

**JHU National Fellowships Program**  
**Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program**  
**Guidelines & Advice**

The Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program allows each campus to define its own advising process. For this application, endorsement letters are optional and institutional assessments (a brief letter offering institutional context) are not accepted. Like many other universities, JHU has decided that it will not provide letters of endorsement for Knight-Hennessy applications. The JHU National Fellowships Program cannot meet individually with Knight-Hennessy applicants because of the high number of applicants it attracts. This document contains our advice for the current application cycle and also attempts to clarify certain aspects of the Knight-Hennessy application.

**Deadlines:**

There is no internal campus deadline for this scholarship. Applicants simply submit their complete application by the official deadline in October. Please see the [Knight-Hennessy website](#) or the [NFP webpage on the KH](#) to confirm the official deadline for this year.

**Letters of recommendation:**

Will the Knight-Hennessy selection committee see all of your letters of recommendation, including those submitted for the application to the academic program of your choice at Stanford?

This is a key question and the answer is: not initially. The initial round of paring down the KH applicant pool occurs *before* the KH selection committee sees any letters of recommendation connected to your graduate program application.

The two letters in support of your KH application are distinct from the letters of recommendation that accompany your application for the academic program of your choice at Stanford (which is a separate admissions process). Only if you make it through the initial KH round, the KH selection committee will also see the letters of recommendation that accompany the application to your graduate program at Stanford.

Here are a few tips to guide the choice of your two KH recommenders:

- These two letters need to open the door for you, so to speak. The audience for these letters is specifically the KH selection committee—that is, not specialists in your field. You should select recommenders who can speak best – most fully, with the greatest detail and conviction – to the core selection criteria for this award (independence of thought, purposeful leadership, civic mindset). Think beyond the people you are asking for letters in support of your Stanford graduate program application.
- The letters that speak best to the KH selection criteria may or may not come from academic advisors. Sometimes a faculty advisor or research mentor knows you in terms of your work and therefore can provide an excellent academic reference of the kind that your Stanford graduate program will appreciate. This is not a good letter for your KH application. Sometimes a faculty advisor or research mentors also knows *you*, the

person doing the work, and can speak to your personal qualities and accomplishments and commitments apart from your academic work. This is a good letter for your KH application, and it's also rare. More likely than not, your two KH letters will be from non-academic references.

- It is possible for the same person to write a letter for your KH application and for your Stanford graduate program application, but you must ensure that he/she submits two distinctive letters of recommendation that address the questions each application requires.

### Your essays:

The KH application asks you to provide short responses (150 word limit each) to the following questions, to help reviewers “see a different side of you”:

1. After graduating from Stanford, what are your immediate and long-term intentions?
2. How will your Knight-Hennessy Scholars experience prepare you to realize your intentions?
3. Please tell us eight improbable facts (things that are unlikely but true) about you.\*
4. Please tell us when you: a) made someone proud of you, b) were most challenged, and c) did not meet expectations. (150 word limit combined)

\*The additional information for this question warns candidates away from taking this as an opportunity to list accomplishments. KH reviewers really do want to learn unexpected, interesting aspects of you, and want you to “have some fun” with it.

There is also a longer essay, with a 600-word limit: “Connect the dots. How have the influences in your life shaped you?” The accompanying instructions direct applicants to “think about your past and how the people, events, and situations of your life have shaped who you are today. Then tell us a story that only you can tell.” This is a personal statement, and your goal is to find your own voice. Please also consider the NFP’s general advice about writing personal statements:

1. **Make it personal:** This statement provides you with an opportunity to introduce yourself to the screening committee on a personal level, like in an interview. This essay should contain information that is not available in your other application materials. It should foremost make your motivation to become a KH Scholar clear and your potential to contribute to the KH community clear.
2. **Wait, what’s too personal?** We like to quote a colleague who addressed this question well: “It’s largely a matter of relevance and tone. Discussions of past challenges must be relevant and explanatory, and not exploitative. Life is messy and hard. The student had a profound experience that shaped their future path. A personal statement can reveal a profound experience that shaped your future path, but gratuitous references or barely-hidden pleas for awards because of previous life traumas are not appropriate, and all of these must be handled in a way that is matter-of-fact and without hyperbole.”
3. **An intellectual biography:** This essay prompt suggests that your personal statement will take the basic form of an intellectual autobiography (rather than offer, for

example, a reiteration of a family history, etc). It should be a statement that explains why certain questions/issues drive you and what you value.

4. **This is a rhetorical exercise.** Thinking of it as an expressive exercise (i.e., turning within to consider who you “really” are and then expressing it) typically ends up as a clichéd glob unless you’re a really skillful writer already. Seeing this as a rhetorical exercise means that you think through clearly what effect you want this essay to have on your reader. How do you create a specific effect? Keep this question in mind as you work through the content of your essay.
5. **Avoid clichés and generalizations.** Period. Find a few specific examples to show your reader what you want to convey. Remember that fewer specific, detailed examples will make a stronger essay than will a listing of a number of ideas or examples, resembling a bunch of CV entries.
6. Remember that **you are crafting an impression of yourself that you and anyone who knows you would recognize**, not creating a wholly different voice or persona. Focus on producing sentences that only you could write.

### **Interviews:**

If you advance in the KH competition and are selected for an interview and campus visit, please let us know. The NFP will arrange mock interviews to help you prepare for the experience. Finalist interviews for highly competitive awards are typically conducted at a level that few applicants have prior experiences with. We’d like to help you feel as prepared as you can be.