

## MEMORANDUM

To: The Board of Directors of The Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)

From: Hoan N. Bui, Chair, 2014 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee

RE: SSSP 2013-2014 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Report

Date: June 25, 2014

The members of the SSSP 2013-2014 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee included: Amanda Lewis (Emory University), Chair-Elect; Francisco J. Alatorre (New Mexico State University); Trinidad Arguello (Tri-County Community Services, Inc., - 24/7 Programs); Junior R. Hopwood (University of Maryland, Eastern Shore); Michael Mascarenhas (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute); Chavella T. Pittman (Dominican University), and Hoan N. Bui (University of Tennessee at Knoxville), Chairperson.

**APPLICANT POOL:** The SSSP Administrative Office received nineteen (19) applications by the deadline. Four (4) were incomplete for several reasons, including: no official transcript; letter of recommendation without signature; no signature on sealed envelopes containing letter of recommendation and signature on the letter was conflicted with signature on the sealed envelope. After four candidates were informed about the status of their applications, two contacted their professors who wrote letters to the chairperson to confirm that they had wrote and signed the letters of recommendation and asked their secretaries to sign the sealed envelopes. The chairperson asked committee members if these explanations would make the applications from these two candidates eligible for evaluation, and the committee agreed. Thus, seventeen (17) applications were eligible to be evaluated by the committee. This year's applicants reflected the following demographic profiles:

**Race/Ethnicity:** There were four (4) Hispanic/Latino candidates (23.5%), three (3) Asian American candidates (17.6%), seven Black/African American candidates (41.3%), and three (3) candidates with mixed racial/ethnic background (17.6%).

**Matriculating Year:** Most of the applicants (fourteen) were in their final year or two of their Ph.D. programs as they had successfully defended their dissertation proposals at the time of application or planned to defend in Spring 2014; two were in the third year and one was in the six year.

**Academic Discipline:** The overwhelming majority of the applicants (fourteen) were from the discipline of Sociology (82%), including three (3) candidates who had sociology in their joined disciplines. One candidate was in Criminal Justice (6%), one in Psychology (6%), and one in Social and Behavioral Science (6%).

**ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:** The committee heavily relied on the organizational and logistical support from Michele Smith Koontz and effective administrative assistance from Elizabeth Ashley (Lisa) East who received applications, checked their completeness and informed the committee chair about the reasons for which some applications were considered

incomplete. Similar to last year, all application materials were combined into single files and posted online on a SSSP secured web-based site. Not only this method contributed to the protection of natural resources, it was also very convenient for committee members to access application materials when reviewing and evaluating applications. Both Michele and Lisa were incredibly outstanding in constructing and making the online review process a seamless one.

**SELECTION PROCESS:** To prepare for the evaluation, the chairperson emailed committee members in early February and sent them a copy of evaluation criteria adapted from the one used last year with minor revisions for approval. Due to the concern that most applicants had no substantial or sustained relationship with the SSSP and that one of the goals was to attract more applicants who were connected to the organization, the committee agreed to include up to three (3) points for SSSP involvement. In addition, the committee also agreed to raise the score for disadvantaged background up to three (3) points, so that different levels of disadvantaged background could be fairly evaluated. In the end, there were ten (10) evaluation areas, and each candidate could earn up to 3 points for each area.

Upon receipt of the instructions from Lisa East for accessing the applications online, the chairperson emailed committee members a copy of the approved evaluation criteria along with a copy of the rating sheet, which was also adapted from the one used last year and proposed timeline for completing the evaluation and selection task.

Three weeks after the proposed deadline for rating sheets (May 9, 2014), the chairperson received five rating sheets from committee members, including the chairperson. Two committee members did not send their rating sheets despite three reminders (Francisco J. Alatorre from New Mexico State University and Junior R. Hopwood from University of Maryland, Eastern Shore).

The committee scored all seventeen applicants accordingly. The overall scores of all five committee members were used. The possible maximum points a candidate could receive per committee member were 30. The scores were tallied by the chairperson and sent out to all committee members for review. **Edelina Muñoz Burciaga** from the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, had the highest scores (111), followed by Regina Smalls Baker (107.5), Ciera Alesha Graham (102) and Phi Hong Su (102). Several committee members, including the chairperson, proposed that Edelina receive the award and Regina honorable mention. All committee members agreed.

**The committee recommended the following:**

1. That the award be conferred to Edelina Muñoz Burciaga from the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, who obtained the highest overall score.
2. That an Honorable Mention Scholar be presented to Regina Smalls Baker from the Department of Sociology at Duke University, who obtained the second highest overall score.

Michele Smith Koontz and Lisa East were of immense assistance in drafting and sending the official letters to each candidate on behalf of the chairperson. Edelina Muñoz Burciaga

enthusiastically accepted the award and will attend the Awards Banquet and Ceremony at the SSSP Annual Meeting on Saturday, August 16, 2014.

This year, committee members were concerned with a fairly large number of incomplete applications (21%) by the deadline. Often, the reasons included recommendation writers who failed to follow the instruction and the candidates who failed to check if requirements related to letters of recommendation were met. Upon receiving the notice of incomplete applications, several candidates wrote to the chairperson and indicated that the problem was not their fault and asked their professors to speak on their behalf. Their actions forced committee members to take time discussing and deciding on the eligibility of these applications. In order to avoid similar problematic situations in the future, the committee suggests using strong language in the application announcement, emphasizing that the candidates have the responsibility to make sure that applications meet all requirements to be considered eligible for evaluation.

The second issue was also related to checking application eligibility. While the scholarship announcement required applicants to be US citizens or permanent residents, this requirement was not included in the check-off list. If SSSP considers this requirement important, the administration may need to think about an effective way to check applicants' citizenship or permanent residency status.

On behalf of the 2013-2014 SSSP Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee, I would like to thank the Board for the opportunity to do such important and crucial work for the SSSP. It was the Committee's pleasure to serve.