

MEMORANDUM

To: SSSP Board of Directors and Executive Director

From: Kathleen S. Lowney, Chair
2010-2011 SSSP Elections Committee

Re: 2010-2011 Elections Committee Report

Date: June 25, 2011

1. The members of the Election Committee were, initially: Joel Best, Alexis Bender, Kendal Broad, and myself. During the process of finding nominees, Kendal Broad was on the list and she decided to place her name in nomination and so withdrew from the committee at that time. Given that most of the process of finding nominees was done by that time, after consulting with the Administrative Office, I proceeded without finding a replacement for her.

2. The 2011 Approved Nomination List was as follows: for President Elect – 7 names; for Vice-President Elect – 7 names; for Board of Directors (2 positions) – 9 names; for Student Representative to the Board of Directors – 8 names; for Budget, Finance, & Audit Committee – 9 names; for Committee on Committees (2 positions) – 9 names; for Editorial & Publications Committee (2 positions) – 9 names; for Membership & Outreach Committee (3 positions, 1 must be filled by graduate student) – 12 names for 2 positions and additional 5 names for graduate student position.

3. The Process: As Chair, I contacted individuals whose names appeared on the 2011 Approved Nominations List. Since there were several people nominated for multiple offices, it seemed easier to keep track of the process if only one person was reaching out to possible nominees and asking them about their willingness to run for office.

All SSSP policies concerning the election process were followed. Nominees were contacted in rank order until the correct number of candidates for each position was found. Initially most nominees were contacted by e-mail. The initial e-mail listed the office/committee for which the person was nominated, the description of that office/committee from the SSSP Operations Manual, and the length of the term being considered, and the statement that the nominee would have to be a member of the SSSP during the entire term. I included my home and office phone numbers and invited each person to call me if the nominee had questions or worries. If I did not hear from an individual after one reminder email, I then called the person. Only one graduate student nominee never replied to either e-mail or phone messages. Each nominee was given two week to consider her/his decision. Seven did call me during this period. With one exception, all of the calls were from graduate students – see point 4 below for more on this issue.

A few individuals wanted to know who would be their competition before they decided if they would accept the nomination. This happened only in the President Elect and Vice-President Elect slate of nominees. While they requested this information – in at least one case, quite vehemently demanded it from me – they were not supplied the names of others nominated or who had agreed to run as a candidate.

I was able to complete the slate of candidates for election in three very busy weeks in August and early September, but different positions required going deeper into the list of nominees than others. For example, I had to contact the top 5 of 7 individuals listed for President Elect position, but only the top 2 of 7 for Vice-President Elect. Only the graduate student position on the Membership & Outreach Committee required contacting all the nominees, plus one graduate student from the Board of Directors list before I found the 2 required candidates.

4. I faced one consistent issue when it came to finding graduate student nominees: the length of term for the positions. Most of the graduate students who were nominated were in their 4th or 5th year of graduate school and had about 1 year left before going on the job market. Thus most were reluctant to accept a 3 year position as a graduate student when they were definitely hoping to not be a graduate student within the next year! Several called me to talk about this – they were excited to be nominated and wanted to serve, but felt ethical queasy about accepting the nomination for that long of a term. All who called to talk to me about this declined to run for election, for this reason. If the SSSP wants to continue the 3 year term length for graduate student representatives to the Board of Directors and the Membership & Outreach committee, there might need to be some attention given to how to find graduate students earlier in their graduate school career.

5. Participation in Election Process

Of the 1,744 members eligible to vote electronically, 355 voted. This translates to a 20% electronic participation rate. Last year there was a 21% electronic participation rate. Of the 63 members eligible to vote by paper ballot, 6 voted. This translates to a 10% paper ballot participation rate. Last year there was a 17% paper ballot participation rate.

Total members eligible to vote: 1,807

Total members who voted: 361

Participation rate: 20% (last year there was a 21% participation rate)

Not included in these counts are the fifty two members who requested not to vote in elections and three members who have an invalid e-mail address.

6. Policy guidance sought: For this year and last year, all results of the election were sent from the Administrative Office, working with the Election Committee Chair. Currently each candidate is sent a personalized letter via first class mail, to the last address on file with the Society. Then a week later, results are told to the Board of Directors and two days later, results are placed on the SSSP website. Should a candidate move and not tell the Society the new address, it is possible that the person will not learn of his/her win or loss until it is posted on the website. That happened to one person in 2010.

A couple of individuals feel that this is a less-than-personal way to announce the results and have suggested that at least all the President Elect and Vice-President Elect candidates should receive phone calls from the Election Committee Chair, before the results are announced to the Board of Directors and placed on the SSSP website.

Personally, I think these could be very awkward conversations to have, at least with the candidates who were not elected. I had a taste of how the conversation might go when someone nominated for several positions called me, upset because he knew he was nominated for X position but had not heard from me about that position, but did receive my email about Y position instead. It was

true, he was nominated for both, but for X position, he was one of the names far down the list and so I did not end up having to go that far down the list to find the number of candidates who were needed. It was awkward and he was angry because he had been told he was ranked higher for X (I do not know by whom) than he actually was. It was a pretty uncomfortable conversation.

So I think that the Board of Directors needs to discuss and then clarify how the candidates to be notified, post-election. That will then allow the Elections Chair and the Administrative Staff of the SSSP to know how to proceed with this part of the process. If the Board is satisfied with the current way notification is handled through first class mail, perhaps in the email where the Chair thanks the person for accepting the nomination, the Chair could add in a plea to “be sure to notify the SSSP’s Administrative Office if one moves or changes email addresses in the next nine months” or something like that.

Thank you for allowing me to have this opportunity to serve the Society.

Sample E-mail Notifying Person on Nomination List

Dear First Name of Person:

I am writing to you as the 2011 Chair of the Elections Committee. One of my tasks is to contact all those individuals who have been nominated for officers, in order to find out their willingness to run on the 2011 SSSP Ballot.

You have been nominated for a position on the Board of Directors (2011-2014). I think this is a wonderful idea – you have been deeply involved in the Society for many years, serving on various Committees, and so forth. I think you would do this position quite well and I hope that you can see your way clear to saying “YES!”

Here is the link where you can read more about the duties of both of this position:

<http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/30>

SSSP handles elections in this manner: until you let me know your decision about this nomination, I cannot move on to another person on the list for this position. So I would ask that you think about this and try to let me know your decision by <date two weeks in advance> at noon. I am trying to fill a slate of 26 people (for various positions) by early October.

If you want to contact me about this opportunity as you are considering it, please call me at either 229-247-3952 (home) or 229-333-5487 (office) or ask me anything by replying to this email.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to serve the Society,

Kathe Lowney
Chair, 2011 Election Committee