

## SSB AWARDS REPORT - JUNE 2022

### 1) Awards Committee

- Awards Director: Liliana M. Dávalos ([awards@systematicsbio.org](mailto:awards@systematicsbio.org))
- Committee members (as of June 2022): Melissa DeBiasse (3 years), Sebastian Höhna (6 mo), Hannah Owens (3.5 years), Anne Yoder (1 year)

### 2) Overview

This report outlines activities managed by the Awards Director and Awards Committee, including calls for proposals, proposal evaluations, and awards.

### 3) Online System

To ensure the handling of support letters through the submission system, we now ask for form letters only (like NSF letters of support). These letters always specify the name of the submitter and project, as well as a commitment to student supervision or, in the case of the mini-ARTS, commitment to sharing taxonomic expertise. The switch to form letters considerably simplified grants handling.

Our award submission handling system has now been in use for more than two years, yet quite a few initial infelicities persist. Administrative functions are only accessible from the back end of the platform. Items to review are not accessible from the front end or the back end of the platform—instead they must be accessed from a separate user screen. Furthermore, we cannot grant platform access to reviewers who are not society members (because platform is linked to Burk), inexplicable glitches in accessing proposals for review, and intermediate submission steps lack clarity. We request the Council discuss whether SSB is open to adopting an alternate system (e.g., *SmarterSelect*).

### 4) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in awards

Although there had been efforts to collect demographic data from award submissions in the past, these were not part of the new system, nor were these guided by the newly formed DEI committee. To fill this gap, one awards committee member—Dr. Melissa DeBiasse—worked with the DEI committee to generate standardized demographic questions to be incorporated into our submission system. Answering the questions is entirely optional, this is made clear to submitters, and responses are invisible to reviewers. We hope the responses will in time help us measure progress toward the Society's DEI mission.

Nevertheless, it will be important for us to outline rules regarding access and time limits on these data, and all input from the Council is welcome.

The 2021 GSRA marks the first time we have integrated demographic questions with grant submissions in a single system. We will continue to use the questionnaire our joint Awards and DEI committees designed as we accumulate more data over time.

### 5) 2021 GSRA

We received 51 applications through the system and recruited 20 reviewers. These awards are judged based on a standard rubric, and reviewers provide feedback to the applicants which requires extra efforts from reviewers but adds value to the process. Though we funded most of the proposals (41), all funded proposals scored at the very good or higher level by at least two reviewers. A total of \$115,866.28 were awarded in the competition.

### 6) 2022 Mayr Symposium

We received 32 abstracts that were anonymized and then judged by the committee, following the posted rubric. Five online and 8 in person talks were selected, for a total of 13 talks in the student competition. All selected talks scored at “very good” to “excellent”. One international

competitor was unable to give their talk in person because of visa delays that continue to plague much of the world. This highlights the importance of maintaining online access for international participants, though this requires significant organizational investment.

#### **7) 2022 Mini-ARTS**

We received 17 applications through the system. This is only four more than the number of awards made in 2018, the last time this award was open. Based on this paucity of submissions, past difficulties in conducting in depth reviews in specialized group-specific systematics, and after consulting with new Treasurer Dr. Emily Jane McTavish, we opted for internal review for all proposals. Conducted by Awards Committee members, this review focused on adequacy to the Mini-ARTS mission and found all submissions to be in line with the Mini-ARTS stated goals.

Based on those internal reviews, we made 17 awards totaling \$59,558.55. Both submitters and Rob Clayton have been notified of the results and disbursements are in process. Additionally, winners were announced on our [website](#).

#### **8) 2023 Mini-ARTS**

Applications for the 2022 Mini-ARTS will open later this summer. Stay tuned to help us disseminate this relatively undersubscribed call.