

Avoiding Implicit Bias: Guidelines for SSC Awards Nominators

(Note: This document was approved by the SSC Board of Directors in October 2017, and is adapted from a policy document on implicit bias approved by the ASA Board of Directors in November, 2011. That document was in turn closely based on a similar document developed by the Mathematical Association of America (MAA). The SSC acknowledges and thanks both the MAA and the ASA for allowing its use.)

Significance of awards

The SSC gives awards to recognize excellence. Award winners are regarded as role models and leaders, so it is important that the award selection process recognize the achievements of a diverse group that reflects the breadth of the Society membership and of the profession. Diversity in award recognition gives visible evidence of the Society's commitment to equity. While selection committees strive for fairness in selecting awards based on established criteria, studies have shown that unconscious, unintentional assumptions can sometimes influence judgment -- a phenomenon known as *implicit bias*. For instance, data gathered across many professional societies show that women do not receive recognition at a rate commensurate with their numbers in the profession. While the reasons are unclear, implicit bias may be one factor.

SSC awards committees have been provided with guidelines intended to help them avoid implicit bias and, in general, to improve the awards process. However, the general membership is responsible for generating nominees for many of the SSC awards, and the following guidelines may help members to further improve the awards process.

- 1. Aim for a large pool of nominees.** Awards are selected based on established criteria, so this step is crucial to ensuring that the pool of nominees contains as many eligible candidates as possible. Members are actively encouraged to make nominations; worthy candidates should not be overlooked.
- 2. Aim for a diverse pool of nominees.** Do not rely on members from under-represented groups to generate nominations from those groups -- it is everyone's responsibility.
- 3. Aim to identify potential nominees whose qualifications are outstanding but whose work may be less widely known.** Some highly qualified potential nominees may not have a wide network of members able to nominate them; such candidates should not be overlooked.
- 4. Make a personal list of top possible nominees when initiating a nomination.** You may thereby identify other individuals who should be nominated. You might then encourage others to proceed with nominations of those other possible nominees.

Avoiding Implicit Bias: Guidelines for SSC Awards Committees

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A. Composing committees and cultivating nominees

- 1. Appoint diverse selection committees and committee chairs.** Several recent studies have shown that more diverse groups with a greater breadth of perspectives make better decisions. Committee members and chairs from underrepresented groups may cushion against unintentional stereotyping. Do not rely on committee members from under-represented groups to advocate for diversity -- it is everyone's responsibility.
- 2. Aim for a large and diverse pool of nominees.** Award winners are selected based on established criteria, so this step is crucial to ensuring that the pool of nominees contains as many eligible candidates as possible (especially those whose work is outstanding but less well-known). Where the list of possible nominees for awards is not constrained to a relatively small group (as in a set of articles appearing in a specified journal), award committees should actively solicit nominations for awards with announcements in *Liaison*, on the g-ssc mailing list, on the SSC website, and in other appropriate places. Increasing awareness of the award among all SSC members has the side benefit of increasing interest in the award and making the selection process more transparent and inclusive.
- 3. Publicize the award among underrepresented groups.** When appropriate, encourage such groups to make nominations (e.g., the SSC Committee on Women in Statistics, as well as institutions that are exemplary in their support of underrepresented groups).
- 4. Periodically review and discuss practices for building a pool of nominees.** Examine lists of nominees, short-lists of nominees, and winners of awards for historical patterns with an eye towards gender or other under-represented groups.
- 5. Periodically review the description and guidelines for the award.** Particular attention should be

paid to the language used to describe the award (e.g., Are the words used associated more often with males than females?) as well as restrictions that could disproportionately affect certain groups (e.g., Do age limits affect women who take time off to raise a family?). For suggested changes, make recommendations to the SSC Awards Committee.

B. Selecting winners

- 1. Discuss the process and criteria that will be used to evaluate nominees before reviewing nominations.** Research has shown that *implicit bias* can enter via unintentional "criteria-shifting" after nominees are discussed.
- 2. Ensure that the selection process adheres to the published criteria.** If prestige is considered important, it should be included in the prioritized list of criteria. If a letter of recommendation from an eminent scholar or leader will be given more consideration than a letter from a less well-known society member, nominators should be informed of this.
- 3. Make a personal list of top nominees before hearing the recommendations of any other members.** This avoids the undue influence of one member and ensures that the list of viable nominees is as large as possible before discussion begins.
- 4. Ensure that every committee member's voice is heard.**
- 5. Take adequate time to make a decision.** Research has shown implicit bias is mitigated when committees have time for thoughtful reflection and discussion, instead of making snap judgments.
- 6. Avoid conflict of interest.** Committee members should make clear any connection they may have with a person under consideration for an award, and come to a decision that is agreeable with other committee members with respect to their participation in further discussions.