

To: SSSP Board of Directors
From: 2007-2008 Lee Student Support Fund Committee (Kamini Maraj Grahame, Chair; Phoebe Morgan, Chair-Elect; LaDawn Haglund)
Subj: Annual Report
Date: July 6, 2008

We are very appreciative of Michele Koontz for all the work she did on behalf of our committee. Michele's efficiency and attention to detail are indispensable to the work of this committee.

Lee Student Support Fund

We received 35 applications (down from 44 last year) for funds to attend the 58th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Most of the applications were submitted electronically. Faxed IDs were generally not legible and students had to be asked to send a mailed or electronic copy. Despite a statement on the application that a photocopy of the student ID was required and that students had to be current members and on the program, several applicants had to be reminded of these criteria. In some cases students were reminded twice via email. One student did not provide evidence of membership and was, therefore, ineligible for funding. One of the applicants was ineligible because she was not a program participant, another requirement indicated on the application. One student withdrew her application since she had funding due to her membership on the board and her willingness to work the registration table.

The remaining 32 applicants received funding totaling \$7,500 (the same as last year). Because requests totaled nearly \$30,605, we considered only travel requests for funding (\$12,129) as was done last year. Initial awards ranged from \$75 to \$800. At the low end was the full fare for travel by bus and at the high end was an international ticket from India. Airline travelers were awarded on average 50% of the cost of airline tickets. The largest awards were to international travelers and one U.S. traveler whose disability required a personal assistant thereby doubling his travel costs. Two applicants withdrew due to insufficient support. Returned funds totaled \$1,025 (one was the \$800 award). The returned funds were redistributed to 18 students based on travel costs. These awards ranged from \$25 to \$100. After the redistribution, final awards ranged from \$75 to \$550. Most students ended up with approximately \$100 out of pocket costs for travel.

Challenges and Recommendations

1) Available Funds and Award amounts.

Since the number and amount of requests far exceed the amount to be allocated, it is clear that we need to increase the amount of money in the fund and we need to advise students that they should not expect full support from the fund. Further, it appears that some students have other sources of support but might not disclose those. It might also be prudent to cap awards as is done for the Smigel award.

Recommendations:

- Increase the total amount in the fund.
- Advise students on limits of individual awards.
- Cap awards at the level consistent with the Smigel award.
- Require students to disclose other sources of support.

2) Incomplete Applications

Both this year and last, students needed to be reminded to register as members and to provide IDs. This is time consuming work for the chair. Given the demands on the fund, we suggest that incomplete applications be rejected.

Recommendation:

- Accept only applications that are complete.

3) Special needs applicants.

This year we had one disabled applicant whose travel costs were doubled because he needed a personal assistant. The committee sought advice from the disabilities committee on this issue. The committee decided to honor the request for the additional costs but to limit the award to travel costs as was done for all other applicants. The board should consider how it would like to address this broader policy issue.

Recommendation:

- Develop a policy or guidelines for handling such requests.

4) Inaccurate information about travel.

It was apparent that some students overestimated or underestimated travel costs. In one case, a student claimed travel from one location that turned out to be inaccurate. The student was awarded support on the basis of the initial (and more costly) request. It appeared that the student was a U.S. student on a “visiting scholarship” abroad and made his request from his location abroad. When it was discovered that he was traveling from a far less costly U.S. location, the award had already been made. However, this student was not allotted additional funds in the second round. One other U.S. student traveling abroad requested travel support from her location abroad. Although the student was disqualified because she was not a program participant, this case and the aforementioned call for a policy decision regarding return travel to the U.S. by students. In the case of underestimates or overestimates on travel, the chair made adjustments based on checking flight costs.

Recommendations:

- Require students to provide some documentation of travel costs (e.g. airline ticket estimate from the airline).

- Inform students that they may be required to submit travel expense records. This might encourage greater accuracy in their estimates.
- Develop guidelines regarding return travel support to the U.S. and inform students of the guidelines.

Meeting Mentor Program

The Committee received 46 requests for mentoring at the meetings, up from 38 last year. Because they had not registered for the meetings three applicants were excluded, leaving a total of 43 mentees to be matched. With emails to the SSSP Board and Division members and a personal appeal from the chair we were able to successfully recruit 43 mentors.

Challenges and Recommendations

1) Mismatch between mentors and mentees.

A significant problem was the mismatch between mentors and mentees in terms of areas of interest and expertise. For example, there were many mentors in the areas of deviance and criminology but not many mentees interested in those areas. On the other hand, many mentees were interested in immigration and race ethnicity but we had insufficient mentors in those areas. Four mentors were asked to mentor two people due to the overlap in areas and interests. Three mentees were not assigned mentors since they had not paid their registration. Five mentors were not allocated mentees due to the lack of a match in terms of areas.

Recommendation

- Encourage applicants to include as many areas of interests as possible. Since the kind of mentoring people want varies, it might help to have applicants indicate what their mentoring needs are (e.g. job searches, professional development in terms of promotion and tenure, post-graduate studies, etc.).

2) Recruiting mentors

The initial number of volunteer mentors was low while the demand for mentoring was high. As noted above, further calls for mentors needed to be made.

Recommendation

- Clarify the duties of mentors in the first call for volunteers including the potential time commitment mentoring entails.
- Include an appeal to professional responsibility and for the health of the organization in the initial request for volunteers.

On July 31st, Fitsum Resome Teddla notified the Executive Office that he would not be attending the conference. The Executive Office asked him please return the money awarded to him, as stipulated by the criteria set in the application. Mr. Fitsum Resome Teddla replied that he had spend the money on the U.S. visa application (90 Euros) and train travel to Berlin to apply for the visa (171 Euros). We have asked him to please refund the entire amount sent to him.

This incident raises important questions regarding how to award money in the future. Given that this incident is so recent, the chair of the committee was not able to consult the entire Lee Student Support Fund Committee.