

## MEMORANDUM

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

From: Amanda E. Lewis, Chair, 2015 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee

RE: SSSP 2014-2015 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Report

Date: June 25, 2015

The members of the SSSP 2014-2015 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee included: **Amanda E. Lewis, Chair** (University of Illinois, Chicago); **Shirley A. Jackson, Chair-Elect** (Southern Connecticut State University); **Matthew Hughey** (University of Connecticut); **Samit Dipon Bordoloi** (Western Washington University); **Antonio (Jay) Pastrana, Jr.** (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY); **Forrest R. Rodgers** (University of Wisconsin, River Falls); and **Rita Shah** (Elizabethtown College)

**APPLICANT POOL:** The SSSP Administrative Office received thirteen (13) applications by the deadline (the final deadline was extended slightly due to major winter storms). A question was raised about one of the applications because the submitted transcript appeared not to be “official” but after getting clarification from the relevant registrar (at Princeton) that this was, in fact, an “official” transcript, the application was accepted for review. So all thirteen (13) applications were eligible to be evaluated by the committee.

This year's applicant pool was quite diverse. In terms of race/ethnicity, there were two Hispanic/Latino candidates, five Asian American candidates, four Black/African American candidates, and two candidates with mixed racial/ethnic background (Black/American Indian and Black/Asian-American). Most of the applicants (9) were in years 4-6 of graduate school and had already successfully defended their dissertation proposals at the time of their application; four applied who were in their third year of graduate school.

**ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:** The committee heavily relied on the organizational and logistical support from Michele Smith Koontz and effective administrative assistance from Douglas Oeser who received applications, checked their completeness and communicated to me if there were any questions about applications. Similar to last year, all application materials were combined into single files and posted online on a SSSP secured web-based site. This worked well for committee members to access application materials when reviewing and evaluating applications. Both Michele and Douglas were outstanding in constructing and making the online review process a seamless one.

**SELECTION PROCESS:** Early in the process I forwarded to all committee members a draft of the evaluation criteria (modified slightly from last year). The committee reviewed and approved this document including following the practice begun last year to include up to three points for SSSP involvement and to raise the score for disadvantaged background up to three points, so that different levels of disadvantaged background could be fairly evaluated. In the end, there were ten evaluation areas, and each candidate could earn up to 3 points for each area. Douglas Oeser sent out links to the applications on February 19<sup>th</sup>. I then emailed committee members a copy of the approved evaluation criteria along with a copy of the rating sheet excel file. Committee members were asked to return evaluations by April 2<sup>nd</sup> so they could be collated in advance of our April 6<sup>th</sup> conference call. I received ratings from all but one committee member (Forrest Rodgers). All ratings sheets were combined into a single spreadsheet that showed all scores for each candidate as well as each rater's top candidates. The

overall scores for six committee members were used. The possible maximum points a candidate could receive per committee member were 30.

The committee had a very productive conference call on April 6<sup>th</sup> reviewing in detail the applications from the eight candidates whose scores were in the top half of most rater's distributions. We came to a consensus to award the scholarship to Anjanette Marie Chan Tack (University of Chicago) and to give an Honorable Mention to Robert Reece (Duke University). Ms. Tack's overall scores were top overall with Mr. Reece a close second. Mr. Reece was only in his third year of the program at Duke University and in a subsequent conversation with him I strongly encouraged him to consider applying again in the future. The awards were communicated to the awardees via email and Michele Smith Koontz followed up with official letters to each candidate on behalf of the committee. Ms. Tack enthusiastically accepted the award and will attend the Awards Ceremony at the SSSP Annual Meeting. I also held follow-up conversations with several other applicants who wanted to receive feedback about why they had not received the award.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE:** The committee spent some time talking at the end about suggestions for improving the process in the future. One suggestion was to clarify the criteria for evaluation in the application. The committee bases its decision on ratings of applicants across 10 different criteria:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Points</b>
School Activism	Does the student demonstrate involvement in school activities that address and/or increase public recognition of social problems/injustices? Evidence of this may come from their participation/leadership in a school-based organization that promotes social justice.	0-3
Community Involvement	Does the student demonstrate commitment to promoting awareness of social problems/injustices through community participation? Evidence of this may come from their active involvement in a community-based organization.	0-3
SSSP Involvement	Does the student demonstrate sustained involvement with SSSP? Evidence of this may come from presentations at SSSP conferences, serving as a member of a SSSP committee, publishing in a SSSP sponsored journal and/or newsletter.	0-3
Academic Performance	Quality of the student's academic performance as judged by grades, academic honors (e.g., fellowships, awards, prizes), and other indicators of scholastic distinction.	0-3
Other Scholarly Activities	Does the student demonstrate a commitment to research? Evidence of this may come from conference presentations, grant applications/awards, or publications.	0-3
Dissertation Research	What is the quality of the student's dissertation research proposal? Is the proposed research sound? Does it demonstrate originality and innovativeness? Evidence for this may come from your assessment of the proposal and the student's personal statement.	0-3
Disadvantaged Social Background	Are there aspects of the student's background that demonstrate disadvantage? Examples might include parents' education level (i.e., the student is first generation college, or they're the first in their family to receive an advanced degree), family inability to provide financial assistance to defray cost of graduate school, or non-traditional student status.	0-3

Current Financial Need	Does the student demonstrate a strong financial need? Examples might include the following: university financial support has ended, fellowship support has ended, will need to teach in order to support final year of dissertation writing, dissertation progress will be delayed because of lack of funding.	0-3
Personal Statement	What is the quality and strength of the student's personal statement? Does it articulate a scholarly commitment to the study of inequality, injustice, or oppression?	0-3
Letters of Recommendation	Do the letters of recommendation make a clear and strong case about the student's past achievements as well as the promise of their dissertation research? Keep in mind that non- substantive praise is not helpful. The strongest letters of recommendation provide concrete examples of the student's achievements, scholarship, activism, and financial need.	0-3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0-30</b>

All of these categories are mentioned somewhere in the announcement but it might be worth being more explicit with them about the specific criteria used in the evaluation process. This came up in part because the committee has had to work hard while reviewing some of applications to gain enough information in all categories to make a rating. Alternatively, future committees may want to consolidate several of the categories.

The committee had several specific suggestions in changes to the application form. First, was to give more space or ask for more specifics about applicant's financial need. Related to this we'd like all applicants to submit a proposed budget (currently some applicants provide one and others do not). The committee also suggested including dependent family members in general rather than just children on the form itself. We'd also like a question about SSSP involvement so we do not need to try to search for signs of it on CVs.