

TO: The SSSP Board of Directors

FROM: 2010-2011 Lee Student Support Fund Committee (Patrick G. Donnelly, Chair; Jennifer Wesely and Tahreer Araj, members)

The committee would like to thank Michele Koontz and the SSSP office staff for the valuable assistance they provided to the Committee. Their diligence, hard work, and attention to detail greatly facilitated the work of the Committee.

The Committee was charged with (1) allocating the Lee Student Support Fund and (2) matching mentors with mentees through the two components of the Mentorship Program. This report describes the Committee's work in these areas and concludes with one recommendation to the Board.

The Lee Student Support Fund

The Lee Student Support Fund has a total of \$7,500 to provide travel support (transportation costs only) for undergraduate and graduate student conference participants. To qualify for an award of up to \$500, an applicant is required to submit an on-line application, document his/her student status and travel costs, be current members of the SSSP, and have at least one proposal accepted for presentation on the SSSP program. This was the first year that applications had to be submitted online. This process worked smoothly. The online application is sent to the Committee Chair and the SSSP Office and provides an immediate record of the application that is saved on the server. We received 48 qualified applications that reported total travel expenses of over \$29,000. The total amount of support requested was over \$21,000. Fifteen applicants reported estimated expenses that were over \$500 including the eight applicants were from outside North America.

The SSSP verified the membership status and meeting participation of the applicants. All 48 applicants qualified. Since the Committee had only \$7,500 to allocate, it used a formula that provided each applicant some support but also required applicants to cover some of their own travel costs. The Committee multiplied the lesser amount of the actual travel costs or \$500, by .35 to most equitably arrive at the amount to be allocated to each applicant. Michele Koontz then contacted all applicants and informed them of their award. In a small number of cases the award recipients declined their award stating that they could not afford to attend the meetings. In a number of these cases, students reported that the award was not sufficient to allow them to attend the meetings. When an awardee declined the offer, the amounts of these awards were distributed equally among the remaining awardees before their checks were distributed. In the case of some international students, wire transfers to bank accounts were made.

There is a significant gap between the travel amounts requested and the funds available. In 2010 the Committee's awards were able to cover about 70% of the students' travel expenses. This year, it was only able to cover about 35%. Given expected changes in institutional support for students and changes in the airline industry, this gap may grow in the coming years. If SSSP is not able to increase the monies available to the Lee Student Support Fund in the near future and

this gap persists or grows, the SSSP should consider reducing the maximum award from \$500 to provide students with a more realistic view of the support that is available.

The Mentorship Programs

The SSSP sponsors a Mentorship Program that involves two separate activities: the Meeting Mentor Program and the Professional Mentor Program.

“The Meeting Mentor Program is designed to facilitate interaction between new members or graduate students and meeting veterans at the Annual Meeting. While meeting times and locations are set by each individual pair, meeting as soon as possible in Las Vegas will help the new member get the most out of the meeting.

The Professional Mentor Program is designed to help junior members with career development. This program requires a *long-term commitment* of 3 months, 6 months, or one year.”

By the deadline for requests, there were 21 requests for Meeting Mentors and 8 mentor volunteers. (These numbers are down significantly from 2010 when we had 56 requests for mentors and 44 SSSP members volunteered to be mentors.) Because we were short 12 mentors, the SSSP Office Michele Koontz sent out a second call for volunteers to all SSSP officers and committee members. The Committee chair also solicited a number of additional mentors. The Committee ended up with 22 requests for mentors and 11 mentors. The committee chair sent an email asking mentors if they would be willing to be assigned to more than one mentee. All agreed.

In 2009, the SSSP Board of Directors joined the Professional Mentor Program and the Meeting Mentor Program and charged the Lee Student Support Fund Committee to match mentors and mentees. 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 professional mentoring relationship can last for a period of 3 months, 6 months or 1 year. By the June 30 deadline, the Committee received 10 mentee requests and 7 mentor volunteers. The subsequent emails resulted in two additional mentor volunteers. One mentor graciously accepted to serve as mentor to two mentees. While numerically there was almost a balance between mentors and mentees, it was very difficult to establish good matches for mentees and mentors. Areas of specialization, career stages, and specific requests of mentees make it very difficult to claim that mentees were well-matched with mentors who could offer great assistance.

Recommendation

In 2010, the Lee Student Support Fund Committee recommended that the Board seriously consider the professional mentoring 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. 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.”

The challenge of finding a sufficient number of professional mentors continued again this year. The 2011 Committee’s difficulty in finding appropriate matches for the professional mentoring program also supports the 2010 report. One 2011 mentor has already reported a concern about trying to mentor a person at a similar career stage in substantive areas outside his own areas of expertise. A brief survey distributed to 2010 mentees and mentors also suggest a need to reconsider the program. While the response rate was low (only three mentees and three mentors) the results were largely negative. Two of the three mentees reported that it was not easy to stay in contact with their mentors. None of the three mentees reported that they got what they wanted out of the program. And two of the three mentees would not recommend this program to others. A number of the mentee comments indicated that they were not well-matched with the mentor.

These results are similar to evaluative surveys gathered previously which led the 2010 Committee to recommend “that the Board give consideration to abolishing the program or completely revising it.”

Based on the experiences and information described above, the 2011 Lee Student Support Fund Committee recommends that the SSSP Board abolish the Professional Mentor Program.