

July 15, 2020
Board of Directions
Society for the Study of Social Problems
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University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-0490

To the Board – We write to you with the 2019-2020 Report of the Lee Student Support Fund Committee. This committee has three members: hephzibah strmic-pawl who is chair (Manhattanville College), Michelle Jacobs (Wayne State University), and Daniel Olmos who is incoming chair (California State – Northridge).

This committee's usual significant task is the allocation of \$15,000 to eligible applicants of the Lee Student Travel Fund. Eligible applicants are members of the Society by the 15 March application deadline, are listed in the annual meeting program, and have submitted suitable documentation of their expected travel expenses. On March 19th there were 91 applicants (5 of which had application ineligibility). At that time the committee, in consultation with Koontz and Delgado, decided to postpone making any decisions on travel awards due to the possibility of cancelling SSSP; this decision turned out to be prudent as the meeting was cancelled. On May 2nd the committee received notice that the Board of Directors would make a decision about how the Lee Student Support Fund monies for the 2020 year would be handled.

This committee also matches mentors with mentees for the annual meeting. Since SSSP was still holding some virtual events, the committee decided to move forward with a virtual mentoring program. The 2020 mentoring program received 58 requests: 34 mentees and 24 mentors. The 2019 meeting had 148 requests with 96 mentees and 52 mentors. The chair of the committee advertised the mentoring program repeatedly through her personal Twitter and Facebook page; an anecdotal message, but the posts received good support.

The committee was also approached on two issues related to the mentoring program.

1. Mentors should be told prior to the final matching of who their mentees are so that they don't receive a mentee they have mentored in the past.
 - a. The committee agrees with this recommendation. Perhaps Chairs could be given the excel sheet with last year's matching so as to check if there has been repeat matching. The other possibility is for Chairs to send mentors a quick list, but mentors may not recall who they had the previous year.
2. There are problems with mentors not showing up or not showing up adequately, particularly for mentees of color. It was the recommendation that the mentoring program be changed so that there is an open list of mentors and mentees based on shared interests; this option would allow for mentees to contact whom they want rather than being restricted to the one person assigned to them. This list would also provide demographic information (race, gender, affiliation) so as to provide more information to mentees to pick an optimal mentor. The person who made this recommendation feels this strategy would create a more *mutual* mentoring relationship, resulting in more effective and supportive mentoring.

The committee feels there are three possible serious pitfalls with this suggestion. 1) It can end up putting the onus on mentees to reach out to one or several mentors, which can be very intimidating to mentees; 2) One mentor could end up receiving many more requests than another thereby creating an unequal workload; and, 3) mentors of color/mentors of smaller institutions/mentors of community colleges may possibly be chosen less thereby possibly resulting in feelings of rejection or exclusion.

The committee appreciates this recommendation and has some suggestions for the future.

- i. Provide some options to identify race, gender, sexuality, first-generation demographic information. Ask the mentee if they would prefer to be paired along any of these lines [there was also a request by a Black mentor this year to be particularly available to Black students]
- ii. In addition to the matching program, also cultivate a list of mentors and mentees indicating interests that can be shared prior to the conference. Then encourage people to use opportunities like the welcome reception and/or student reception to meet with each other (make sure mentors are clearly identifiable through meeting ribbon). This allows people in the program another avenue to meet each other and create their chosen mentor-mentee relationship. It could also lead to a supportive way for mentees to meet each other and talk in groups rather than only one-on-one. In this scenario, both mentors and mentees would have to opt-in to this additional mentoring program option.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve in this capacity. Please also thank Hector Delgado, Michele Koontz, and Kelsey Whitaker for their help during this process.

Best,
hephzibah strmic-pawl, Chair Lee Student Support Fund Committee
Michelle Jacobs
Daniel Olmos (Incoming Chair)