

June 20, 2023

Re: Committee Report to the Botanical Society of America Board

From: Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award in Comparative Morphology Committee

Members (year ending service): Lena Hileman, chair (2023), Jessica Budke (2024), Paula Rudall (2024), Mark Olson (2025), Natalia Pabon-Mora, incoming chair (2025)

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 (2023) was the fourth award cycle.

Fourth Award Cycle: The Call for Proposals was circulated to the Botanical Society members in early 2023, with an application deadline of 2/15/2023. The committee met virtually on 4/19/2023 to review applications and make a recommendation. Our selection was based on a pool of four applicants. This is compared to four applicants in 2022 (originally two, increased to four after extending the deadline in 2022), nine applicants in 2021 and thirty applicants in 2020. All four 2023 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 Haylee Nedblake, a graduate student working in Lena Hileman's lab at the University of Kansas as the 2023 Kaplan Award recipient. Haylee's Kaplan research proposal is titled "Evolution of bee-exclusionary corolla width differences in *Penstemon*." Lena Hileman, chair of the Kaplan Dissertation Award Committee and PhD advisor to Haylee Nedblake, excluded herself from all discussion of Haylee Nedblake's proposal and the final ranking of the four proposals was conducted by the other committee members with Lena Hileman removed from the discussion.

In 2023 there again were an unfortunately small number of applications for the Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award. We will continue to encourage applications in the following ways. 1) An email in early November 2023 and again in late December 2023 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.

Previous reports encouraged Honorable Mention to highest quality non-recipient applicants. We continue to encourage this practice, but because of the small number of applications in 2023, no applicant was awarded Honorable Mention this year.

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 2022 and 2023 award cycle, two members rotated off the committee: Sean Graham and Joe Williams, the committee thanks them for their excellent service. Two new members joined the committee: Mark Olson and Natalia Pabon-Mora. 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.