

BSA GSRA Award Committee Report
June 2024
Submitted by Richard Moore, Chair

The 2024 awards committee received 101 student applications for the BSA Graduate Student Research Award. This is a 16% decrease in the number of applicants from 2023 (121 applicants), yet still an increase from 2022 (81 applications). All sections were represented in this applicant pool, although the most frequently identified sections were the ecology section (23% of applications), the genetics section (18% of applications), and the systematics section (17% of applications). We were able to provide awards (of \$1500) to 25 students. Of the total applicants, 26 were Master's students and 74 were Ph.D. students. Of the award winners, 6 were Master's students (22% of Master's applicants) and 19 were PhD students (24% of PhD applicants). This year we had 13 members on the committee reviewing proposals.

This is the third year using the application's new shortened format for proposals (i.e., a two-page abstract and narrative requirement). Reviewers reviewed ~21 proposals each and we were able to provide three 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 we still had a slight imbalance in the number of awardees per reviewer, with one reviewer having only a single applicant in their pool receiving an award and two with two awardees; the average number of awardees per reviewer is 4.7. 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.

One unfunded application was found that was highly ranked by two reviewers, but had one low rank by another reviewer and this application was reviewed by additional reviewers, including the Committee Chair. It was agreed that this applicant was deserving of an award, and it was decided to award them the Kaplan Award (\$1500). This required us to remove the 25th ranked student from the awardee list; however, this student had also selected to be considered for the new AJ Harris Graduate Student Research award that honors one of our early career Botanists who we lost too soon. This applicant was deemed a good fit for this award based on what they were studying, and we were thus able to award them this new award.

One additional concern with this year's awardees was that there were no winners from outside US and Canada. While there was a desire to see international awardees represented, the committee decided not to award a GRSA solely because of this criterion. That being said, the committee may want to consider a policy ensuring we offer at least a few awards to non-US/Canadian applicants per year. Unlike in 2023, there was a good mix of Universities represented, with no one University with more than 3 winners; there were 22 institutions represented out of 25 winners. We should continue to track institution data to see if institutional diversity of awardees continues to be a concern. Overall, 22 out of 73 total institutions (30%) 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 three 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 2023, 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 2024. Overall, we felt these to be useful and worthwhile additions to the application.

In 2024, we had an earlier deadline for applications (moved to February 16 versus March 1). The review process was also accelerated, and the due date for reviews was moved about 3 weeks earlier this year to April 10th (eventually extended to April 18th to allow all reviews to be submitted). No complaints were raised by this earlier deadline to my knowledge, and we should continue to strive this earlier deadline. The early-Mid April is a less busy time of year for academic reviewers, as it does not generally coincide with the end of the academic semester that is typically a very busy time of year. 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 and should be thanked for their service (Liming Cai, Stephanie Conway, Cheryl Dunn, and Helen Michaels).