2003 Minority Scholarship Fund Committee Report

To: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems

From: Joyce N. Chinen, University of Hawai`i-West O`ahu
Chairperson, 2003 Minority Scholarship Fund Committee

Committee: Teresa Scheid, University of North Carolina, Charlotte (Chairperson-Elect);
John R. Cross, Oklahoma State University;
Peter Kivisto, Augustana College;
Alfonso R. Latoni, National Institute on Aging - NIH;
Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr., University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee;
Caroline M. Springer, New York City Department of Health;
Patricia Ann Washington, San Diego State University.

Date: July 15, 2003

In early Fall of 2002, Michele Smith Koontz of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) Executive Office sent the chairperson a packet of information and evaluation materials. This packet contained a call for applications, the board report from the previous year, a template of evaluation materials, and a list of resources. This material was most helpful in carrying out the charge of this committee. With the assistance of the SSSP Office, the Call for Application was announced in a number of national and regional social science publications. The Call for Application was also sent to several organizational listservs including some ethnic studies-related ones.

The chairperson received 19 complete applications and sent out packets of material to the members of the committee in early April (there was a slight delay because of a deadline question regarding one of the 19 applications which was investigated and subsequently resolved). In addition to the 19 complete applications, committee members received a Criteria Rating Sheet for each applicant, a First Round Ballot, and a Committee Timetable. The chair received rankings from 5 members of the Committee. One member of the Committee was indisposed because of hospitalization, and another was indisposed because of a family emergency. Consequently, the assessment of the applications was based on 6 evaluations. After tallying the 6 First Round Ballots, committee members were asked to review the collective top rankings. With only 1 exception, the top candidate consistently received the top ranking.

The 2003-2004 SSSP Minority Graduate Scholarship recipient is Luis Alberto Fernandez of Arizona State University, whose work demonstrates the SSSP’s commitment to scholarly activism.

As indicated in the table below, the composition of the pool of 19 applicants included 14 women and 5 men. African Americans comprised 42%; Latina/os 37%; and Asians 21% of the applicant pool. As in the previous year, there were no Native American applicants.
TABLE 1: Race and Sex Characteristics of Applicants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Latina/os</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Native American</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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*One of the applicants described herself as half Asian.

As in 2001 and 2002, the applicant pool was small as compared to previous years. However, this year we were able to reverse the decline of the past two years:

TABLE 2: Number of Applicants by Year

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pool of candidates was very good, with several excellent ones representing a broad range of research interests. Several members expressed that it was unfortunate that SSSP could only afford to award one scholarship.

This year we received inquiries concerning two of the criteria for eligibility. One question concerned the criterion of U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status. One potential applicant was neither a U.S. citizen nor a permanent resident, and was informed that he was ineligible. A second set of inquiries concerned the definition of “minority.” At least one potential applicant was determined to be ineligible to apply because her racial ancestry was not of any of the ones listed on the SSSP Minority Scholarship application form. On the other hand, she identified herself as being disabled, and believed that the definition of “minority” should be more inclusive and include individuals who possess one or more legally recognized disability/ies. To this, and yet another inquiry regarding whether sexual orientation would qualify, the chair consulted with the SSSP office. Michele Smith Koontz graciously provided organizational minutes and discussion notes which clarified the SSSP’s conceptualization of the term “minority.” These individuals were all informed of the definition of “minority” that was adopted by the organization, and of the fact that this year’s committee was bound by those provisions. They were additionally informed that only the SSSP Board of Directors could recommend a change and the SSSP membership would have to vote to adopt that change at its Annual Business Meeting. The 2003 SSSP Minority Scholarship Committee made its determination on the basis of this definition.

In light of the evolving scholarship on the social construction of “difference(s),” the pattern of inquiries of this past year, and the probability that similar inquiries will be faced by future committees, the 2002-2003 Minority Scholarship Committee recommends that the SSSP Board of Directors revisit the question of the eligibility criteria of its Minority Scholarship, specifically the definition of “minority” as used by this organization. One of the inquiries was
received from Ms. Jeanie Akamanti, a Doctoral Student in the Department of Sociology at Southern Illinois University, and she requests a meeting with the Board of Directors at the SSSP Annual Meeting in Atlanta. The committee hopes you will consider and comply with this request.

Finally, the chair would like to thank the committee members for their hard work, their thoughtful comments, and suggestions, and Dr. Tom Hood for his advice. Thanks also go to student Mary Beth Aldosa who assisted the chair with many of the tasks this year. The biggest “mahalo” (thanks) go to Michele Smith Koontz, Administrative Officer for the SSSP for her prompt, extremely valuable assistance throughout the year.