

To: The SSSP Board of Directors  
From: 2008-09 Lee Student Support Fund Committee (Phoebe Morgan, chair; Jenniffer Santos-Hernandez, member; Tracy Dietz, member)

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to applaud Michele Koontz's outstanding support of our endeavors. This Committee was charged with two tasks: (1) allocating the Lee Student Travel Support Fund and (2) matching volunteers with applicants to the Mentorship Program. The following summarizes our efforts and the results.

### **The Lee Student Travel Support Fund**

For readability, the Committee made modest revisions to the call for applications. The qualifications and deadline, however, remained unchanged. To qualify for funding, applicants needed to document student status, be current members of the SSSP and have had at least one proposal accepted for presentation. On March 16, 2009 we received 41 applications requesting a total of \$31,000.00 in travel support. Only one application failed to meet the minimum qualifications. In March the Committee allocated \$7,500.00 to the remaining 40 candidates for transportation expenses only (in other words we did not consider estimates for lodging or other conference related expenses) and those allocations were determined by the distance traveled. The average award was \$175.00 and the amounts ranged from \$100 (Southwest) to \$225.00 (Tokyo, Japan). Some of the funding was returned by students who decided not to attend the meeting. Thus, in May a second allocation was made, distributing the remaining funding equally among the remaining candidates. We just learned yesterday that the funding for the Chinese student from Japan was returned. So, given the lateness of the date, we recommend that the \$225.00 be carried over to the next year.

Our deliberations were affected by two issues. First, the significant disparity between the amount requested (\$31,000) and the funds available (\$7,500) caused us to allocate funding based only upon transportation costs. But this approach was further complicated by the fact that the estimated travel costs varied a great deal among applications. In at least one case the difference in airfare from the same region fluctuated by as much as \$1500.00. Verification of the cause was challenging (was it due, for example to different airports, different dates of purchase or due to account padding). We resolved the dilemma by identifying the lowest Travelocity fare on a single day for a roundtrip ticket for all 40 applicants. We then used those fares to calculate average costs for these regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Northwest, Southwest, California, Canada and Japan.

Unless SSSP has the means to narrow the gap between the amounts requested and the funds available, we recommend that future calls for application be limited to requests for transportation assistance only (i.e., airplane, train, cab fares and rental car charges) and the form be streamlined as such (eliminating estimates for lodging, meals and registration). We are wondering if it would be feasible to require applicants to verify their estimates with quotes from the transportation company or a travel agency like Travelocity, Orbit, Priceline, etc.

## **The Mentorship Program**

In June we received 55 requests for mentors and 39 SSSP members volunteered to meet that need. Because we were 16 mentors short and not all those who volunteered were registered to attend the meeting, Michelle Koontz sent out a second call for volunteers to all SSSP officers and committee members. This effort increased the number of mentors to 40. To address the disparity between requests and volunteers, 14 mentors were assigned two mentees each.

The consistently increasing number of requests (2009 = 55; 2008 = 44; 2007 = 38) speaks to a growing need and perhaps increasing success of this relatively new program. But, the number of volunteers has not kept pace with the requests. Given the questions posed by potential mentors, we agree with last year's committee that a lack of clarity regarding the mentor's duties might be an impediment. Here are but a few of the questions commonly posed: Is there, for example, any expectation for mentorship beyond the upcoming meeting? Would it be helpful for those unable to attend the meetings to offer mentorship by telephone or email only? Could a mentor be assigned a group of like-minded mentees? How much experience does one need to have to be a mentor? Is it appropriate for me to mentor someone I know? In light of the upward trend in requests and the queries posed, perhaps this is a good time to re-evaluate current mentor recruitment efforts.