

TO: The SSSP Board of Directors
FROM: 2009-2010 Lee Student Support Fun Committee (Tracy Dietz, Chair; Patrick G. Donnelly, member; Jupeng Li, member)

The committee would like to begin this report by thanking Michele Koontz and the SSSP office staff for their assistance in making it possible to carry out the duties of the committee over the year. Without their diligence, hard work, and steadfast attention to detail, it would have been impossible to perform the responsibilities associated with the committee.

The committee was charged with (1) allocating the Lee Student Travel Support Fund and (2) matching mentors with mentees through the two portions of the Mentorship Program. This report summarizes these.

The Lee Student Support Fund

To qualify for funding, applicants were required to document student status, be current members of the SSSP, and have at least one proposal accepted for presentation on the SSSP program. By the deadline of March 15, 2010, we received 37 applications requesting total travel support of \$16,190. Five applicants failed to meet the minimum qualifications. The \$7500.00 available was allocated to the 32 students who met the qualifications.

Our deliberations were affected by the significant disparity between the amount requested (\$16,190) and the funds available (\$7500.00) and the further disparity between applicants even within the same region and city. This caused us to allocate based upon the transportation from airport to airport or by mileage alone (for those traveling by car). We resolved this by using the lowest Travelocity fare on a single day roundtrip ticket for those applicants who reported they were traveling by air identified on the same day. For those reported to be traveling by car, we used Mapquest to identify the mileage and used SSSP's mileage reimbursement calculator to determine the reimbursement. We ignored all other expenses (e.g. lodging, food, registration). Further, because the costs were still \$9693, we imposed the maximum to those international travelers (\$500) and multiplied the travel costs by .71375 to most equitably arrive at the amount to be allocated to each applicant. Michele Koontz contacted all applicants and if an applicant/awardee declined the award, his/her funds were distributed equally among the other applicants.

The committee would like to recommend that only online applications be accepted in the future. There are several reasons for this. First, the vast majority of applications are sent online. Second, the online application provides an immediate record of the application that is saved on the server. Third, we did receive one mailed application sent to the office address of the committee chair. This required that the chair scan the application and email the scanned copy to the administrative office and the office staff to enter the information by hand into the database. All around this increases the workload for all involved. Furthermore, there is likelihood for the mailed application to have been lost in the campus mail system. Fourth, because of the option for the applicant to mail in the application, the committee had to wait for potential mailed applications to arrive in the mail and though none did this meant that valuable deliberation time was lost. And, finally, and most importantly, weeks after decisions were made, two individuals contacted the committee indicating that they had applied by email but had never received a confirmation. Though the instructions inform applicants to contact the administrative office or committee chair within 10 days of making application if they fail to receive a confirmation, neither did so until weeks and in one case 3 months had passed. Both produced a copy of an email confirmation

indicating that they sent an email to the committee chair with an email attachment in it, but a search of the committee chair's email, including junk folders, failed to produce either. Although the committee determined that there was a responsibility for the applicant to follow the instructions and contact the committee chair and no awards were made, this was quite awkward and would have been avoided with a completely online system.

Unless SSSP has the means to narrow the gap between the amounts requested and the funds available, the committee would like to further recommend that future applications limit requests solely to transportation assistance and ask that the applicant provide a copy of the price quote along with the student ID.

The Mentorship Program

The SSSP sponsors a Mentorship Program that involves two separate activities. One involves the mentoring activities previously known as the "personal mentoring program" while the other was previously referred to as the "meeting mentor program".

Meeting Mentors

Each year the SSSP sponsors a meeting mentor program where new members can be asked to be matched to a meeting veteran. By the deadline for requests, June 30, 2010, we had 56 requests for mentors and 44 SSSP members volunteered to be mentors. Because we were short 12 mentors, Michele Koontz sent out a second call for volunteers to all SSSP officers and committee members. The committee ended with 58 requests for mentors and 48 mentors to be assigned to mentees. The committee chair sent a request to some members to determine if any would agree to be assigned to more than one mentee and received affirmative responses from most. The committee voted to not assign mentors to individuals who had not paid their meeting registration.

Personal Mentoring

In 2009, the SSSP Board of Directors joined the personal mentoring program and the meeting mentor program and in that action moved responsibility for matching mentors and mentees to the Lee Student Support Committee.

This activity is designed to match SSSP members with mentors who can offer guidance in a number of areas: job search, manuscript preparation, dissertation support, tenure and promotion review, career development, and so forth. The mentoring relationship can last for a period of 3 months, 6 months or 1 year. Mentors and mentees will be matched in time for them to make arrangements to meet in person at the annual meeting. (Participants in the program are encouraged but not required to attend the meeting.) Applications for both mentor and mentee are due by June 30, 2010. By that date, the committee had received 19 applications from individuals wanting mentorship but only 4 members had applied to mentor individuals. The deadline was extended to July 12, 2010. The second call resulted in a total of 22 mentees and 28 mentors. However, 5 mentors indicated a desire to mentor only at the

annual meeting and were not assigned. The committee voted to not match mentors to applicants who had not paid for memberships.

The committee would like to recommend to the board that serious consideration be given to this program. First, many of our members are already overwhelmed with the mentoring expectations at their home institutions and while the idea of mentoring our junior members is a worthy one it may very well be that a year-long commitment to someone that they do not know, with needs that they are unaware of at the beginning is something that they are not interested in undertaking in a time when individuals are already being asked to do more teaching, more research, and more service, for less pay, all while they are mentoring students at their home institutions. Second, there are multiple, multiple areas of mentorship identified on the applications along with multiple areas of interest. For the committee to identify a member who has the skills and interest to be able to mentor these individuals with these is to some degree an impossible task. It may be more appropriate for the personal mentoring program to be facilitated through the divisions than through SSSP.

To provide the board with an example, one applicant this year asked for the following assistance, help with job hunting, job skills help, interviewing, writing a vitae, manuscript preparation, developing a manuscript idea, revising a manuscript, dissertation support, developing a topic, turning a dissertation into a publication, tenure and promotion review, preparing a dossier, and general career development. Areas are race, gender, class, sexuality, family, African Studies. The committee would suggest that hoping that the perfect match will occur with 20+ mentees just from our members sending in applications is naïve. This is an arduous process and if this program is to continue and be successful, it is likely best served via the divisions where the first level of matching (area of interest) can be done more readily. However, such a suggestion would require that the divisions all have a division chair with the ability and desire to actively seek out individuals who have the appropriate backgrounds and skills to provide the mentoring needed.

Indeed, the committee would like to suggest to the board that very careful consideration be given to the administration of this program. First, the committee would like to suggest that there may be too many options provided for mentoring and that some of the options may even be inappropriate. For instance, the committee would suggest that most doctoral committees would not find it inappropriate for a non-affiliated mentor to help the doctoral student develop the dissertation topic or idea. Second, the committee would like to suggest that the board collect and analyze data to determine the benefit of this program to the mentor and mentee, and by extension, SSSP. Further, the committee suggests that the areas of specialization should not be left open and should instead be categorized by the SSSP's divisions. It is virtually impossible to match mentors to mentees using the unique descriptors provided by the applicants. Moreover, the committee would suggest that it would be appropriate to limit the number of mentoring areas to something that is more reasonably accomplished between strangers in a 12-month or shorter time-frame.

With the realization that this program developed from the strategic planning retreat, the committee believes it is now time to evaluate the effectiveness of this labor intensive program (for the committee chair charged with administering the program, the administrative staff, and for some mentors) to

determine if the program is effective and determine its efficacy for continuation. To that end, I requested what information was available from the SSSP administrative office from evaluative surveys on the program. Very few people (5; 4 mentors, 1 mentee) had responded. Of those, only 1 mentor indicated that they had received what they had wanted from the mentor/mentee relationship and in that instance the mentee was more advanced in the career than the mentor. All but 1 indicated that they either never heard from the other party (mentor/mentee) or that the relationship was very short-lived. One respondent indicated that he/she wondered if the program was a better idea in theory than in practice and suggested that perhaps it was perhaps not useful. Of particular note, the mentee who responded noted that he/she would not recommend the program. Consequently, the committee would like to recommend that the Board give consideration to abolishing the program or completely revising it as there is some concern about whether the program may be useful or not and to an even more problematic end, whether it may actually be damaging to SSSP's reputation as "student-friendly". In essence, however well intentioned this program may have been, it may not be accomplishing its intended goal and perhaps worse, may be problematic from a public relations perspective. To that end, SSSP needs to devote considerable thought to its maintenance and/or extension.

Other Issues

While the combination of the two mentoring programs for administration purposes last year seemed to make sense from an administrative perspective, it has created confusion for our mentors and mentees. Both the administrative office and the committee chair have received many, many inquiries following the emails that introduce mentors to mentees. Both mentors and mentees who signed up for both programs are confused by having more than one mentor or mentee. The administrative office and the committee chair have explained that the board combined the programs last year and that the mentor/mentee signed up for both programs. It is not clear if the mentor/mentee understood at the time that they signed up that they were signing up for more than one program or not. The committee would like to recommend that official names for both programs be established. Both can remain under the direction of the Lee Student Support Committee but the committee feels it is necessary for there to be two distinct names for the mentorship programs so that both mentors and mentees understand for what they are applying.