

Notes on the Workings of the GFC Awards Committee Based on the Experience Committee Members During the 2021-2022 Academic Year

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The 2021-2022 Committee began its work without past experience and without any records or guidance document beyond what is available in the GFC Bylaws. The GFC leadership charged the Committee to try to codify its practices while engaging it its work. The following notes represent a response to this charge.

On Committee Membership

The current GFC Bylaws state (in Article IV, Section 3B) that:

1. The Awards Committee shall consist of at least five faculty members, including two from the Bloomington campus, two from the Indianapolis campus, and one from a regional campus.
2. The duties of the Awards Committee shall be to review applications for the annual award competitions administered by the School, and to review applications for external award competitions.

Despite significant effort, the GFC leadership faced a challenge in fully staffing the Committee in 2021-2022. GFC Chairperson Dominique Galli needed to serve as a member in order to get the Committee to five members and there was not a regional campus representative (2=IUB, 3=IUPUI). Above and beyond the current general difficulty of recruiting faculty participation in shared governance institutions, there is a specific difficulty here in that the four awards presently reviewed by the Committee do not meaningfully connect with the work of the regional campuses. This made Awards Committee service particularly abstract for an potential GFC member from a regional campus. Few in number, it is logical that GFC members from regional campuses would want to be involved in those committees most relevant to their campus duties and contexts. From a Council-wide perspective, they are also most needed in such areas of relevance.

Staffing of the Awards Committee is a matter that should be revisited by the Committee itself and by GFC leaders. It does not appear to be inherent that all Committee members must be GFC members and thus it may be possible to recruit Awards Committee members more broadly on all campuses, including the regional ones. The Awards Committee is particularly independent in its efforts from the other activities of the GFC and few problems would be expected in a situation in which the Awards Committee Chair (and perhaps some members) were from the GFC but others were drawn from the faculty at-large. That said, it may be useful to eventually remove the regional campus requirement from the Bylaws. If there were an award that included graduate students on the regional campuses, that would also change the dynamics in this situation.

Note also that the Bylaws include language about “at least five” members. Because problems can arise, including the need for a member to withdraw midyear, it would probably be best to try to staff the Committee with six or seven members. Members chosen from the faculty at large would help with this also. The “at least five” rule could then inform particular deliberations at the award level, thereby also allowing for recusals, sick leaves, and other temporary disruptions.

When staffing the Awards Committee, it is important that GFC leaders explore conflict of interest issues to avoid appointing someone who then has to bow out of Committee service because of a previously undiscovered conflict. It is the experience of the Committee that departmental level roles such as Director of Graduate Studies represent a manageable conflict of interest that can be addressed through case-by-case recusal but that School-level responsibilities in which the faculty member is involved consistently with a number of award nominees is impractical and a potential conflict of interest.

On the Slate of Awards

At the start of its work, the Committee learned that four awards are within its purview. These are the Wells, Edwards, Master’s Thesis, and Dissertation awards. It was not clear to the 2021-2022 Committee what sets these awards apart for the Awards Committee relative to other awards offered by the Graduate School. The Committee raises this not in search of additional work. It is mentioned here because it would be useful if the Committee could be oriented at the start of the academic year on the broader contexts of its work and the nature of the division of labor present in the awards area. Who adjudicates those other awards? Why in particular are these four assigned to the Awards Committee? As they are not named in the Bylaws, what factors determine when an award is or is not sent to the Awards Committee? The Committee is aware of that in adjudicating the Thesis and Dissertation Awards it is also simultaneously engaging (per the Bylaws) in a screening for external awards.

On Processes Used in 2021-2022 (with Recommendations for 2022-2023)

For each of the four awards adjudicated, the Committee operated in the following way during 2021-2022. The Chair coordinated timings and access to files with the Graduate School’s Fellowships and Awards Coordinator. The Coordinator provided the Committee members with shared, online access to the files when they were available for review. A due-by date was established for each award in the discussion between the Coordinator and the Chair.

The Chair communicated with the Committee members prior to file availability to set a time and day for a Zoom-based meeting of the Committee. Prior to the meeting, Committee members reviewed the nomination files (when available) for the award in question. Committee members tended to also individually review the nomination process and award-level information (with the relevant University Graduate School webpages) at the

time of review. (An improvement on this specific practice is recommended below.) The Chair asked each member to prepare a preliminary ranking of the files and to share this with the Chair prior to the meeting. These individual preliminary rankings were brought together to produce a preliminary overall ranking. This preliminary overall ranking was used as a starting place for discussion when the Committee met. It could be changed in the course of conversation. Conversation allowed for Committee members to share their views of particular nomination files. While different rankings were common so too was consensus about which files were at the top of any assessment ranking.

When developing the preliminary rankings, the following system was used. If there were ten files under review, first place in an individual ranking was worth ten points, second place worth nine points, tenth place worth one point, etc. If there were thirteen files, first place would be worth thirteen points, etc. These individual points were added up for the whole Committee, generating an overall preliminary ranking based on the number of points accumulated by each nominee from all reviewers.

In each Committee meeting, the results were decided. Afterwards, the Chair communicated the results to the Coordinator. The results were also conveyed in reports to the full GFC. The report of results also constituted, in essence, the minutes of the meetings of the Committee.

To assist in the work of future Committees, the dates on which the 2021-2022 Awards Committee met are as follows.

- October 18, 2021 General Orientation and Master's Thesis Award
- January 10, 2022 Wells Graduate Fellowship Meeting
- February 22, 2022 Edwards Fellowship Meeting
- May 24, 2022 Dissertation Award Meeting

In considering this schedule, the Wells Graduate Fellowship presented the greatest burden to Committee members. It had the greatest number of nominees (N=28), the quality of the nominees was consistently high, and this deliberation fell right at the start of the spring 2022 semester at a time in which graduate admissions work was also frenetic and in which, for some colleagues, interviews, job talks, and other time-intensive hiring activities were underway. The 2021-2022 Committee suggests that shifts in timing be explored by the Graduate School and the Chair of the 2022-2023 Committee. Committee members are cognizant that the timing is sequenced in relation to relevant factors such as student appointments in the following academic year, but it is hoped that improvements in timing can be achieved.

A reoccurring theme for Committee members was the issue of dossiers prepared by faculty not fully conforming to the nomination guidelines thereby sometimes placing particular nominees at unfair advantage. The preceding is a faculty-side issue. In the case of the thesis and dissertation awards, there is the student-side issue of some non-technical summaries being, despite their purpose, inaccessible to Awards Committee members. Separately, the member of the Committee (Stacie King) who is expected to continue on to the 2022-2023

Committee has documents and resources to use with the next committee to work on solving this problem.

Across the year and in its final deliberations, the Committee members discussed the need to increase participation in several of the adjudicated awards. If, as expected, 2021-2022, Committee member Stacie King continues onto the 2022-2023 Committee, she will have the benefit of these discussions and can help the Committee to work with Graduate School staff and leadership to improve promotion and participation.

Here, in closing, we offer a final additional recommendation for improving the Committee's work. In the work of the 2021-2022 Committee, as mentioned above, individual members consulted the available award information online for the purpose of preparing to assess the nominations for particular awards. It is the view of the 2021-2022 Committee that an improved process would involve the following steps. Prior to an initial meeting of the Committee, each member would be asked to review the online guidelines for all awards being adjudicated in the year ahead. In the first meeting of the committee, a working set of priorities and criteria would be developed in conversation for each of the awards. This approach is intentionally looser than the development of a formal and durable set of criteria or rubrics and it allows for different Committees and Committee members to approach the work in their own way, but it avoids the situation of Committees and Committee members developing their own criteria of judgement alone and in the face of actual nomination files. Through a summary of its initial discussions, the Chair of the Committee can promulgate the year's framework to members prior to the work of evaluating specific files. Future Committees might access this summary of previous year's deliberations but would not be strictly bound by it.

***Awards Committee, 2021-2023**

Dominique Galli (IN-3)
Jason Baird Jackson (BL-2), Chair
Stacie King (BL-2)
Hanxing (Sean) Peng (IN-6)
Dawn Holder (Filling in for Andrew Winship, IN-4)