

## Memorandum

To: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)  
From: Michelle Harris, 2011 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Chair  
RE: SSSP 2011 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee Report  
Date: July, 2011

The members of the SSSP 2011 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Scholarship Committee were; Tyrone A. Forman, Chair-Elect, Sabrina Akbar Alimahomed, Hoan N. Bui, Leslie Hinkson, Raymond J. Michalowski, Elvia G. Ramirez, and Michelle Harris (Chairperson).

### **APPLICANT POOL**

The committee received 19 complete applications this year. Last year's committee evaluated 23 applicants. Several applications were incomplete or arrived late. This, I believe, accounted for the slight decrease in the pool. Applicants reflected the following demographic profiles:

#### *Gender*

The applicants included 16 women (84.2%) and 3 men (15.7%).

#### *Race/Ethnicity*

The applicants included 6 Latino/a candidates (31.5%), 7 Asian American candidates (36.8%), 4 African American candidates (21%), and 2 mixed-race candidates who self-identified as Asian and Latina and Latina and Black (10.5%).

#### *Matriculating Year*

Most (eight) of the applicants were in their fifth year of the PhD program (42.0%), five candidates were in their fourth year (26.3%), three had been attending for seven or more years (15.7%), two were in their sixth year (10.5%), and one candidate was in his/her second year (5.2%).

#### *Academic Discipline*

The overwhelming majority of applicants (thirteen) were from the discipline of Sociology (68.4%). Two candidates were in Anthropology programs (10.5%), and one candidate (5.2%) was in each of the following disciplines – Political Science, Criminology, Psychology, and Cultural Studies.

### **ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE**

The committee relied heavily on the organizational support and expertise of Michele Koontz and on stellar administrative help from Sarah Hendricks. We could not have completed our work without them.

### **SELECTION PROCESS**

After receipt of the applications from Sarah Hendricks, the committee utilized the *criteria rating sheet* from prior evaluation periods and scored the nineteen applicants accordingly. Because the chairperson knew two of the applicants, she recused herself from scoring; therefore, only the scores of six members were used. After the votes were tallied, the top applicant was not evident

and so the committee chair devised a point system ranking candidates who earned top scores from the evaluators. **Ryan Alaniz** emerged as the winner. The chair telephoned Mr. Alaniz, and Ms. Koontz notified the recipient by letter.

A little over a week later, Mr. Alaniz notified the chair that he would be taking a full-time job in the fall, and so did not believe that he could accept the scholarship since he would not be dedicating the next year solely to finishing his dissertation. This matter was brought to the committee, and in consultation with the Executive Officer and Administrative Officer, the decision was made to award the scholarship to the second runner-up, **Sarah Mayorga**. Again, Sarah was notified by a phone call from the chair, and Ms. Koontz followed-up with an official letter.

The decision was made to acknowledge both Mr. Alaniz and Ms. Mayorga as winners of the scholarship this year.

## **CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *A. OPPURTUNITY FOR COMMITTEE TO MEET*

Committee members suggested that a conference call meeting may be useful prior to and even after scoring ended. One committee member argued that this might be useful ...“in case anyone wants to make a case for another closely-ranked candidate. Sometimes linking qualitative processes with quantitative ones can foreground nuances that may get lost in numbers.” It should be noted that last year’s committee also suggested that a teleconference before the evaluation began might be useful, and I recommend that this suggestion be seriously considered.

### *B. RETHINKING SOME OF THE PRESENT CRITERIA*

Committee members had the following concerns regarding scoring criteria and recommend that the 2012 committee thinks about these issues as they begin the application process:

- Evaluators are asked to score several criteria that present some challenges. One of these is “disadvantaged background.” Are we inferring this based on race, whether the candidates’ parents can/will help financially, or some other criteria? Any of these reasons are problematic, and yet, I believe that it is the information we are forced to use. Perhaps the incoming committee will spend a little time sorting-out what this criteria means or if it is relevant.
- Another issue that is unclear is how one may use the transcript to determine a commitment to activism.
- Finally, none of the candidates demonstrated “SSSP involvement.” From past experience, I cannot think of any in last year’s pool that demonstrated this also. Is this a critical issue under the circumstances, and do we want to keep this in our scoring criteria?

On behalf of the 2011 Minority Scholarship Committee, I want to thank the Board for this opportunity to do such important work for SSSP. It was our pleasure to serve.