SSB Awards Report - July 2020

Awards Committee

- Awards Director: Liliana Dávalos (awards@systematicsbiologists.org)
- Committee members: Emily Jane McTavish, Brett Aiello, Melissa DeBiasse

Overview

This report provides details on each of the awards managed by the Awards Director and Awards Committee.

Award Committee Members

Given the heavy load and multiple obligations of all members of the awards committee, we recruited one more member, Dr. Brett Aiello, to replace former member Dr. Akito Kawahara.

Administrative Assistance
Since the 2019 Evolution meeting, the awards committee has been looking for solutions to support awards administration and reduce the workload of the Awards Director (AD) and committee members. As an example, right now we rely on committee member Dr. Melissa DBiasse's University of Florida affiliation to deploy Qualtrics to collect GSRA submissions and letters of recommendations. Although this works for now, it requires and depends on the composition of the Awards committee and requires hand curation downstream (see below). We have invited a presentation from a representative from SmarterSelect, which specializes in this kind of logistical challenge aiming for 1530 EDT.

During the fall of 2019, then AD Felipe Zapata met (online) with 3 groups who have developed tools to support administration and review of applications and awards for other societies. The key points he identified and included in the January 2020 report are outlined here, with notes from conversations with the current AD, Liliana Dávalos:

- A platform to receive and assemble all applications, accessible anywhere (e.g., Google Forms does not work in China, Qualtrics require a paid license, etc.). This means a mechanism to automatically receive documents sent independently by the applicant and recommender and match them seamlessly. Currently our scripts work well, but people don't follow rules of file naming, use of web form, and we do this by hand. By requiring curation by hand in some cases, current procedures are not scalable.
- A mechanism to facilitate contacting potential reviewers. We have a database of people who have indicated they could review proposals, and in 2010 we implemented the "suggested reviewers" box to the applications. Once contacted, facilitate decisions about Conflict of Interest by masking everything in the proposal except name/title/institution. Facilitate distribution of assembled proposals-LoR-budget to assigned reviewers. Contact reviewers regularly to remind them about reviews. As an example, in 2019 the AD sent about 650 emails (sometimes personalized to answer specific questions of reviewers, etc.) in the last month for the current Graduate Student Research Award.

- A platform to provide access to reviewers of the assembled application for download or online reading.
- An automatic mechanism to receive and assemble the reviews (each proposal is reviewed by at least 3 external reviewers). Then, an easy platform to allow the committee to go over the reviews, review the proposals, make sure the reviews are professional/editable, request a new review if needed, etc. Email/Slack comments in Google Spreadsheets have worked but a platform with all the documents easily accessible would be way better. In addition to the review itself, a mechanism to facilitate summarizing the scores, review the rankings, etc. Current scripts work OK but require hand curation as outlined above.
- Not critical, but really helpful, interface with membership database.

Implementing a new system is our top priority to save the committee time and ensure a critical function of the society, to support systematic biologists, becomes scalable. Then AD Felipe Zapata received quotes from 3 organizations, his notes are summarized in this table. We have added one more company is included, they support Bat Conservation International in their grant-making, as well as 500 other clients worldwide (e.g., IHME uses them):

Name	What and how	Cost	Pros	Cons
SmarterSelect	The application management system for scholarships, grants, awards and more.	Up to $5,000/year.	Already in use, cost compared to others, this is what they do.	None noted.
Rob Brandt, Heather Cacanindin	An "in-house" solution tailored to the specific needs and way to conduct reviews for SSE and BSA.	"a small investment," best guess; in the low thousands.	Willing to explore changes to their platform to suit our needs.	This is perhaps a side job for Rob, no certainty of stable support in the long term.
Submittable	A company dedicated to produce a web platform for all sorts of applications, reviews (including manuscripts), competitions, etc.	2 year contract was $21,150	Includes support, training, and most (if not all) the utilities we would need. Highly customizable. Support 24/7.	Cost, unknown how long it will last (start-up).
SCORES	a system developed by AIBS to support applications and reviews for	year 1 is $37,136 and $29,369.50 for year 2	System developed specifically for administration of applications and reviews, support	Cost.

	academic societies and groups		24/7, perhaps long-term.	

2020 Mini-ARTS Awards

The 2020 Mini-ARTS competition was tentatively announced for Fall 2020, but it will conflict with the GSRA schedule which, considering system-wide delays, was posted to close 31 October. In 2019 these awards disbursed $14,612.99. We should discuss a new schedule to avoid conflict with the GSRA.

2020 Mayr Award

The Mayr competition is one of the key events to be held online in 2020. To improve access and equity among potential participants and in the absence of the Evolution meetings we have proposed:

- Open to all eligible presenters (contingent on having the usual 40-50 submissions),
- Asynchronous online presentations,
- Over multiple weeks,
- Extending into the Fall.

We have yet to define and should discuss:

- Submission platform for handling the abstracts,
- Exact dates on which Mayr will be held,
- Platform for online talks,
- Composition of panel judges and video watching burden,
- Any changes to Mayr award rubric for online format.

2020 Graduate Student Research Awards

To date this year, Rob Clayton has disbursed $53,700 in awards granted in 2019. For 2020, the usual timing of announcement for the GSRA was in late April, when most academics and students were struggling to adapt to lockdowns, travel restrictions, and even relocations forced by campuses closing residential facilities. Instead of attempting to collect proposals at that time, we opened the competition to close on 31 October, mirroring the schedule for 2019.

Budget

It is not clear what is the annual budget for the awards committee. While it is my understanding that we have a significant amount of cash in hand that we should spend, having an explicit budget might help the awards committee plan ahead of time the award announcements.

Reviewers

Reviewer Database

Finding enough reviewers for all the awards is extremely challenging. At the moment we have a database populated from a Google form sent in the newsletter and posted on the website. We should also have it as an option when signing up for new memberships or renewal for all but students.