

Ad Hoc Committee Report on the Joseph B. Gittler Award

(Completed August 5, 2007)

We have framed our recommendations in terms of answers to the following *key questions*. Comments appear indented below our recommendations.

Also, we have prepared suggested language paralleling the language used to describe the purpose, criteria and guidelines of the Lee Founders Award in an attached document. This document includes a few brief footnotes to inform interested readers of some of the factors taken into account by the committee.

1. Who is eligible to receive the award?

We recommend that any member of the SSSP who has been active for in the society for at least three years is eligible to receive the award.

Specifically, we suggest modifying the language found in the Lee Founders Award: The nominee must have been an active member of the Society for the Study of Social Problems for at least three years prior to receiving the award.

2. How often shall the award be given?

We recommend that the award be given out yearly.

However, though we suggest that the committee be allowed the option to forego giving the award should members feel that no nominee merited the award. In such circumstances, we suggest that the award sum be added to the principle drawing interest so that future recipients would receive a bit larger monetary award.

3. When should the award be presented?

We recommend the award be presented at the annual awards banquet, along with the other major SSSP awards.

This would communicate that this honor is of equal standing and prestige with our society's other major awards. We imagine that the chair of the committee would formally announce and introduce the winner of the award at the awards banquet. Based upon our reading of the communication from the Gittler estate, we do not think we have the discretion to use part of the proceeds to pay for conference and banquet fees and a travel stipend to ensure that the award recipient will attend the ceremony. However, this does not seem to be a problem with recipients of the other SSSP awards, and we do not anticipate this would be a problem for recipients of this award.

4. What types of scholarly contributions will be considered in determining the award?

We recommend that the Joseph B. Gittler Award should be given annually to the SSSP member whose scholarship over the preceding three or more years has most significantly promoted

ethical solutions to social problems. By *ethical solutions*, we mean scholarship that promotes awareness and/or activism to increase public recognition that social problems and social injustices are ethical issues; or scholarship that identifies and promotes societal level responses to social problems and injustices. By *scholarship*, we mean academic work including both applied research (qualitative or quantitative research) and normative work (e.g., argumentative, historical, philosophical, textual or theoretical analyses). See Appendix 1 for discussion of how ethics is treated generally in the social sciences.

5. How shall eligible persons be nominated for the award?

We recommend that any active member of the SSSP be allowed to nominate one or more SSSP members for the award. Again, borrowing from and altering the language of the Lee Founders Award, we recommend the following: “Any member of the society may nominate one or more persons for the award. Members of the Joseph B. Gittler Award Committee are encouraged to nominate.”

Those nominating potential award recipients would be asked to submit the name of the nominee, perhaps how they know of the nominee, and a narrative explaining why they feel the nominee meets the award’s criteria and merits the award. The nominee would be allowed to offer supporting evidence (e.g., samples of the nominee’s publications and research, media accounts of activist activities inspired by the nominee’s scholarly efforts, testimonials from grass roots organizations or advocacy agencies, etc.) or to direct committee members to appropriate supporting evidence (provide references to books, video clips, etc.). While this may put a burden on the nominating individual, the fact that the nominator goes to such efforts might itself be taken as some evidence of the nominee’s merit.

Again, we recommend borrowing from the language found in the Lee Founders Award: “All nominations must be accompanied by supporting evidence sufficiently detailed for the committee to render a decision (e.g., a resume; additional supporting description of the nominee’s work, demonstrating that the contributions meet the criteria for nomination). Please include supporting information not covered in a resume. List names of colleagues who would be willing and able to write supporting letters upon the request of the committee or include letters of support with your nomination.”

6. Who will make up the Joseph B. Gittler Award committee and who shall select committee members?

We recommend that the current Vice-President be responsible for recruiting volunteers to serve on the committee for a term of one year (Fall through Summer). Potential committee members could be solicited through the addition of a check off box on the SSSP membership/renewal form just as members are now asked to indicate if they are interested in serving on one or more the various appointed committees. Further, we recommend that the committee be composed of three, five or seven members, and that the current Vice-President select the chair of the committee as well.

An odd rather than even number committee members is desirable to prevent tie votes. Also, more than seven members of a committee will likely make arranging common meeting times and conference calls onerous for the committee chair.

7. *What timeline does the committee have in mind for making the first award?*

It is our hope that the ad hoc committee's recommendations can be reviewed, discussed and acted upon by the appropriate committee/s during the Fall 2007 annual meeting. With the approval of the various committees, a Joseph B. Gittler Awards committee could be formed during the Fall 2007 semester, the award advertised to members via division newsletters, *Social Problems Forum: The SSSP Newsletter*, and via our SSSP website, and if sufficient nominations are made, the committee could decide upon an award recipient. Accordingly, the first Joseph B. Gittler Award could be announced and distributed at the August 2008 annual meeting. If this timeline is too rushed, we have no doubt that this process could be completed during the following academic year so that the first annual Joseph B. Gittler Award would be made in August 2009.

8. *Some professional societies less diverse than ours have overall award committees to provide oversight on society award programs. As the Board considers the receipt of endowments for particular award purposes--do we need to have a committee that provides thoughtful consideration of the establishment of award programs?*

We do not recommend that the Board establish a permanent committee to oversee the establishment of awards programs.

Our thinking is that a permanent awards committee is not needed given our experience serving on this committee. Unless the SSSP anticipates a rush of new awards being developed in the near future, we think that soliciting interested members to serve on ad hoc committees should be sufficient. Also, by creating specific committees for each award, the SSSP is likely to get the participation of those most interested in the award's focus or the donor's legacy or donor's vision.

This report reflects the work of the ad hoc committee to establish the Joseph B. Gittler Award. I would like to thank committee member Nancy Jurik for her time, energy and thoughtful suggestions.

Submitted August 9, 2007.

Respectfully,

Ken Kyle, Chair
Ad hoc Joseph B. Gittler Award Committee

APPENDIX 1 – Ethics

Of the various codes of ethics adopted by social science-related professional associations, the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS) statement seems most noteworthy given the establishment of the Joseph B. Gittler Award. The AACS's sixth principle, "Statements about Social Concerns, Policies, and Programs" reads:

Sociological practitioners are often in possession of data or privileged information about critical social issues, policies, programs, laws or regulations. We have an obligation to our clients, our research subjects, and to our profession to maintain confidentiality. *However, we also have an obligation to society to use our skills, experience, and knowledge for the benefit of human welfare.* When there is conflict between professional participation in social and policy discussions, on the one hand, and maintaining confidential or privileged information, on the other, identifying information must be removed so that sociological practitioners can engage in discussion or presentation of social and policy issues without compromise [italics added].

But even this statement is not that applicable to the task at hand. Therefore, we offer our own, fresh interpretation of the SSSP's ethical concerns. Please see point four above. Note that we recommend that two explicit clarifications be included in public announcements of the award. These clarifications are driven by the committee members' concern that the terms *ethical* and *scholarship* are sometimes narrowly conceptualized, and that narrow interpretations might exclude important ethical work undertaken by SSSP members.

Review of other scholarly awards emphasizing ethics,¹ and review of the way ethics is conceptualized in scholarly organizations² shows that ethics is very often narrowly conceived and focuses on individual decision-making. Specifically, ethics usually seems to be thought of as an individual making the correct choice using either a utilitarian or Kantian imperative-perspective with some (often limited) knowledge of the immediate consequences of their actions. Consequently, most of the ethics statements reviewed entail explicit guidelines for how scholars and practitioners should behave, and define ethical behavior in the classroom, in research settings, in the field conducting research and in the field serving as a consultant.

It is rare that the greater social implications of a personal decision, act or institutional policy are factored adequately or even overtly into ethical decision-making processes. This seems at odds with the SSSP's emphasis on the familial, community and social aspects of injustices.

Endnotes

1. Review of the American Sociological Association, Law and Society Association, National Association for Social Work, American Political Science Association, American Society of Public Administration, Canadian Sociological Association, and American Psychological Association with an eye toward ethics awards yielded poor results. NASW has a Knee/Wittman Health & Mental Health Achievement Award that might serve as a point of comparison, but ethics seems a secondary, albeit an important and necessary concern. Consider, “The Knee/Wittman Awards are given to recognize individuals who are models of excellence and have made significant contributions in the field of health and mental health. The Knee/Wittman Award Program was established to recognize those who represent the values, ethics and approaches exemplified by two dedicated social work pioneers, Ruth Knee and Milton Wittman. The Knee/Wittman Awards are non-monetary awards recognizing outstanding achievements (see <http://www.naswfoundation.org/recognition/knee.asp>). Also, the APA Ethics Committee and the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students sponsor a Graduate Student Ethics Prize (see <http://www.apa.org/apags/members/ethicsprize.html>), but in all honesty it is not very applicable.

2. For samples of peer professional social science associations’ ethics statements, see Appendix 2, or visit <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/statementonprofessionalethics.htm> (American Association of University Professors), <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html> (American Psychological Association), http://www.apsanet.org/section_513.cfm (American Political Science Association) and/or http://www.britisoc.co.uk/user_doc/Statement%20of%20Ethical%20Practice.doc (British Sociological Association).