

July 15, 2017

TO: SSSP Board of Directors  
Lee Student Support Fund Committee Members

FROM: Joel Best, Chair  
Lee Student Support Fund Committee (2016-17)

## Report of the 2016-17 Lee Student Support Fund Committee

This year, our committee consisted of Meghan McDowell (who will chair the committee in 2017-18) and Rebecca Wiersma, as well as myself. The committee has two responsibilities, to award travel funds to students through the Lee Student Travel Fund, and to match mentors and mentees for the annual meeting. We were of course guided by the indispensable Michele Koontz. Michele schedules various messages, announcements, etc. to make people aware of these programs. She did ask me to okay the wording of these messages, which I did. This report ignores those routine communications, and focuses on things unique to this year.

### Travel Funds

The Lee Student Travel Fund consists of \$15,000 that the committee allocates to students who apply for assistance in meeting their travel expenses. Applicants are required to submit an application by March 15, which is treated as a hard and fast deadline. Michele prepares a spreadsheet which identifies eligible applicants (who must be SSSP members, be listed on the annual meeting program, and have submitted documentation of their expected expenses—requirements that are clearly spelled out in the application invitation). Applications by students who fail to meet these criteria are not considered for awards. This year, there were 94 eligible applicants.

Michele sent us a memo detailing the rating scheme used in the past:

The committee is charged with determining the amount and allocation of the awards. As there is very little guidance on what to consider for the distribution model, previous committees have used a point system based on the following criteria:

- Location: 0 for Pacific, 1 for Mountain, 2 for Central, 3 for Eastern, 4: International (Canada is International)
- Conference role: 3 for multiple roles, 2 for discussant (or being a chair of a division), 1 for organizing/presiding
- Presenting a paper: 3 for 3 papers, 2 for 2 papers, 1 for 1 paper, 0=no paper but playing another role (which should be counted above)

- Received an award last year: 0 for yes, 1 for no

Each applicant is assigned a total point score based on the criteria above.

There are three categories from the point totals:

7-9 points

4-6 points

1-3 points

From this, the \$15,000 travel funds can be distributed as follows:

- Those who total 7-9 points receive \$250
- Those who total 4-6 points receive \$150
- Those who total 1-3 points receive \$75

We modified this scheme to reflect the location of this year's meeting in Montreal. We awarded: 0 points for most applicants in the Eastern time zone; 1 point for those in the Central time zone as well as those from Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina; 2 points for those in the Mountain time zone; 3 points for those in the Pacific time zone; and 4 points for those in Hawaii (we used the same time zones for Canadian applicants).

Using the existing scheme, we would have awarded far less than the full \$15,000 allotted to our committee. Therefore, we modified the award scheme: 7-9 points received \$350; 6 points received \$300; 4-5 points received \$200; and 1-3 points received \$100. (In other words, every applicant received more than the amount allotted in the template.)

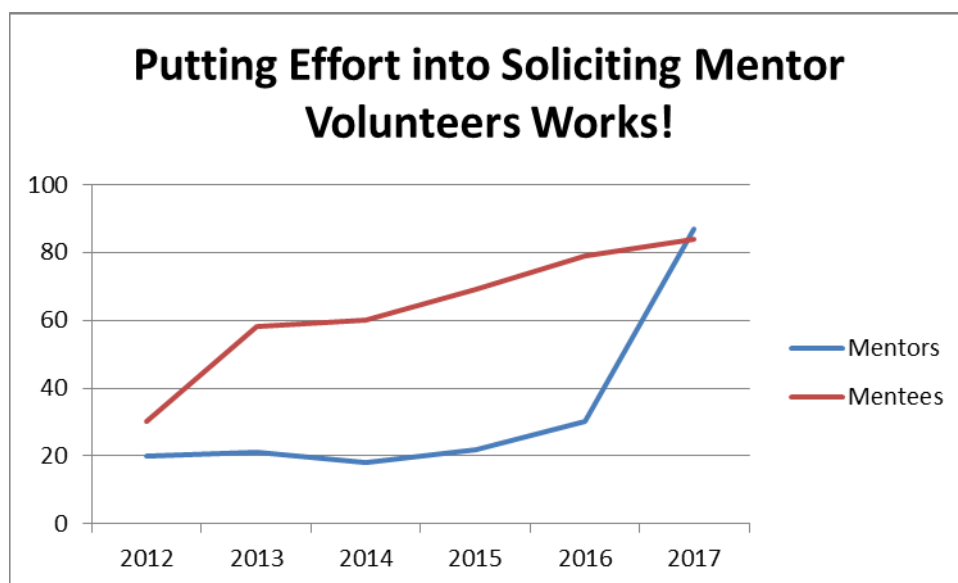
### Meeting Mentor Program

This has become something of a troubled program; with newcomers to SSSP asking to be mentored outnumbering volunteer mentors. This has led to a vicious cycle: mentors wind up being assigned to work with more mentees and these matches often involve mentors and mentees who do not share interests, which leads to fewer people volunteering to mentor, which. . . .

I tried to break this cycle. In the fall of 2016, I contacted all the division chairs and requested that they insert a message in their fall newsletters encouraging members of volunteer as mentors (this effort seemed to have a disappointingly small effect.) Once I began receiving notices of people applying to be mentors and mentees (I was copied on all of these), I created a spreadsheet showing, for each division, the number of volunteer mentors and the number of people requesting mentoring. It quickly became obvious that some divisions had lots of folks requesting mentoring and few mentor volunteers. In April, I began contacting the chairs of divisions where mentees outnumbered mentors and requested that they contact people within their division and encourage them to volunteer. This had a dramatic success in the Racial and Ethnic Minorities: I received about a dozen volunteers, and that division went from the one with the greatest imbalance to one that was basically balanced. I continued badgering chairs of problematic divisions—two more messages in May, another in early June. (In a couple cases, chairs wrote me explaining that theirs was a division filled with members who lived hard lives, who should not be expected to volunteer. I responded that the future health of the division might be enhanced by fostering contacts with newcomers.) Finally, in mid-June, after four attempts to nudge the division chairs, I

took the step of contacting the members of ten divisions which had too few volunteers and spelling out the situation in those divisions (i.e., you are part of a division with XXX members, but only Y people have volunteered to serve as mentors, meanwhile we have ZZ newcomers with an interest in your division requesting mentoring). This worked reasonably well: within a few days another 22 people volunteered.

By the way, making the extra effort to solicit more volunteers took up some time—but it wasn't a lot of time. I'd guess that chairing this committee required a total of a day or two, spread out over the course of the year. As the graph makes clear, the number of people requesting mentoring has steadily increased, but the extra effort to solicit volunteers really paid off—their numbers almost tripled so that we actually had a couple more volunteers than mentors.



Having more volunteers had two major advantages. First, no mentor was assigned more than one mentee, making the task less onerous. Second, it was possible to do a much better job of matching mentors and mentees: more than three quarters of the mentees could be matched with a mentor who shared their choice of a primary division, and in more than half the remaining cases, it was possible to match the mentee with someone who shared an interest in either their primary or secondary division. In only about ten cases was it necessary to match mentees with someone who did not express an interest in either of their divisions.

### Overall

In general, I think that these are worthwhile programs. Obviously, the meeting mentoring program faces challenges. In my view, the solution to those challenges is to get the divisions more engaged. While meeting mentoring is administered by a SSSP committee, people should appreciate that most members operate at the division level—mostly interacting with people who share their interests. Therefore, I urge future

committee chairs to nudge, nag, and hector division chairs throughout the year, and in particular to keep track of divisions where there are imbalances between mentees and volunteers. This will allow the committee to anticipate where problems will arise, and to circumvent them. I also think it would be a good idea to write all mentors immediately after the meeting and thank them for their service, and during the spring to contact those former mentors and urge them to volunteer again.