Josephine Winkelman established the Fellowship in 1959 in memory of her husband, Leon G. Winkelman, to aid PhD students at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management with preference for students specializing in gerontology. This is one of the oldest fellowships at Brandeis University.

Many family members donated to the fellowship, including their son Stanley and their grandson Roger and his wife Linda. Stanley Winkelman was the chairman and chief executive of Winkelmans’s Ladies Apparel Stores, which had 110 stores in three states (Michigan, Illinois and Ohio) and was based in Detroit, Michigan. Stanley’s son, Roger Winkelman is a Federal Administrative Law Judge in Santa Barbara, California. Both Stanley and Roger have been well known in the Detroit area for their community involvement.