

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

From: Ana Muñiz, Chair, 2018 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Fellowship Committee

RE: 2017-2018 SSSP Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Fellowship Committee Report

Date: July 6, 2018

The 2017-18 SSSP Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Fellowship Committee is pleased to present its annual report. In the sections that follow, we discuss the committee's activities, the award recipients, and four action items for the board to take up at its annual meeting.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: The Committee members included: Ana Muñiz, University of California, Irvine (Chair); Saher Selod, Simmons College (Chair-Elect); Trinidad de Jesus Arguello, Compostela Community and Family Cultural Institute; Samit Dipon Bordoloi, Western Washington University; Rodney D. Coates, Miami University; Rita Shah, Eastern Michigan University; Stephani Williams, Northern Arizona University.

APPLICANT POOL: The SSSP Administrative Office received twenty-two (22) complete applications by the due date. Six (6) of the applicants identified as Black or African American; nine (9) applicants identified as Hispanic or Latino; five (5) applicants identified as Asian or Asian American; one (1) applicant identified as Black or African American/Hispanic or Latino; and one (1) applicant identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Fifteen (15) applicants identified as Female; five (5) applicants identified as Male; and two (2) applicants did not select either option.

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE: As in prior years, this committee relied on the invaluable support of Michele Koontz and the assistance of SSSP Graduate Research Assistant and Webmaster, Caitlin Mize, in the administrative office. The administrative office conducted a call with the chair in January 2018 to discuss logistics and timeline. Once the application deadline of February 1, 2018 had passed, the administrative office checked and scanned all paper applications. The administrative office combined application materials into single PDF files and posted them online in a password protected and secure page of the SSSP website. Subsequently, the administrative office made applications available to all committee members via a link distributed, with detailed instructions, through email.

SELECTION PROCESS: The chair emailed all committee members a draft of the evaluation criteria; a timeline for the selection process; and links to the Fellowship announcement and application in October 2017. The committee reviewed the criteria and made additional suggestions by November 15, 2017. However, the suggestions did not require a modification of the evaluation instrument. We followed the previous year's practice of allowing up to three points for SSSP involvement. Since involvement in national conferences can be prohibitively expensive, the chair calculated applicants' scores both with and without SSSP involvement.

The administrative office uploaded 22 applications to the website for the committee to access by mid-February. At this time, the chair scheduled conference calls with the committee for the last

week of April to discuss Fellowship finalists and action items. Due to difficulties accommodating all committee members' schedules, the chair held two conference calls – one on April 27, 2018, and a second call on April 30, 2018. The chair asked committee members to return evaluations by April 6, 2018, but this deadline was ultimately extended until the end of April.

All evaluation sheets were combined into a single spreadsheet. After reviewing the applications, the committee decided to award scholarships to Carolina Valdivia Ordorica (Education, Harvard University) and Nikhilendu Deb (Sociology, University of Tennessee Knoxville). Both awardees overcame substantial financial and social challenges to pursue their education. Furthermore, both awardees demonstrated excellence in scholarship, promising dissertating projects, and a strong commitment to social justice activism.

Carolina Valdivia Ordorica's work examining the effects of immigration enforcement on the trajectories of youth in mixed status families evidences scholarly rigor and is primed to impact contemporary policy debates. Furthermore, Carolina Valdivia Ordorica has a history of grassroots organizing in the undocumented youth movement.

Nikhilendu Deb has conducted impressive research on the Bhopal Disaster of 1984, providing a much need contribution to the sociological literature. Nikhilendu Deb is a scholar who utilizes their research on environmental issues to engage in global activism through a framework of social justice praxis.

The SSSP administrative office communicated via email with the awardees, who both accepted the award.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE: The committee proposes the following action items:

1. Modify the eligibility criteria for "Racial/Ethnic Identification"

During the application period, the chair received inquiries from a student, and a professor on behalf of several students, regarding the Fellowship eligibility status of students who identify as of Arab/Middle-Eastern descent. The chair contacted the administrative office for clarification. The administrative office referred the chair to Professor Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer, Society for the Study of Social Problems. Professor Delgado clarified that, under the current eligibility criteria, students who identify as being of Arab or Middle-Eastern descent are not eligible for the Fellowship. It is the committee's understanding that the Racial/Ethnic Identification eligibility categories are based upon US Census categories.

- (a) The committee proposes that SSSP modify the eligibility criteria to include students who identify as Arab/Middle-Eastern descent. People of Arab/Middle-Eastern descent face pronounced racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination; are subject to intensive policing and surveillance; and are targets for white supremacist hate and violence. The inclusion of this category in the Fellowship eligibility criteria would reflect SSSP's commitment to supporting students from marginalized and oppressed groups.

- (b) The committee encourages SSSP to consider larger modifications to the Racial/Ethnic Identification eligibility criteria such that they are not modeled after US census categories. US Census categories are frequently non-exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and do not accurately reflect the identities with which people identify.

2. *Modify the application category for “Sex”*

Currently, the application asks the applicant to select one of two options (Male or Female) as their “sex”. While this application component does not affect eligibility, the board should consider modifying the category in a more inclusive manner to align with the spirit of SSSP’s mission. The application component might be better served with a “Gender” category accompanied by various options.

3. *Transition to an electronic application system*

The current paper-based application process creates unnecessary work on all sides. Paper-based applications make coordination for deadlines more difficult for students and faculty. This year, there were cases of letter writers on leave or out of country. This, in turn, creates more work for the administrative office in the case of late or incomplete applications. It appears previous chairs of this committee have experienced similar issues. As stated in last year’s report, the move to an electronic application system would be greatly beneficial.

4. *Eliminate the budget requirement*

The committee would like to reiterate the suggestion of last year’s committee to eliminate the budget requirement. The chair received several requests from the applicants for greater guidance and a template, which do not appear to be available. Furthermore, there was no uniform way to assess such expenses.