

TO: The SSSP Board of Directors

FROM: 2011-2012 Lee Student Support Fund Committee (Jennifer K. Wesely, Chair; Jane Hood and Ruth Thompson-Miller, members)

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 Meeting Mentor Program. This report summarizes our activities for each program.

The Lee Student Support Fund

The Lee Student Support Fund provides up to \$500 in travel support (transportation costs only) for undergraduate and graduate student conference participants. To qualify for funding, applicants were required to submit their on-line application, document their student status and travel costs, 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, 2012, we had received 76 applicants (72 of whom were ultimately qualified based on the criteria mentioned above) who reported travel expenses totaling \$25,553. Fifteen applicants reported estimated expenses that were over \$500.

Though the total amount of support requested was over \$25,000, the Committee had only \$7,500 available to allocate. Due to the broad nature of application criteria, there was no way to further reduce the number of recipients based on merit or any other qualification. Further, the number of qualified applications (72) was much higher than it had been during any previous year. In order to equitably distribute the awards among the large number of qualified applicants, the committee ended up giving most applicants only a small portion of the funds they requested. Because we had no basis for judging the relative merit of each request, the committee multiplied the travel costs of each applicant by .293 (\$7500 is 29.3% of \$25,553). This method meant that all applicants would receive some support, but that all applicants would have to cover some of their own travel costs. Michele Koontz contacted all applicants and informed them of their awards. In a small number of cases, the applicants/awardees declined their awards. The amounts of these awards were distributed equally among the remaining awardees before the checks were distributed.

Problems and Recommendations:

The unusually high number of applicants resulted in several complicated tasks for the committee. Specifically, each applicant's documentation and online application was cross-checked to make sure that the amount requested was consistent with application requirements and with reasonable costs given departure location. This is the second year that the application was required to be

submitted online. This process seems to work smoothly. However, the same requirement is not made for the accompanying documentation. Some documentation was provided by students electronically (through scanned documents), and some was mailed by post to the Committee Chair, Jennifer Wesely. Postal delays or address errors resulted in incomplete files. In general, the two mechanisms through which the documentation was supplied complicated the cross-checking of applications.

Recommendation One: ALL materials must be submitted online, not just the application. Documents such as student IDs can be scanned and emailed, and estimated travel costs can also be emailed via screen shot or directly from the travel search engine website.

The Committee Chair went through all 72 applications and found that some applicants submitted cost requests that included per diem, luggage fees or hotel. These are outside the scope of qualified funds, which are specifically meant to cover transportation costs only. Other issues uncovered during the cross-checking were that students requested funds to travel from a location other than their university home base. For instance, travel from a summer abroad location rather than the U.S. university attended by the student. The Committee Chair then researched the appropriate costs (often through travel search engines like Expedia) and adjusted the requested amount accordingly. After conducting these cross-checking adjustments, the Committee Chair asked each committee member to double-check her calculations, delegating each of the two committee members half of the total applications.

Recommendation Two: All advertisements for the Lee Student Support Fund explicitly state examples of what does not qualify for funding in addition to the already stated qualifications, and note that applications that do not adhere to these guidelines will be disqualified. Currently the Lee Student Support Fund solicitation states, “The fund provides up to \$500 in travel support (transportation costs only).…” We recommend that this clarification be extended to state, “Travel support does NOT include luggage fees, hotel, per diem, or other costs not associated with airfare, railway, or driving expenses between their university and the conference locations. All applicants who include unqualified costs will be eliminated from consideration.” This recommendation will ease the nearly untenable task of the committee painstakingly examining 72 applications, researching and then re-adjusting amounts for applicants whose departure cities do not match up with their universities or for those who request amounts outside the qualified scope.

There is a significant gap between the travel amounts requested and the funds available. Each year, the number of applicants has increased and the amount of money available has remained the same. Between 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, the number of applications jumped from 48 to 76. It would not be surprising if next year the amount of applicants exceeds 100.

Recommendation Three: Increase award monies. If SSSP is not able to increase the monies available to the Lee Student Support Fund and this gap persists, more stringent application criteria must be created so that the amount is not spread so thin that each individual student receives a negligible amount (ultimately discouraging them from attending the annual meeting at all). One committee member suggested adding a requirement of documented activist scholarship or having applicants document all their travel expenses and funding sources. Evaluating more

documentation coupled with exponential increases in applications is outside the scope of one 3-person committee, so a larger body would need to be charged with this task.

Another possibility is to return to the original form of the program and once again limit applications to students coming from abroad. The Society would need to vote on this change.

Meeting Mentor Program

The SSSP sponsors a Meeting Mentor Program. “The Meeting Mentor Program is designed to facilitate interaction between new members or graduate students and meeting veterans at the Annual Meeting.”

The application deadline for the Meeting Mentor Program was June 30th. Prior to the deadline, on June 4th, an email was disseminated by Michele Koontz and Jennifer Wesely to solicit more mentors. This resulted in a small amount of additional mentor volunteers, including two who did not register via the online system but simply sent the Committee Chair an email. They were included in the process and assigned mentees. By deadline, the committee received 56 requests. Duplicates and those no longer attending were removed from consideration. Ultimately, there were 30 requests for Meeting Mentors and 21 mentor volunteers.

Due to the relatively high demand for mentors, nine mentors were assigned two mentees each. These mentors were emailed and queried about their willingness to take on two mentees.

Recommendation One: Expand the venues through which the call for mentors is made and create an automatically generated email to members of SSSP a month prior to the Meeting Mentor Program deadline again requesting participation.

Recommendation Two: Since Mentor and Mentee applications are submitted online, engage this technology to automatically match the two based on areas of interest. In the current application, mentors and mentees are both asked to designate a Primary and Secondary SSSP Division membership. If the system was able, at the least, to organize mentors and mentees who share the same areas of interest, the committee could then be responsible for resolving the remaining issues.