

# HISTORY OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

GRADUATE STUDENT WORKSHOP

The Tobin Project seeks applications from doctoral students undertaking new research that explores how American democracy has functioned and evolved over time. Doctoral students *from all disciplines* who are considering research on this *and related topics* are encouraged to apply.

The deadline for applications is  
May 5th, 2019.

The Tobin Project aims to foster innovative and rigorous research that addresses major challenges facing society. Tobin is currently working with leading scholars from a wide range of disciplines to investigate the institutions, both formal and informal, that have shaped American democracy. By studying the practices, policies, and values that have influenced collective decision making, we hope to improve our understanding of how democratic outcomes are achieved and the factors that contribute to democratic health and decline.

## RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP AND WORKSHOP

**Fellowship recipients will be awarded grants of up to \$1000 and travel to Cambridge, Massachusetts to share and develop their research-in-progress with a community of other fellows and Tobin Project staff.** The fellowship grants are meant to partially or fully support research expenses and provide general support to graduate students working on topics related to the Tobin Project's research priorities. Any additional research costs should be noted in the budget and will be considered for funding if it is available.

Fellows will attend a two-day workshop in Cambridge, MA, where they will present their research-in-progress. The workshop will provide an interdisciplinary seminar-style environment for fellows to receive feedback on their research, with a particular focus on strengthening fellows' skills in formulating and refining core research questions. It represents a rare opportunity to receive critical feedback on new research outside of a departmental environment. **The workshop will begin on the evening of Wednesday, September 25th, and conclude in the afternoon on Friday, September 27th. The Tobin Project will cover travel and lodging expenses.**

The Tobin Project seeks applications from doctoral students from all relevant disciplines, including but not limited to history, political science, law, economics, anthropology, and sociology.

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All applications should include the following:

- Curriculum Vitae
- Project title and short abstract (100-150 words)
- Research proposal (600-900 words). Please include the following in the proposal:
  - The question(s) your research aims to address
  - Research methodology and, if applicable, initial hypotheses
  - Connection to the Tobin Project's research
  - Expected output (e.g., journal article, dissertation chapter, etc.) and timeline
  - Potential implications for the academic literature and/or the policy world
  - Budget

Please email application materials as a single PDF to [research@tobinproject.org](mailto:research@tobinproject.org) by May 5th, 2019. In the subject line, please indicate that you are applying to the Graduate Student Workshop.

The study of American democracy often focuses on elections and formal institutions created by the Constitution. Yet historical experience suggests that these elements alone are not sufficient to establish durable and effective democracy. Across the nation's history, diverse factors beyond elections and formal institutions have also been crucial to enabling large groups of Americans to meaningfully engage in self-governance. The Tobin Project's History of American Democracy inquiry seeks to identify the most important institutions, both formal and informal, that have shaped democratic governance in America, and to examine how they have evolved and interacted over time. By bringing together historians and social scientists, as well as scholars from other disciplines, we hope to develop a richer account of American democracy as it has been practiced, and, where applicable, use such findings to evaluate and improve upon existing models of how democracies work.

As part of this inquiry, the Tobin Project seeks to support graduate students pursuing new research that addresses any of the following key research questions:

1. What institutions—both formal and informal—have shaped the substance, process, and extent of democratic decision-making across American history? How have these institutions evolved and functioned over time? What factors have led these institutions to become more or less accessible and/or responsive over time?
2. What factors have shaped how “the people” have been defined in the United States over time, including at different levels of government? Which people have been included and excluded, and how has the logic for inclusion and exclusion changed over time? What have been the implications of these changes for conceptions of the public interest?
3. Political theorists going back to James Madison have pointed out important weaknesses in representative democracy, including the potential for elites to take control of the policymaking process (policy capture) and the ever-present danger that majorities will use their political power to abuse minorities (tyranny of the majority). With this in mind, what factors have allowed or restrained policy capture by elites, and which have allowed or restrained “tyranny of the majority” over the course of American history?
4. Over time, what factors have enabled or suppressed meaningful participation in self-governance beyond (or apart from) the vote, particularly with respect to individuals and groups excluded from the franchise?
5. How has the existence of multiple levels of government—as well as overlapping jurisdictions, constituencies, and sovereignties—shaped American democracy?

For additional information on the Tobin Project's Institutions of Democracy research initiative, please visit: <https://www.tobinproject.org/research-inquiry/democracy>.

## THE TOBIN PROJECT

The mission of the Tobin Project is to mobilize, motivate, and support a community of scholars across the social sciences and allied fields seeking to deepen our understanding of significant challenges facing the nation. Toward this end, the Tobin Project aims to identify and pursue questions that, if addressed with rigorous scholarly research, could have the greatest potential to benefit society and to unlock doors within the academy to new and vital lines of inquiry. Inspired by Professor James Tobin's belief that scholars have a vital role to play in the public sphere, the Tobin Project has built an interdisciplinary network of over 600 leading scholars across 80 universities, from Nobel Laureates to the most promising graduate students, who are together working to generate pioneering research on pressing problems of the 21st century. Currently the Tobin Project is focused on four core research areas: Economic Inequality; Government & Markets; Institutions of Democracy; and National Security. For more information, please visit [www.tobinproject.org](http://www.tobinproject.org)

The Tobin Project is a non-partisan organization recognized as a public charity under sections 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

**THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MAY 5, 2019.**

Please direct submissions and any questions to [research@tobinproject.org](mailto:research@tobinproject.org)