Becoming a Pickering Fellow means that you are committed to pursuing a two year master’s degree program in a field related to the Department of State’s Foreign Service, becoming a U.S. Department of State Foreign Service Officer and representing your country and its interests abroad and at home. Upon accepting the fellowship, you will sign a contract that clearly outlines your benefits and responsibilities as a Fellow.

In addition to the rigorous academic requirements of being a Pickering Fellow, such as maintaining a GPA of 3.2 on a 4.0 scale for each individual semester of the Fellowship program, there are strict Foreign Service entry requirements including security, medical and suitability requirements which must be fulfilled and maintained to remain in the program. Also, there is a minimum five year service commitment in the Department of State’s Foreign Service.

The five year service commitment begins upon entry into the Foreign Service. Failure to meet the contractual obligations, including obtaining and maintaining required medical, security and suitability clearances may result in your disqualification from the fellowship program and reimbursement to the U.S. Government of financial assistance paid in connection with your education.

On the right is a brief timeline for the 2016 Pickering Fellowship program followed by a more detailed explanation of the security, medical and suitability clearances you must obtain and maintain in order to remain in the program. Please ensure to log onto the U.S. Department of State website for additional information on these required clearances:

- Required Security, Medical and Suitability Clearances
- Security Clearance Process
- Medical Clearance Process
- Suitability Review Clearance Process

### 2016 Pickering Fellowship Timeline

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pickering Application Deadline</td>
<td>January 15, 2016</td>
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<td>Pickering Selection Interviews</td>
<td>April 2016</td>
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<td>Notification of Selection as a Fellow</td>
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<td>Deadline for Accepting Fellowship Offer</td>
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<td>Orientation for 2016 Pickering Fellows</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin first Pickering-funded year of school</td>
<td>August 2016</td>
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<td>Domestic Internship</td>
<td>Summer 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin second Pickering-funded year of school</td>
<td>August 2017</td>
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<td>Overseas Internship</td>
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<td>Enter Foreign Service (Graduate Fellows)</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
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<td>Enter Foreign Service (Undergraduate Fellows)</td>
<td>Summer 2019</td>
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</table>

### Required Security, Medical and Suitability Clearances

All Pickering Fellows must obtain and maintain Department of State security, medical and suitability clearances in order to remain in the fellowship program. Failure to meet medical, security and suitability requirements may result in your disqualification from the fellowship program and reimbursement to the U.S. Government of financial assistance paid in connection with your education. **Potential candidates who have any serious issues that may prevent them from receiving a clearance should give some thought to the likelihood of their being found ineligible before starting this process.**
Security Clearance Process

The security clearance determination process begins in April 2016 when finalists come to Washington, D.C. for selection interviews. At this time, finalists undergo fingerprinting by the Department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security as the first step in the security clearance process. As soon as individuals are selected for the fellowship, the Department of State requests that they complete and submit an application, within about two weeks, as part of the continuing security clearance determination process.

The time needed for security clearance determination processing varies depending on a number of factors. The security clearance process involves a comprehensive background investigation, conducted by the U.S. Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies. This investigation provides the information necessary to determine a candidate’s suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and for a Top Secret security clearance.

The process considers such factors as: failure to repay a U.S. Government guaranteed loan or meet tax obligations; failure to register for the Selective Service; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; unsatisfactory employment records; a criminal record or other violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; and less than honorable discharge from the armed forces.

Candidates who hold dual citizenship, have had extensive travel, education, residence and/or employment overseas, or who have foreign contacts, a foreign-born spouse, immediate family members or relatives who are not citizens of the United States, should be aware that the clearance process will take longer to complete. The background investigation includes interviews with current and previous contacts, supervisors and coworkers. Candidates who do not receive a security clearance are ineligible for the fellowship.

Medical Clearance Process

Pickering Fellows must obtain and maintain medical clearances in order to remain in the program. They do medical exams at the State Department during the orientation period and receive decisions on their medical clearances from the State Department. These clearances often take a couple of weeks, although the process can be longer depending on the situation. The Office of Medical Services of the Department of State determines a candidate’s medical fitness and ability to serve overseas. Many Foreign Service posts are located in remote areas with extremely limited medical support. Each fellow, therefore, must meet rigorous medical standards in order to qualify for the required worldwide medical clearance. Medical clearance determination by Medical Services is based on its thorough review of each fellow’s medical history and a physical examination, including an individual assessment of his/her specific medical needs and the medical capabilities of Foreign Service posts to meet those needs.

The Department’s Office of Medical Services determines whether a candidate is medically eligible for assignment to all Department of State posts worldwide. While a candidate may effectively manage a chronic health condition or limitation within the United States or in specific areas outside of the U.S., the Office of Medical Services might well determine that the same individual is not eligible for a worldwide (“Class One”) medical clearance. Such clearances may only be issued to candidates whom the Office of Medical Services deems able to serve at the most isolated and restricted overseas posts.

Some posts could face extreme isolation due to limited air and other transportation service, and unreliable Internet, telecommunications and postal and delivery systems. Any of these limitations can have a severe adverse impact on the availability of required medical services and supplies or delay timely medical evacuations. Some countries have inadequate infrastructure such as a poor or negligible public health care system, poor sanitation, unreliable electricity and a lack of potable water. There may also be infectious and communicable diseases, such as malaria, dengue
fever, typhoid, tuberculosis, rabies, encephalitis and gastrointestinal diseases. There may be no health unit at the post and next to no local medical facilities. The local emergency room, for example, might be completely inadequate, without ventilators, defibrillators, x-ray capabilities, etc. There are often no blood banks or limited medical supplies and medications available locally. Due to political instability, security could be a concern. Fellows should be aware that these posts are neither few in number nor confined to a specific geographic region. There are numerous posts where conditions appear similar to that of the U.S. but which also suffer from some of these restrictive characteristics. As a result, stress levels among employees may be very high. Given these concerns, Fellows must be able to obtain and maintain the required medical clearance to remain in the program.

**Suitability Review Clearance Process**

Upon completion of the background investigation and medical examination, a State Department Suitability Review Panel will examine your file (minus any privileged medical information) to determine your suitability for employment with the Foreign Service.

The attainment of U.S. foreign policy objectives depends substantially on the confidence of the public (both American and foreign) in the individuals selected to serve in the Foreign Service. The Department of State, therefore, requires the highest standards of conduct by employees of the Foreign Service, including an especially high degree of integrity, reliability, and prudence. Given the representational nature of employment in the Foreign Service, employees must observe proper standards at all times. The purpose of the suitability review is to determine, from the candidate’s total record, whether the candidate is indeed suitable to represent the United States. The Suitability Review Panel has the authority to terminate a candidacy.

In evaluating suitability, the Suitability Review Panel takes into consideration the following factors:

- Misconduct in prior employment, including marginal performance or inability to interact effectively with others.
- Criminal, dishonest, or disgraceful conduct.
- Misrepresentation, including deception or fraud, in the application process.
- Repeated or habitual use to excess of intoxicating beverages affecting the ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the employee’s position.
- Trafficking in or abuse of narcotics or controlled substances.
- Reasonable doubt as to loyalty to the U.S. Government.
- Conduct which clearly shows poor judgment and or lack of discretion which may reasonably affect an individual or the agency’s ability to carry out its responsibilities or mission.
- Financial irresponsibility, including a history of not meeting financial obligations or an inability to satisfy debts.