Apple Scholars in AI/ML

2026 PhD Fellowship Nomination Guidelines

June 2026

These guidelines are intended for invited universities.

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Introduction

Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD fellowship program

The Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD fellowship program recognizes the contributions of emerging leaders in computer science and engineering at the graduate and postgraduate level. The PhD fellowship in AI/ML was created as part of the Apple Scholars program to support the work of outstanding PhD students from around the world, who are pursuing cutting edge research in machine learning and artificial intelligence.

At this time, we are only able to review nominations from universities for students enrolled full time at an invited university. While you may share this document with departments at your university, **please do not share these guidelines outside of your university.**

Important Dates

A link to the nomination portal will be sent out on Tuesday, August 19th, 2026.

Nomination window opens: Tuesday, August 18th, 2026

Nomination window closes: Tuesday, September 8th, 2026

Decision announced: All nominating universities will hear back regarding the status of their nominations by December 2026.

Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD fellowship: Award Details

The fellowship award is comprised of a monetary gift and professional mentorship.

All monetary gifts are disbursed to the nominating university annually at the beginning of each academic year, and are conditional upon the Apple Scholar's full time enrollment with the university for the upcoming year to which the monetary gifts would apply and continuing to meet the eligibility criteria.

The award of the Apple Scholar in AI/ML PhD fellowship does not represent an employer/ employee relationship between Apple and the receiving university and/or student. Apple Scholars may separately be invited to apply for Apple internships; participating in an internship is not a requirement or a guarantee of the fellowship.

Universities receive the following in support of the research of their Apple Scholar(s):

North America

The monetary award will be disbursed annually to the eligible nominating university in the form of an unrestricted gift with the intention to fully support the research of the university's successful nominee(s).

Please confirm with your university development or corporate relations office that they are able to accept the monetary award as an unrestricted gift before nominating students.

- Gift amount covering full tuition and fees (enrollment fees, health insurance, and books) for two (2) academic years
- Up to $40,000 USD gift each year to help with actual living expenses and related expenses
- $5,000 USD gift each year to support research-related travel and associated expenses
- Mentorship with an Apple researcher

Europe, Australia

The monetary award will be disbursed annually to the eligible nominating university in the form of an unrestricted gift with the intention to fully support the research of university's successful nominee(s).

Please confirm with your university development or corporate relations office that they are willing to accept this gift structure before nominating students.

Award amounts will vary by country.

- Monetary gift each year for two (2) academic years to help with actual living expenses and related expenses
- $5,000 USD gift each year to support research-related travel and associated expenses
- Mentorship with an Apple researcher

Asia-Pacific (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore)

The monetary award will be provided in an annual funding structure determined directly with the eligible nominating university, either as a sponsored research agreement or an unrestricted gift, disbursed annually.

- Up to $25,000 USD monetary gift each year for two (2) academic years to help with actual living expenses and related expenses
- $5,000 USD gift each year to support research-related travel and associated expenses
- Mentorship with an Apple researcher

Latin America, Africa (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, South Africa)

The monetary award will be disbursed annually to the eligible nominating university in the form of an unrestricted gift to support the research of the university's successful nominee(s).

- Up to $20,000 USD monetary gift each year for two (2) academic years to help with actual living expenses, research-related travel and related expenses
- Mentorship with an Apple researcher

Nomination Guidelines

We believe that technology for everyone should be made by everyone, and that research is strengthened by a diversity of perspectives and lived experiences. We aim to create an inclusive and equitable nomination process that amplifies a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and voices in the research community.

With that in mind, invited universities may nominate students per the following guidelines.

Nomination Rules

Invited universities may nominate up to three (**3**) PhD students pursuing research relevant to the research areas listed in the nomination guidelines. This limitation is applied *per institution*, not per department.

Each nominated student must be submitted for a unique research area. We will not accept nominations for multiple students under a single research area from the same university.

Applications will be reviewed based solely on the strength of the submitted materials.

Initial and Ongoing Nominee Eligibility

Nominees must meet all of the following criteria to be considered:

- Nominee must currently be enrolled full time at the nominating university, and expect to be enrolled through the end of the 2028/2029 academic year;
- Nominee should be entering their last two to three (2-3) years of study as of Fall 2026; and
- Nominee must not hold another industry-sponsored full fellowship while they are an Apple Scholar in AI/ML (Fall 2027 to Summer 2029).

Review Criteria

Nominations are reviewed and moved forward by Apple based on the strength of the research proposal, the impact the nominee has had on the field thus far (both as a researcher and community citizen), and their demonstrated potential as a leader and collaborator in the field.

When reviewing the research proposal, we consider the following:

Clearly stated research issue and proposed direction, novelty of the proposal, scientific merit of the proposed approach, potential for impact, and alignment with research areas highlighted by Apple.

We also consider, in addition to the aforementioned research acumen, the unique perspective and experience each nominee brings to the field.

Required Materials

Universities should submit the following materials for each student's nomination:

- Student CV and publication list
- Research Abstract (*200 word maximum*)
- Research statement covering past work and proposed direction for next 2 years (*4 page maximum, including citations, in a legible font size*) clearly stating the hypothesis and expected contributions to the chosen research area. Personally identifiable information is redacted for phase one reviewers. *We recommend not including personally identifiable information in the main body of the research statement in order to maintain research statement clarity for reviewers of the redacted copy.*
- 2 letters of recommendation, one from current advisor (*1 page maximum per letter)*
- Link to most recent published work (*optional)*

Documents must be submitted as PDF's with the file naming convention:

"Last name, First name - Research Statement"

"Last name, First name - Resume"

"Last name, First name - Letters of recommendation" *(this document should include both letters of recommendation combined into a single PDF)*

Please also prepare to submit the nominee's **estimated tuition and fees** (including enrollment, health insurance, and books) for the nominee's 2026-2027 academic year (or PhD student bursary stipend, if regionally appropriate).

The amount entered will be used for planning purposes only, and will not impact final Scholar recommendations and/or the actual gift amount, if awarded.

Privacy Policy

- Nomination packet materials should not contain confidential or proprietary research.
- Remove or redact birth date, any other personally identifiable information, and/or photographs of the nominee if they appear on submitted materials.
- All information submitted by your institution will only be used by Apple for the purposes of conducting the Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD Fellowship program, and is intended at all times be handled in accordance with Apple's Privacy Policy.

Research Areas

Nominees should be pursuing research in one or more of the following research areas.

The subtopics listed under each research area are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather highlight areas of particular interest to Apple.

When entering a nomination, the nominator will be asked to select up to two (**2**) research areas that the nominee feels are most aligned with their work.

There is no single research area that Apple prioritizes over another. We encourage schools and nominees to select the area(s) most relevant to the research.

On-Device and Efficient AI

On-Device and Efficient AI focuses on making capable AI systems run on resource-constrained hardware - mobile devices, wearables, and custom silicon - without relying on the cloud. Research spans model compression, hardware-aware training, and compiler optimization, through to efficient foundation models, vision-language models, and streaming architectures designed for tight memory and latency budgets.

Sub topics: Model Compression and Efficient Architectures, Hardware-Aware Training and Inference, TinyML and Energy-Efficient AI, On-Device Foundation and Language Models, Efficient Vision-Language and Streaming Models, Large-Context On-Device Processing, Compiler and Runtime Optimization for ML

AI Security, Agent Safety & Assurance

AI Security, Agent Safety & Assurance focuses on protecting AI systems and the infrastructure around them from adversarial threats, misuse, and unintended behavior - from training time through deployment. This includes research on adversarial attacks and defenses, prompt injection resistance, data poisoning, and the containment of autonomous agents operating with elevated privileges or in high-stakes environments.

Sub topics: Adversarial Attacks and Defenses, Prompt Injection and Jailbreak Resistance, Data Poisoning and Training-Time Attacks, Agentic Containment and Risk Management, Privacy Attacks and Model Extraction, AI-Generated Content Provenance and Watermarking, Secure Deployment, Red-Teaming, and Supply Chain Security

Evaluation, Reliability & Measurement for AI Systems

Evaluation, Reliability & Measurement focuses on the methodologies, benchmarks, and frameworks needed to assess AI systems rigorously, consistently, and at scale. This includes designing evaluations for generative, multimodal, and agentic systems, as well as approaches to calibration, uncertainty estimation, and robustness testing that hold across diverse and out-of-distribution conditions.

Sub topics: Benchmark Design and Methodology, Evaluation of Generative and Multimodal AI Outputs, Human Evaluation and Annotation Frameworks, Calibration, Uncertainty, and Robustness Evaluation, Agentic and Long-Horizon Task Evaluation, Safety and Alignment Verification, Reproducibility and Scientific Rigor in AI Research

Computer Use Agents & AI-Assisted Software Development

Computer Use Agents & AI-assisted Software Development focuses on building AI systems that can plan, reason, and act across extended workflows - operating software interfaces, writing and understanding code, and completing complex developer tasks autonomously or collaboratively. This area spans foundation models for interactive agents, reinforcement and imitation learning, multi-agent coordination, and AI-powered code generation, verification, and debugging at the repository level.

Sub topics: Foundation Models for Interactive and Computer-Use Agents, RL and Imitation Learning for Sequential Decision-Making, Planning, Reasoning, and Multi-Agent Coordination, Tool Use and Long-Horizon Agentic Workflows, UI Automation and App Generation, AI-Assisted Code Generation, Synthesis, and Completion, Repository-Level and NL2Code Reasoning, Software Verification, Testing, and Debugging with AI

Human Centered AI

Human Centered AI focuses on designing, developing, and evaluating AI systems in ways that center human needs, values, and experiences throughout the entire development process. This includes research on conversational and multimodal interaction, human-in-the-loop learning, personalization, usable AI tools, and the emerging challenges of designing appropriate interaction paradigms for autonomous agents.

Sub topics: Multimodal and Conversational Interaction, Social Signal Processing and Human Factors, Human-in-the-Loop ML and Human-Guided Model Refinement, Model Personalization and Recommendation Systems, Usable AI Tools and Products, Agentic Interaction Design, AI for Augmented Cognition

AI Ethics, Inclusion & Social Responsibility

AI Ethics, Inclusion & Social Responsibility focuses on ensuring AI systems are fair, safe, and beneficial for all people - particularly those from historically underserved communities - as AI becomes more capable and pervasive. This includes research on bias mitigation, interpretability, guardrail mechanisms, value-sensitive design, and the assessment of sociotechnical impacts across diverse populations and deployment contexts.

Sub topics: Fairness, Bias Mitigation, and Inclusion, Interpretable and Transparent AI, Guardrail Models and Safety Mechanisms, Human-AI Interaction Risks, Value-Sensitive and Ethical Design for AI, Sociotechnical Impact Assessment

AI for Accessibility

AI for Accessibility focuses on developing AI systems that expand how people with disabilities interact with technology and the world around them, from communication and perception to cognition and navigation. Research spans augmentative communication, sign language recognition, accessible speech technologies, adaptive interfaces, and AI approaches tailored to cognitive and neurodivergent needs.

Sub topics: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), Sign Language Recognition and Generation, Computer Vision and Multimodal Interaction for Accessibility, Accessible Speech Technologies (ASR and TTS), Adaptive and Personalized Interfaces, Automated Accessibility Testing and APIs, AI for Cognitive and Neurodivergent Accessibility

Data-Centric AI

Data-Centric AI focuses on systematically improving the quality, composition, and management of data as a first-class concern in building reliable and fair machine learning systems. Research spans dataset curation and annotation, synthetic data generation, active learning, data selection and mixture optimization, and the attribution and valuation of training data.

Sub topics: Data Curation, Annotation, and Quality, Active Learning and Data-Efficient Methods, Data Augmentation and Synthetic Data Generation, Data Selection, Pruning, and Mixture Optimization, Data Attribution and Valuation, Fairness-Aware Dataset Construction, Data for Multimodal and Large-Scale Models, ML and Data Systems Integration

Privacy Preserving Machine Learning

Privacy Preserving Machine Learning focuses on developing techniques that enable AI systems to learn from and reason about data without compromising individual privacy. Research spans federated learning, differential privacy, cryptographic approaches including homomorphic encryption and secure multiparty computation, and privacy-preserving inference designed for on-device deployment.

Sub topics: Federated Learning, Differential Privacy, Private Inference and On-Device Privacy Mechanisms, Homomorphic Encryption and Secure Multiparty Computation, Cryptographic Primitives for Private ML

AI for Science, Health Signals & Biological/Physical Modeling

AI for Science, Health Signals & Biological/Physical Modeling focuses on applying machine learning to health and physiological data - from wearable sensors and time-series signals to longitudinal monitoring - to understand human health and support better decisions. Research spans foundation models for health domains, physiology-informed and causal modeling, behavior and activity recognition, and trustworthy clinical decision support grounded in continuous, real-world data.

Sub topics: Health-Domain Multimodal Foundation Models, Representation Learning for Sensor and Time-Series Data, Physiology-Informed and Causal Modeling, Longitudinal and Continuous Health Monitoring, Computational Modeling of Behavior and Activity, Trustworthy Clinical Decision Support, ML and RL for Mobile Health and Wearables

ML Theory

ML Theory focuses on developing rigorous mathematical frameworks to explain why and how machine learning algorithms work, to characterize their limits, and to guide the design of better systems. Research spans generalization, optimization, scaling laws, emergent behavior, and the theoretical underpinnings of modern large language models - including in-context learning, chain-of-thought reasoning, and test-time compute.

Sub topics: Foundations of Generative Models, Generalization and Out-of-Distribution Theory, Optimization Theory and Convergence Analysis, Scaling Laws and Emergent Behavior, Theory of In-Context, Few-Shot, and Reasoning in LLMs, Theoretical Foundations of Test-Time Compute, Foundations of Trustworthy AI (uncertainty quantification, calibration, robustness)

ML Algorithms and Architectures

ML Algorithms and Architectures focuses on developing the core models, training methods, and architectural innovations that advance the capability and efficiency of machine learning systems at scale. Research spans foundation and large language models, generative architectures, representation learning, retrieval-augmented systems, reasoning methods, and the growing landscape of alternative sequence architectures including state space models and mixture-of-experts designs.

Sub topics: Foundation and Large Language Models, Diffusion and Generative Models, Reliability and Factuality in Generative AI, Unsupervised and Self-Supervised Representation Learning, State Space Models and Alternative Sequence Architectures, Mixture of Experts and Long-Context Modeling, Test-Time Compute Methods, Reasoning and Chain-of-Thought in Language Models, Retrieval-Augmented Generation and Knowledge Grounding, Practical Optimization and AutoML, Multilingual NLP and Machine Translation, Interpretability and Model Representation

Spatial, Embodied & World-Model AI

Spatial, Embodied & World-Model AI focuses on developing AI systems that perceive, model, and act within three-dimensional visual and spatial environments - from mixed reality and computational photography to robotic perception and generative visual media. Research spans multimodal foundation models, neural rendering, 3D scene understanding, video reasoning, embodied AI, and sim-to-real transfer, with an emphasis on the challenges unique to spatial and continuous-world settings.

Sub topics: Generative AI for Visual Content, Spatial Computing and Mixed Reality, Semantic Scene Understanding, Video Understanding and Temporal Reasoning, 3D Scene

Understanding and Reconstruction, Neural Rendering and AI-Driven Graphics, Multimodal (Vision-Language-Audio) Foundation Models, Vision for Robotics and Embodied AI, Synthetic and Simulated Data for Visual Learning, Computational Photography, Continual and Lifelong Learning, Sim2Real Transfer, End-to-End Spoken Language Models and Native Audio Models

FAQ

How will the award be disbursed?

For all schools in North America, the fellowship award is given to the nominating university or associated foundation as an unrestricted gift.

For schools outside of North America, the fellowship award is given to the nominating university (or the US-based foundation that accepts gifts on behalf of the university) as an unrestricted gift.

For schools in mainland China, funds will be distributed to the school as a sponsored research agreement unless otherwise discussed with the school.

Can students submit their own nominations?

No. Students should be chosen and nominated by their institutions, and have a member of the faculty or staff upload their application materials. Students will receive a consent email after their application is submitted, confirming that they agree to be nominated for the fellowship.

What if a student graduates before the two year fellowship is over?

The fellowship award is disbursed on an annual basis at the beginning of each academic year, conditional upon the Apple Scholar's full time enrollment in their program to which the monetary gifts would apply and continuing to meet the eligibility criteria. If a student is not enrolled full time for the second academic year, the award amount may be reduced or omitted from the second year at Apple’s discretion.

Can first year students be nominated for the fellowship?

Students attending universities in the United States who are starting the first year of their PhD at the time of nomination (i.e., starting their PhD in in the 2025 / 2026 academic year) may not be nominated.

First year students (at the time of nomination) in programs outside of the United States may be nominated.

The program is targeted towards mid-to-late career PhD students with an established research and publication record.

Can students from departments other than Computer Science and Computer Engineering be nominated?

Yes. Nominees can be working towards their PhD in computer science or adjacent fields. Nominees from engineering fields, statistics, informatics and related disciplines who are conducting research in one of the categories listed above are welcome.

Schools will still be limited to three (3) nominations *per institution*, not per department. We recommend schools designate one (1) individual to submit all nominations, to ensure you do not exceed the limit.

Can the student accept other fellowships if they become an Apple Scholar?

The Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD fellowship is intended to be a fully funded fellowship, so that Apple Scholars would not require any additional funding for the duration of the program. Thus, Apple Scholars may not hold other industry-funded fellowships during their their time as an Apple Scholar. Once a university and its student nominee have committed to the Apple Scholars in AI/ML PhD fellowship in writing, we would ask them to withdraw any remaining nominations they have to other industry-funded fellowships.

Can the nominator list multiple advisors in the application?

Yes, you may list as many academic advisors as the nominee has. A letter of recommendation from any of the listed advisors can fulfill the “letter from current advisor” requirement.

Can the nominator submit more than two letters of recommendation?

No. Please limit letters of recommendation to two. If more than two are submitted, we will remove any letters that appear after the first two before reviewing the packet.

Can the nominator save an unfinished application and finish it later?

No. The application tool does not allow you to save work in progress. Once you click “Submit” you cannot make any changes to your application. We strongly recommend crafting your responses in another document and returning to the application page when you’re ready to input and submit. Upon clicking “Submit”, you will receive an automated “Thank you” email acknowledging your submission.

Can the nominator edit or change the nomination application after I submit?

Applications cannot be edited after you click “Submit”. We strongly recommend crafting your responses in another document and returning to the application page when you’re ready to input and submit.

Upon clicking “Submit”, the nominee will receive an email asking for their consent to be nominated. **They must complete this step before the nomination is complete.**

Once they have completed this step, the nominator will receive an email confirming the nomination is fully submitted. This final email may be sent up to 3 business days after the nominee consents to their nomination.

If you are concerned that you made an error in your application packet, please email: aiml_scholars@apple.com before the application deadline to determine if edits can be made