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

From: Reuben Jonathan Miller, Chair, 2017 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee

RE: SSSP 2016-2017 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Report

Date: July 20, 2017

Dear board members. The 2016-17 SSSP Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee (Committee) is pleased to present its annual report. In the sections that follow we detail the committee's activities, discuss our award recipients, and present eight action items for the board to take up with justification.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: The Committee members included: Reuben Jonathan Miller, University of Chicago (Chair); Ana Muñiz, University of California, Irvine (Chair-Elect); Ramon Guerra, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley; Omari Jackson, Morgan State University; Juliette Roddy, University of Michigan- Dearborn; Yuying Shen, Norfolk State University; Hephzibah V. Strmic-Pawl, Manhattanville College

APPLICANT POOL: The SSSP Administrative Office received twenty-four (24) applications, however one applicant was incomplete by the deadline and one (this year's highest scored candidate) almost missed the deadline (but submitted on-time) due to unforeseen mail delays. The Committee's chair made the decision to review the circumstances and found in both cases that the reasons were beyond the applicants' control. In both cases, an advisor was on leave and did not furnish their letter of recommendation by the due date. In one case, the advisor who was out of the country sent the letter weeks before the due date but experienced an unforeseen mail delay.

All additional materials were received within a few days of the due date. The chair accepted those additional materials and subsequently, all twenty-four (24) applications were considered eligible to be evaluated by the committee. All twenty-four were reviewed.

We benefitted from a diverse applicant pool. 10 applicants identified as Black or African American, 10 as Hispanic or Latino American, 3 as Asian American, and as Middle Eastern American (having checked the "other" box).

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE: As in prior years, this committee relied on the tireless support of Michele Smith Koontz and the assistance of the diligent SSSP graduate research assistant, Bethany Nelson (the administrative office).

The administrative office received all paper applications, ensured they were complete, and scanned and made them available to the committee for review. They met with the chair in November to discuss criteria for the year (re late applications and how to best address problems in the application and review process). As in previous years, they combined application materials into single PDF files and posted online in a password protected and secure page of SSSP's secured website. The administrative office provided invaluable support making the process nearly seamless.

SELECTION PROCESS: I forwarded all committee members a draft of the evaluation criteria in January, following last year's protocol, with a list of suggested agenda items based on questions I fielded from candidates and their referees during the lead up to the application due date. The committee reviewed the criteria and made additional suggestions, which were incorporated into a slightly modified version of the evaluation criteria. While we kept criteria the same from the year before, we added red text with committee member suggestions for each respective evaluation criteria. This allowed us to use those suggestions as a guide in our later deliberation and to discuss the benefits of modifying the form in the future.

We followed the previous year's practice of allowing up to three points for SSSP involvement. Since involvement in national conferences can be expensive, and those expenses can be onerous to graduate students from more humble means, we made the decision to calculate applicants' scores with and without SSSP involvement. We also discussed, via email, questions about the process and set a meeting date and an agenda for the conference call to select awardees.

The administrative office processed the applications quickly, but carefully, scanning and preparing the website for the committee to access the applications by mid-February. Committee members were asked to return evaluations by April 7, 2017, which allowed time for each committee member to give the applications a couple rounds of review and for the chair to collate the scores.

Our conference call was held on May 4, 2017. I received ratings from all but one committee member (Yuying Shen). All ratings sheets were combined into a single spreadsheet that showed all scores for each candidate, listing candidates in rank order by their scores. Candidates could receive a maximum of 30 points.

The committee held a 90-minute conference call on May 4, 2017. After reviewing the applications, the committee was pleased to award scholarships to Ulluminair M. Salim (UCSF Sociology) and Diego Emmanuel Avalos (ASU Social Transformation).

The competition, as in all years, was stiff. Ulluminair had the highest-scored application and hers was among the most compelling projects. The committee was convinced that her work on limb amputation and humanitarian reason offered a novel approach to a set of new and interesting research questions, and will make considerable contributions to what we know about humanitarianism, moral economies, charity and philanthropic practices more broadly, advancing the fields of medical and political sociology and anthropology and the role of the scholar-activist in shaping public debate on our most pressing social problems. Diego Emmanuel Avalos was our second highest rated applicant. The committee was convinced that Diego's project on migrant drywall workers in Tijuana was not only important and timely given current debates about immigration and immigrant laborers, but that it will make considerable contributions to what we know about clandestine migration, precarious labor, economic sociology, and ethnographies of border crossing.

Both applicants had rigorous, methodologically and theoretically sophisticated projects that raised compelling research questions, a strong history of scholarship and activism, and a commitment to improving the social conditions of marginalized people throughout the world. The committee is pleased to support these two fantastic applicants and look forward to the contributions they will make through their research and activism.

The chair communicated via email with the awardees, who both gladly accepted the award. The committee also provided (brief) feedback to each candidate who was not awarded the scholarship in their rejection letter. We wanted to let them know that the committee read their work carefully and that their time and effort was appreciated. We received positive feedback from three applicants who relayed their appreciation to the committee. In all this was a time consuming but rewarding process for the committee members.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE: The committee spent considerable time discussing next steps, how to best improve the process, and how to bring greater visibility and additional prestige to this very competitive award (given its roughly 8% acceptance rate). After some deliberation, and given the needs our students communicated through this process, we propose the following action items:

1. **Allow DACA and other "at risk" graduate student scholars to apply**

This year, our committee had to turn away requests from DACA students because of the U.S. citizenship requirements. Given the political, symbolic and actual violence faced by scholars in places like Yemen, Syria, and Turkey (Turkish scholars for example have been fined, blacklisted, and incarcerated for conducting work perceived to be against the state), SSSP should keep its door open to such "at risk" scholars should they decide to apply. Perhaps this could happen through a designated fund for "at risk" scholars. Perhaps they should be allowed into the general candidate pool. This measure should be discussed by the board.

2. **Make the immediate transition to an electronic application submission system**

We asked a lot of Michele and Bethany. It was the current chair's position to accept late application materials when a student could demonstrate that they were not at fault for a late submission. In some cases, faculty members were on research leave overseas and there were mail issues that the student was not responsible for. Each instance, save one, resolved on time (as was the case with our top-rated applicant) but it caused needless stress for our applicants and Bethany had to keep up with documents as they straggled in. Finally, because each page had to be scanned (a time-consuming process) and some were handwritten, the committee was not able to search within a given document. This meant reviewers had to print each page of each application, take separate notes on each application, or find some creative way to mark the application using some software reading program. We should move to electronic application submission right away.

3. **Advertise outside of sociology programs**

There are several committee members (including the current and the incoming chairs) and many of our applicants (including our second highest-rated applicant and one of our two scholarship award recipients) who are not in sociology programs. They are, however, active members of SSSP and contribute in meaningful ways. It is therefore our position that we should advertise the award outside of sociology programs, alerting faculty and their graduate students who are sociologists, anthropologists, and social scientists trained in related fields of the scholarship opportunity. This means advertising among social scientists working in diverse fields such as American Studies, Criminology, Education, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Gender Studies, Social Science History, Social Work and Social Welfare, and Public Policy. These efforts will no doubt increase the competition for the award, but they will also bring greater visibility to our Society, encourage greater

participation across fields, and help raise the profile of scholar-activism in fields across the social sciences. In addition, the committee noted that many scholar-activists are drawn to interdisciplinary fields where their political commitments are recognized (i.e. American Studies, Geography, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Women's Studies, etc.).

4. **Change the title from scholarship to fellowship**

We believe using the term fellowship will enhance the optics of our awardees CVs and aid in their professional advancement by signaling the analytic and methodological rigor they offer. There are few, if any other external awards for graduate students that use the term scholarship, and the term scholarship is typically used in ways that suggest one is awarded something for past productivity and/or as an act of charity (i.e. proof of merit in high school or college, proof of low income or minority status, etc.). Fellowships, however, are usually awarded to support the completion of an ongoing project. We believe that fellowship is a more appropriate description of this award given it is awarded to help off-set the costs of an ongoing dissertation project.

5. **Raise the GPA requirement from 3.25 to 3.5**

We believe raising the GPA requirement sends a strong signal about the rigor required of our award recipients' projects.

6. **Eliminate the academic performance rating**

With an increased GPA requirement, there is no need for an academic performance rating. Our candidates are expected to have strong GPAs.

7. **Eliminate the budget requirement**

We understand that the budget requirement was a suggestion from previous committees, but we found these criteria to be superfluous in its application. Students needed funds for a range of things, including living expenses. There was no uniform way to assess such expenses. Also, students requested budgets but we had no good examples to send them (due to no uniform assessment criteria). Rather than require funds be restricted in ways that could be counterproductive for our scholar-activists, we believe the requirement itself should be eliminated.