

Proposal for Expanded Funding for Student Research at the Botanical Society of America.

Revised July 22, 2018

The Botanical Society of America (BSA) has a strong record of supporting undergraduate and graduate student research through a competitive grants program. Since 2004, the BSA program has supported 203 student projects totaling more than \$101,500 in awards. In 2016, the BSA granted 20 awards of \$500 for a total of \$10,000.

Developing the next generation of botanists is part of the core mission of the BSA, and as such, supporting the nascent research trajectories of BSA student members is a primary goal of the society. This important role came into focus recently when the National Science Foundation announced the cancellation of their Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant (DDIG) Program.

Is the BSA doing enough to support graduate student research? To address this question, we conducted a survey of BSA members in April 2018. More than 300 members responded, of which 57% were professional members, 30% students, 6% postdocs, and the remaining in other categories. Results are available [here](#), and are summarized below.

- **BSA overwhelmingly supports an expansion of funding for graduate student research.** 98% of respondents favored an expanded role for BSA in supporting graduate student research. Respondents agreed that research proposals could request funds for fieldwork, experimental/greenhouse work, sequencing, or some combination of these.
- **Master's thesis research preferred award size: \$1,000** (favored by 47% of respondents) or \$2,000 awards (favored by 30% of respondents).
- **Dissertation research preferred award size: \$2,000** (favored by 38% of respondents) or \$5,000 awards (favored by 37% of respondents).
- **Total number of awards preferred: 20** (favored by 33% of respondents) or 10 (favored by 25% of respondents).
- **Total funding amount: \$25,000** (favored by 41% of respondents) or \$50,000 (favored by 32% of respondents).
- **Prefer fewer, larger awards:** BSA membership favors having fewer, larger awards (63%), rather than more awards for modest funding amounts (37%).
- **Willing to pay for it:** 92% of respondents indicated they would be willing to contribute \$30 in increased membership fees if they knew that the funds would go directly toward an increase in the amounts of research funding offered to graduate students.
- **91 respondents offered comments on how best to go about this.** Sentiments included gratitude for expanded funding, suggestions for cooperative funding with other societies, making sure recipients could include students from developing countries, maintenance/expansion of undergraduate funding levels, willingness to contribute directly to a fund for graduate student research (in addition to a dues increase), structured awards at different amounts, fear that only students from "golden crown of botany research labs" would be funded, need to engage corporate sponsorships to

support awards, perhaps request donations for named fellowships, arrange post-docs to review awards.

Based on these data, we propose an expansion of the BSA Graduate Student Research Awards to help fill the gap in research funding for graduate student research, and to strengthen the society’s commitment to growing the next generation of botanists.

**Update:**

At the July 21, 2018 Board Meeting in Rochester, MN the board voted to commit \$25,000 to graduate student funding in the 2018 – 2019 academic year. There was extensive discussion about how to fund this increase, and below is a summary of my understanding of what the board decided. Current funds derived from a 2.5% draw from the Bill Dahl Graduate Student Research Award Fund in the investment portfolio at Morgan Stanley will continue (\$11,000). The additional \$14,000 will need to be raised from the membership.

**Revised funding:**

	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Bill Dahl Graduate Student Research Award Fund in the investment portfolio at Morgan Stanley (~\$440,000)	\$11,000 (2.5% draw)	\$11,000 (2.5%)
\$25 default, non-mandatory increase in professional membership dues. Membership dues will include this number, but members can opt out of this contribution in the membership process if they choose. <b>All of the \$25 increase will be used to support graduate education.</b>	\$0	?
Targeted fundraising drive	\$0	?
Cash from BSA to hit fundraising target if needed	\$0	?
<b>Total:</b>		<b>\$25,000</b>

These funds could be distributed in the following way:

**Dissertation research awards:** 10 awards of \$2,000 each: \$20,000

**Master’s research awards:** 5 awards of \$1,000 each: \$5,000

**Undergraduate research awards (no change):** 2 awards \$500 each

**Addition details to be determined:**

1. **Membership dues increase:** How long will this continue? Is it just for the coming year or will it extend beyond this?

2. **Award number and amount:** A general goal is to fund 10 research awards at \$2,000 and five research awards at \$1000.
  - a. **Recommendation:** If more than \$25,000 can be raised for this then perhaps more awards could be distributed?
3. **Relative funding for undergraduate/graduate research:** Will funds raised be used to support both undergraduate and graduate research? If so, how much will be used for each? Will contributors have the option to specify whether or not they want to awards to go to graduate or undergraduate research?
4. **Submission process:** The board favors keeping the current requirements for graduate student research proposals (<https://cms.botany.org/home/awards/awards-for-students/bsagraduatestudentresearchawards.html> ). This includes a four page, single-spaced application encompassing abstract, narrative, budget, and any tables/figures. In addition, references, a biosketch, and a one page letter from the student's research advisor.
5. **Submission timeline:** The next submission session is scheduled to run from January 1 – March 15, 2018. We didn't explicitly discuss this but I think it makes sense to keep this as is.
6. **Towards a balanced portfolio of awards:** There was concern among survey respondents that only the "golden labs of botany" would be recipients of the graduate student awards. To address this we discussed establishing a rule that only one award per lab would be made. We also discussed the importance of a balanced portfolio that ensured different labs from different regions of the country working on different types of questions would be funded.
7. **Long term vision for funding student research:** The board discussed the establishment of an endowed fund to support graduate student research.
8. **Announcement of this decision:** When/how will this vote to increase student research funding be shared with the membership?