

Memorandum

To: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)
From: Adriana L. Bohm, 2009 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Chair
RE: SSSP 2009 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Report
Date: July 9, 2009

The members of the SSSP 2009 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee were Sandra Barnes, Suzanne Goodney Lea, Isabel Martinez, David Rangel, Boris Ricks, Mangala Subramaniam, and Adriana Bohm (Chair). Initially, the committee had one additional member (John Cross) but he resigned from the committee in May 2009.

Changes to the Process

We began the year by making a recommendation to the SSSP Board of Directors to change the date of the dissertation proposal completion status on the scholarship application. Initially the deadline was the fall of 2009, and we requested the Board amend the date so that all required applicant work would be completed by May of 2009.

The rationale for the change was due of the following reason. We currently ask applicants to complete all the work for the Ph.D. except for the dissertation by the time the award is granted, which would be in the fall of 2009. The committee, however, felt that since projected statuses are often delayed, we should move the date up, to ensure a greater likelihood that the applicants would actually complete all the requirements for the Ph.D. except for the dissertation by the time the scholarship winner was notified that he/she had received the award. Our hope, in regards to this change, is that such an alteration in the application process will increase the likelihood that the award recipient completes the degree in a timely manner.

Another smaller yet important change the committee requested was to alter the wording surrounding the budget request on the application itself. We asked to request "detailed" budgets in the hope that this minor change in wording would increase the detail surrounding applicant budget development. We hope this change provides more insight to financial need in the future.

The first change was approved by the Board; the second change, however, did not need Board approval. We revised all of the materials regarding the fellowship accordingly.

Applicant Pool

The committee received 12 outstanding applications this year! Last year's committee evaluated 16 applicants; we hope that our date change encouraged candidates closer to dissertation completion to apply. The following information denotes demographic data regarding the candidates.

Gender

The applicants included 9 women (75%) and 3 men (25%).

Race/Ethnicity

The applicants included five Latino/a candidates (42%), four Asian-American candidates (33%), two mixed-race candidates who classified as Latina & African-American (17%), and one African-American candidate (8%).

Year

Three candidates were in their fourth year (25%), seven candidates were in their fifth year (58%), and two candidates were in their sixth year (17%).

Discipline

Our candidates came from a range of disciplines, including nine candidates from Sociology (75%), one candidate from Anthropology (8%), one candidate from Education (8%) and one candidate from Women's Studies (8%).

Role of the Executive Office

Michele Koontz and Sarah Hendricks are fabulous, not to mention amazingly organized and efficient! We cannot speak more highly of both women, and we have to say that Mrs. Koontz was one of the timeliest, friendly, diligent and enthusiastic individuals we have ever worked with in any business, organization or educational system. Their hard work made our committee's work appear much easier, and pleasant.

Selection Process

After receiving the applications from Sarah Hendricks, the committee members developed a time line for the selection process. We utilized the criteria rating sheet which had been passed down to us by the previous chair, Joya Misra. We scored the twelve applicants in terms of their activism in school-related activities as well as community involvement, as expressed in each applicant's personal statement. In addition, we scored SSSP involvement - especially beyond membership, their past research and scholarly activities, the strength of their dissertation proposal, and their letters of recommendation. Finally, we scored applicants in terms of

personal financial status (resources and background) and how each would utilize the award granted.

Once the first round of ballots was received, it appeared as if we had a clear cut “winner.” One applicant received six total votes out of seven committee member votes, and of those six votes, she was the #1 choice for first place for five committee members. However, after the initial round of ballots, all votes were examined, and the top three choices for each candidate were reviewed. We discussed candidates’ strengths and weaknesses via email, and then each committee member was asked to select their first choice. The initial candidate emerged in first place, and the committee was delighted to offer the award to Sabrina Alimahomed! Mrs. Koontz called the scholarship recipient and notified her of the award. A formal follow-up letter was then sent by the SSSP office. The chair provided additional feedback to the one candidate who requested suggestions on application improvement.

Concerns and Recommendations

As in previous years, we are concerned that so few applicants have been involved in SSSP. Members of the committee suggested that perhaps the rating criteria could be amended so that there is more of an emphasis placed on SSSP involvement. This way, more weight is granted to those applicants who show greater commitment to SSSP and its mission, instead of merely joining the organization in order to apply for the scholarship.

Another concern raised by some committee members had to do with the very nature and importance of the candidates’ racial/ethnic background, and that groups’ history of experiencing racial discrimination in the US. Some members felt that the award should geared more towards awarding scholarships to racially disadvantaged minority groups, instead of members of minority groups in general.

Thank you for requesting our participation on this committee! We all enjoyed the opportunity to be active in the organization, and to present the scholarship to an amazing candidate.