

**TO: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems**

**FROM: Angela Moe, Chair  
2006 Racial/Ethnic Minority Scholarship Committee**

**DATE: July 1, 2006**

**RE: 2006 Racial/Ethnic Minority Scholarship Award Committee Report**

This report summarizes the work of the 2006 Racial/Ethnic Scholarship Award Committee. Committee members include Amalia Cabezas, Walter DeKeseredy, Seth Feinberg, Raquel Ellis, Glyn Hughes, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, Shirley A. Jackson (Chair-Elect), and Angela Moe (Chair). Every member took an active and timely role in the work of the committee and their service to SSSP is to be commended. An earlier draft of this report was forwarded to them at the end of May for their review and approval.

The committee whole-heartedly thanks Michele Koontz and Mary Walker for their valuable assistance throughout the year. Many issues were addressed by Ms. Koontz and Ms. Walker prior to committee involvement and their efforts very much streamlined and expedited the selection process.

### **Overview of Applications & Process**

The committee reviewed 22 applications, which were due to the SSSP Executive Office on February 1, 2006 (see attached "timeline"). Prior to this date, both the Chair of the Committee and the SSSP Executive Office received several inquiries as to the criteria and procedure involved with applying for the scholarship. However, several inquiries were answered through referrals to the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) section of the application. The creation and addition of the FAQs was seen as an important improvement from previous years.

Of the 22 applications, 21 were submitted by women and one by a man. Twelve applicants identified as African American, six as Latino(a), one as Asian, one as Pacific Islander, one as biracial (African American and Latina), and one as Polish. For comparative purposes, in 2005 27 applications were evaluated -- 20 were by women and seven were by men, 12 were from African Americans, eight from Latinos, six from Asians, and one from a Pacific Islander. In 2004, 16 applications were evaluated -- eight were by women and eight were by men, six were from African Americans, six from Latinos, and one from an American Indian.

Committee members received a three-ring binder with copies of all of the applications via UPS in mid-February. Each was asked to individually review, evaluate and rank the applications according to the attached "Criteria Rating Sheet" and "First Round Ballot" and to return these forms to the committee chair via mail or fax by May 15, 2006. A couple of the committee members elected to respond by email, which was also sufficient. The evaluation forms were similar to those used by the 2005 scholarship committee, but were expanded and elaborated upon in order to account for the recommendations of the 2005 committee. The committee chair averaged the scores for each candidate and noted ballot rankings.

While several committee members commented that it was difficult to evaluate and rank such a fine group of applicants, we are pleased to announce that **Rashawn Jabar Ray**, a doctoral student in sociology at Indiana University, is the winner of the 2006 Racial/Ethnic Minority Scholarship Award. Mr. Ray received an average of 14.06 points (out of 16 possible on the criteria rating sheet) and he was listed as one of the top three overall candidates (on the first round ballot) by six committee members. Andrea M. Lowry came in second place, with an average of 13.19 points and was listed as one of the top three candidates by four committee members. Isabel Martinez came in third place, with an average of 13.06 points and was listed as one of the top three candidates by one of the committee members. Overall, there was quite a bit of diversity in the scores and rankings by committee members, much more so than in 2005. The overall winner was selected by highest overall average score and greatest consistency in ranking.

Rashawn Ray has been informed of his receipt of the scholarship (by both email and a formal letter). He has expressed much appreciation for the recognition and looks forward to the 2006 SSSP meetings in Montreal. All other candidates have been notified by letter that they did not receive the award. The committee chair has fielded their individual inquiries for feedback on the selection process.

### **Committee Recommendations**

The committee recommends that applications continue to be submitted to the SSSP executive office, with a deadline of Feb. 1 (receipt date), and that a screening for eligibility and completeness continue to take place within that office prior to the committee's evaluation. In 2006, there was much communication between the executive office and the committee chair with regard to missing items and deadlines (i.e., what would and would not be allowed). In most cases, a "hard line" was taken in terms of the requirements of the applications. Out of fairness to all potential candidates, this is seen as a desirable stance to maintain in the future. The committee recommends continued efforts to enforce the requirements of the application process and noted that a number of applications may have still slipped through the cracks. As examples, the following were noted by various committee members during the review process: missing recommendation letters, missing seals on transcripts, substandard GPA, non-SSSP member, non-US citizen, non-minority. Additionally, the committee recommends a process through which verification of signed letters and envelope seals is made (perhaps add a line on the "check off list" for this).

The committee would also like greater clarification on GPA and transcripts – are only doctoral GPAs considered and transcripts required, or all graduate work? Or even all university-level education?

The citizenship issue is one that the committee chair addressed early on, in that it did not appear to be clear whether or not applicants needed to be US citizens. The application indicates that they ought to be, but in correspondence with the SSSP executive office, it seemed to be more of a requirement than a preference. This should be readdressed in upcoming years and the expectation/requirement made very clear. Should the decision be made to narrow the award eligibility to US citizens only, then a verification process (beyond the honor system) ought to be implemented for confirming applicants' eligibility. Along these lines, one committee member also questioned the appropriateness of applicants applying for the award when studying outside

of the US, suggesting that greater clarity be given both in explanation of the award and directions for the committee as to how to consider/compare applicants studying in the US to those studying outside the US.

The committee also suggests that greater explanation be given as to the intent of the award regarding racial and ethnic minorities *within* the U.S. This year, one application was evaluated by a Polish (non-US citizen) student and the committee in large part refused to consider the application and questioned why it had been included in the binder. In reference to what exactly is meant by the term “minority”, one committee member took issue with the continued use of the label in terms of race and ethnicity. This member pointed out the fact that this term is highly contested when used to refer to people of color. The same member made a good point regarding the need to reconsider and widen the racial/ethnic designations listed within the application in a way that better represents the diversity of people within the US, beyond basic census categories. In particular, why isn’t Middle Eastern/Arab included in the listing?

In particular, the committee would like to see greater clarification on who the ideal candidate is. For the last number of years, it appears the award has recognized “advanced” doctoral students, and in many cases this year, applicants who were otherwise very strong were simply seen as too early in their graduate careers to be competitive. Perhaps greater emphasis within the application, FAQs, and rating forms ought to be placed on exactly what “advanced” means (e.g., completed coursework, completed/defended proposal, dissertation work in-progress). Along these lines, committee members noted that they would like to see several of the applicants re-apply and that some formal indication of this be given within the rejection/response letters sent by the SSSP. One committee member indicated that aside from such suggestions in letters, a more systematic way of giving feedback to applicants on the application process be implemented. Possibilities for doing so include writing more detailed letters, which may require that they come directly from the selection committee; reporting average scores back to applicants; and providing an applicant-friendly version of the criteria rating sheet with average scores.

As noted earlier, the FAQs proved very helpful this year and the committee recommends that they continue to be expanded and elaborated upon, as appropriate.

In general, the revised/expanded criteria rating sheets were well liked by the committee. The only suggestion made for improving upon them involves some sort of operationalization on how to think about each criterion (e.g., “disadvantaged social background” meaning a mixture of father/mother education, mother/father marital status, applicant’s debt, past scholarships/fellowships, marital status, dependents, and employment status) as well as some indication of what it means to rank an application at a 0, as opposed to 1 or 2 (e.g., for “current research”, 0 for no dissertation proposal, 1 for completed proposal but no data collection started, 2 for completed data collection and beginnings of analysis/write up). As was observed in the range of scoring this year, committee members were obviously left to interpret the criteria on their own. This may or may not be a desirable aspect of the award selection process. Having a large committee was certainly helpful in this regard, as themes within the evaluation and rankings were still observable. It is recommended that future committees stay relatively large in number for this reason.