

BSA GSRA Award Committee Report
July 2023
Submitted by Richard Moore, Chair

The 2022 awards committee received 121 student applications for the BSA Graduate Student Research Award. This is a 38% increase in the number of applicants from 2021 (81 applicants). We were able to provide awards (of \$1500) to 32 students; three of which made possible from a large donation from a long-time BSA member made at the end of the review process. Of the applicants, 34 were Master's students and 87 were Ph.D. students. Of the award winners, 11 were Master's students (32% of Master's applicants) and 21 were PhD students (24% of PhD applicants). This year we had 13 members on the committee reviewing proposals.

This is the second year using the application's new shortened format for proposals (i.e., a two-page abstract and narrative requirement). Due to the increased applicant pool, reviewers reviewed ~20 proposals each and we could only provide two reviewers per proposal. The current method for evaluating and comparing reviewer's rankings across reviewers takes into account disparities in reviewer's personal ranking systems, and has worked well over the last few years since implementing this method. This year, however, there was a slight imbalance in the number of awardees per reviewer, with two reviewers having only a single applicant in their pool receiving an award, one with two awardees and one with three awardees (other reviewers typically had 4 awardees). Opportunity was given, though, to address this disparity if reviewers felt strongly about it, but the general consensus is that the current system is overall sound and should be continued to be used. It was suggested that having three reviewers per proposal is ideal, as this might bring balance to the reviews of proposals with high a disparity between reviewers. However, this request should be tempered by the volume of reviews assigned to reviewers; 20 reviews per committee member (even at 2 pages per application), seems to be the comfort limit for most committee members.

One additional concern with this year's awardees was an overrepresentation of winners from two institutions: we had 5 award winners from Northwestern U. and 3 from U. of Connecticut. The general consensus was to continue to disregard the Institution when ranking (and I would also note that Northwestern had 9 applicants, which was the largest contributor of proposals), although we should continue to track institution data to see if institutional diversity of awardees continues to be a concern. Overall, 22 out of 70 total institutions (31%) are represented in the awardee pool.

In accordance with the committee's discussions from 2020, this year's committee continued the use of a number of demographic questions related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial/ethnic identity in the online application. It should continue to be noted that this reporting is not and will not be used for discriminatory purposes. Demographic information was not part of the proposal evaluation process and was not available to reviewers at any time during the proposal review process. Only staff working on behalf of the society have access to identifiable demographic data for the sake of reporting. For the last two years, the pool of winners has followed closely the same percentage as the overall pool of applicants. For future evaluations of demographic data, we should compare the demographic data for the entire pool of applicants to the demographic data for the overall BSA membership.

In 2022, we asked applicants to prepare a short (200 words or less) synopsis of how their work contributes to diversity and inclusivity in botany and BSA, and we continued this in 2023. Overall, we felt these to be useful and worthwhile additions to the application.

In 2023, we had a March 1 deadline for applications (moved to March 8 to encourage more applications). This allowed us to begin the review process sooner, with a May 1st deadline. No complaints were raised by this earlier deadline to my knowledge, and we should continue to strive this earlier deadline. In accordance, we should be prepared to open the application portal early for the next application cycle (similar to 2023) to accommodate this schedule.

Finally, four members of the GSRA Committee are rotating off of the committee this year (Lisa Boucher, Jamie Kostyun, Elene Peredo, and Norm Wickett).