

June 28, 2021

Re: Committee Report to the Botanical Society of America Board

From: Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award in Comparative Morphology

Background: The Kaplan Award was established by the family of Donald R. Kaplan in 2019 to foster research in comparative morphology, the focus of Kaplan's career in research and teaching. The endowment of the Kaplan family currently provides for an annual award of \$10,000. A committee was appointed by then President-elect Linda Watson for the purpose of outlining details of the review and awarding process. Previous documents provided to the Board of the Botanical Society for approval included a detailed description of the origin of the award, how the committee was established, specifications of the award, and how the committee intended to proceed. The Kaplan Committee also provided a Call for Proposals. These two documents were approved by the Board. The first award cycle was in 2020.

Second Award Cycle: The Call for Proposals was circulated to Botanical Society members in early 2021, with an application deadline of March 15, 2021. The committee met virtually on May 13 to review applications and make a recommendation. Our selection was based on a pool of 9 applicants, compared to 30 applications in 2020. Of these applicants, 2 (22%) were from international students. Among applicants, 7 (77%) were female. Based on the criteria outlined in our description of the award, we selected Erin Patterson, a graduate student working in Madelaine Bartlett's lab at the University of Massachusetts, as the 2021 winner of the Kaplan Award. Erin's dissertation research is entitled "The development and evolution of awns in the grass subfamily Pooideae." As in 2020, we had several excellent proposals to choose from, and designated the proposal from Jacob Suissa for honorable mention.

Based on the 2021 competition, we discussed ways in which the awarding process should be modified in future years. These suggestions are summarized below:

For the first time, a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement was a requirement for the proposal. The committee suggests that applicants should be instructed to incorporate the statement into the proposal document, just as the abstract is included. Now that this statement is required, the committee needs to have a way of evaluating the information applicants provide for future award cycles.

Giving an Honorable Mentions in each award cycle should be considered, especially if we have a second very highly ranked proposal. In light of the very high quality of the proposals in 2020 and 2021, we believe that Honorable Mentions are a strong possibility in future award cycles.

The committee should provide feedback to applicants. In general, applicants deserve to have this feedback. Additionally, the Kaplan Award Committee had many repeat applications between 2020 and 2020 (five out of nine proposals), and all applicants should be given guidance for modifications to their proposals in case they resubmit. We instituted this feedback in 2021, using the BSA awards system.

International aspect of the award. The committee identified several applications from outside the United States that seemed quite good, but they did not rise to the level of the best proposals. Although we have no specific solution to the problem, we hope that in some way, the international community will realize that we consider their applications seriously. Perhaps the feedback we provide students will be helpful in achieving this goal.

The committee have has yet identified the best way to rotate membership and maintain a committee size of five (which we consider to be a desirable number). The committee suggests that at least one or two members of the committee are outside the area of comparative morphology.

The Botanical Society has moved to an appointment system that encourages applications from Society members to join a committee. The committee does not believe that this would work very well for the Kaplan Committee because of the specialized nature of the committee's primary task and feels that the goals of the Kaplan Award would be better met by the Committee finding replacements for those rotating off the committee. The committee nonetheless supports DEI initiatives, and needs mechanisms to ensure that committee memberships supports the objectives of diversity, equity, and inclusion.