

July 5, 2022

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. 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 (2022) was the third award cycle.

Third Award Cycle: The Call for Proposals was circulated to the Botanical Society members in early 2022, with an application deadline of April 1st, 2022 (extended to April 15th, 2022 after receiving only 2 applications by the April 1st deadline). The committee met virtually on May 19th, 2022 to review applications and make a recommendation. Our selection was based on a pool of four applicants. This is compared to nine applicants in 2021 and thirty in 2020. Of these applicants, two were from students at non-US institutions, and three were female. Based on the criteria outlined in our description of the award, we selected Yesenia Madrigal Bedoya, a graduate student working in Natalia Pabón-Mora's lab at the University of Antioquia, Colombia, as the 2022 winner of the Kaplan Award. Erin's dissertation research is entitled "A Morpho-anatomical characterization of the vegetative-to-reproductive meristematic transition in terrestrial and epiphytic neotropical orchids."

Based on the 2022 competition, we discussed ways in which the awarding process should be modified in future years.

In 2022 there was an unfortunately small number of applications for the Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award. We identified a number of mechanisms to encourage applicants in future years. 1) An email early in Spring 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. 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 Mentions to highest quality non-recipient applicants. We continue to encourage this practice, but because of the small number of applications in 2022, 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 2022 in order 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 in order to ensure transparency in the selection process and to facilitate excellence in proposal development.

This year, the committee saw two members rotate off and two new members rotate onto the committee. While in previous years it was not clear how this rotation might work, we identified a mechanism that we feel is appropriate for this committee, and that was approved by BSA president, Michael Donoghue. The 2021 members developed a ranked list of possible candidates. The two top candidates were contacted to confirm their potential interest in serving a three-year term on the committee. Their names and biographies were forwarded to the BSA Committee on Committees for approval to serve on the Kaplan Dissertation Improvement Award Committee. Following approval, the candidates were informed of their selection. The committee developed a draft list of future potential committee members and continues to encourage that at least one or two members of the committee are outside the area of comparative morphology.