

May 16 2024

Re: Committee Report to the Botanical Society of America Board

From: Kaplan Dissertation Award in Comparative Morphology Committee Members

Natalia Pabon-Mora, chair (2025), Jessica Budke (2024), Paula Rudall (2024), Mark Olson (2025), Marcelo Pace (2026).

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. Previous documents provided to and approved by the Board of the Botanical Society included detailed descriptions of how the award was established. The first award cycle was in 2020. This year (2024) was the fifth award cycle.

Fifth Award Cycle: The Call for Proposals was circulated to the Botanical Society members in early 2024, with an application deadline of 02/01/2024. The committee met virtually on 03/19/2023 to review applications and make a recommendation. Our selection was based on a pool of six applicants. This is compared to four applicants in 2023, four applicants in 2022 (originally two, increased to four after extending the deadline in 2022), nine applicants in 2021 and 30 applicants in 2020. All six 2024 applicants are working towards their PhDs at US institutions. In previous years, we received applications from students pursuing PhD degrees at non-US institutions. Based on the criteria outlined in our description of the award, we selected Andrea Appleton, a graduate student working in Elena Kramer's lab at Harvard University as the 2024 Kaplan Award recipient. Andrea's Kaplan research proposal is titled "Diversity and development of the intricate staminodes across Loasaceae (Cornales)". However, we highlight the incredible level of all six proposals and congratulate all mentees and mentors for the wonderful applications received.

In 2024 there were a manageable number of applications, not too large, not too small as in previous years. We will continue to encourage applications in the following ways. 1) An email in early November 2024 and again in late December 2024 to BSA members that includes just the Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award Solicitation. 2) Communication between BSA outreach and the award committee to ensure that BSA tweets about the award solicitation are re-tweeted broadly. 3) Ensure that solicitation wording includes the \$10,000 award amount and the award being open to students pursuing PhD degrees at US and non-US institutions. 4) Advertise the winner from the previous year beyond the Botany Conference ceremonies, especially on Twitter, with encouragement for students to start thinking about their next-year's application.

The committee instituted a requirement for feedback to applicants in 2021. We continued the practice of providing feedback in 2023 to encourage and guide non-recipients to re-apply the following year. The committee agreed that in 2023 the selection rubric will be shared as part of the application materials to ensure transparency in the selection process and to facilitate excellence in proposal development. In Fall of 2022, before the 2023 application cycle, the rubric was shared with applicants on the Kaplan Dissertation Award website. Between the 2023 and 2024 award cycle, one member rotated off the committee: Lena Hileman, the committee thanks them for their excellent service. A new member joined the committee: Marcelo Pace. Two members finish on 2024, Paula Rudall and Jessica Budke. We will strive to replace them very soon. The committee's mechanism for

replacing members is for the current committee to develop a ranked list of possible candidates. The two top candidates are contacted by the committee chair to confirm their potential interest in serving a three-year term. Their names, CVs and brief qualifications are forwarded to the BSA Committee on Committees for approval to serve on the Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award Committee. Following approval, the candidates are informed of their selection. The committee maintains its ranked list of future potential committee members, emphasizing service from advisors of Kaplan Award recipients, and encouraging that at least one or two members of the committee are outside the specific area of comparative morphology/development.