertation must contain original work that makes an unusually significant contribution to the discipline.
- The effective date of degree awarded is between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2026.
- If the nominee is selected to represent CMU, the dissertation must be in, or added to, the ProQuest database.

Nomination Process

- Each CMU graduate program need to develop its own process to nominate ONE dissertation per each broad category: 1) Social Sciences, 2) Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Engineering.
- The primary criteria are described as the 'unusually significant contribution to the discipline'. Therefore, the student-written abstract and letters of recommendation should both emphasize the contribution the dissertation makes to the discipline, the level of scholarship, and potential impacts beyond the discipline.
- Programs will submit the Office of Graduate Studies nomination form that contains the following three items:

Complete Nomination Package – a single pdf including these three items:

1. An **abstract** of the nominated dissertation, written by the student and no longer than five double-spaced pages. Appendices with other material (charts, tables, and/or references) may be included as additional pages (not to exceed five pages). All pages must be numbered and should have the name of the nominee in the header. See tips below.
2. Nominee's **curriculum vitae** (not to exceed five pages).

3. Three letters of recommendation evaluating the **significance and quality** of the nominee's dissertation work. One must be from the nominee's **dissertation supervisor**, another from a member of the nominee's **dissertation committee**, and third from a person of the **nominee's choice**. Letters may include resulting publications, presentations (or the promise thereof).

Advice for Students and Letter writers for materials in the application packet:

1. Keep in mind you are writing for a **general audience**. There is no guarantee your material will be reviewed by someone in your specific field.
2. Make as clear as possible what the **impact** of the dissertation work is **to the field**. What may be obvious to you may not be clear to a reviewer unless you say it explicitly.
3. The Abstract is a professional text and should include citations.
4. Provide a structure for the extended Abstract so that you have an introduction with an objective and rationale, the aims/goals of the work, methods, results, discussion, and future work. Subheadings are highly recommended.

Note that the Graduate School has access to all dissertations electronically, so the dissertation is not needed to nominate a student. Nomination packets are due by 5pm, June 1, 2026, via Docusign. Eligible students with a complete nomination packet will be evaluated by a panel of faculty from the University.

Award Details

CMU may nominate one candidate in each of the two disciplinary categories each year. The student ranked highest in each discipline by the committee will be forwarded to CGS as the CMU nominee.

- The top-ranked student in each category will receive a CMU Distinguished Dissertation Award at a Spring event and \$200.

The CGS awardees are honored at the annual meeting each December. If a CMU student is selected for a CGS award, they will receive a \$2,000 award and a certificate of recognition. Reasonable travel expenses for CGS awardees to the 2026 CGS Annual Meeting will be covered. The faculty mentor will be invited to attend the presentation ceremony, but their expenses will not be covered.