

Graduate Student Awards and Recognition

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Whether openly admitted or secretly hoped for, people like to be recognized for their efforts. The possibility of public recognition for achievement has long been known to be an incentive for people to excel. Plant pathologists, younger and older alike, are no different from other people in this regard.

All institutions and organizations with which I am familiar bestow some type(s) of public recognition and/or awards upon members. Most commonly, these result from nomination by peers or supervisors and judgment made by a representative

group of the institution or organization. In other cases, awards are given for accomplishments that may require direct effort on the part of the awardee, including application or other indication of intention to compete for the award. The competition itself may include performance—for example, a paper presentation.

Awards and other forms of recognition generally include a certificate or plaque with proper inscription to denote the circumstance. It is not uncommon for awards to also include a monetary consideration, sometimes of significant amount. Although the financial award is no doubt appreciated, unless it is of sizable magnitude and depending upon the career level of the recipient, I suspect the recognition lasts longer and is more significant.

The American Phytopathological Society has a formal award system that recognizes members who have made significant professional and service contributions. Through the annual selection of fellows and recipients of the Ruth Allen, Lee M. Hutchins, CIBA-Geigy, Excellence in Extension, and Excellence in Teaching awards and the periodic honor of the Award of Distinction, the Society has recognized many outstanding plant pathologists for their contributions. The North Central and Potomac divisions of APS present Distinguished Service awards, the Northeastern Division gives an Award of Merit, the Southern Division selects an Outstanding Plant Pathologist, and the Caribbean Division recently instituted competitive awards for paper presentations by plant pathologists with less than 5 years of experience. All these awards by APS and divisions recognize active or retired professional plant pathologists. Isn't it time for APS to establish merit awards for graduate students in our discipline?

Formal recognition of graduate student achievements in plant pathology occurs only at the division level in APS. Most of the divisions conduct competitions for graduate student papers at their annual meetings, including when a division meets with the parent Society. These include North Central, Northeastern, Pacific, Potomac, and Southern divisions (the North Central Division sometimes judges posters in addition to, or rather than, oral presentations). The parent Society has been very cooperative with divisions in accommodating competitive presentations on the program during joint meetings and in providing a spot on the program of the business meeting for awards. The APS Council has agreed to group graduate student competition presentations of a division into one contributed-paper session (or more if needed) at future joint

meetings.

The number of graduate students competing for best paper awards varies from year to year in each of the divisions, but interest seems always to be high. Awards consisting of a certificate or plaque and modest cash amounts are presented to at least the first- and second-place winners. Mechanisms for judging are similar in all divisions. In the Southern Division, with which I am most familiar and where I have judged papers, a panel of five judges selected by the Executive Committee to represent a cross section of the membership is chaired by the past president.

Papers are judged on scientific merit, contribution to the science, and quality of presentation. Competition is always keen. We have always had outstanding graduate students in plant pathology, and they do some outstanding research. They deserve recognition. The job they do preparing and presenting papers on their research sets a high standard of excellence for others, including scientists, to emulate. In my opinion, the overall quality of paper presentations at Southern Division meetings has improved because of the graduate student award competition.

Several years ago, the Southern Division initiated a program that recognizes all of the participants in the graduate student award competition. The division hosts a breakfast for all the students the morning after the competitive paper session and invites their major professors at their own expense. At that breakfast, all are introduced and lauded as winners, whether or not they placed in the competition. This has been a popular addition to the program, and one I highly recommend. At the time this was begun, the division also began scheduling the competition on the first day of the program and the award ceremony the next day, so the membership would have ample time for recognition of the awardees.

The research of a graduate student may make a significant contribution to the program of the major professor, the institution represented, and the science of plant pathology. The accomplishments of graduate students deserve full recognition by the professional society with which they usually become affiliated while they are students. A number of professional societies recognize graduate student achievement at the parent society level. For example, the Weed Science Society of America annually recognizes an outstanding graduate student; the honor includes a cash award. The Crop Science Society of America selects a meritorious graduate student in crop science to receive the Gerald O. Mott scholarship. The Society of Nematologists has paper or poster presentation competition, including a cash award. I am particularly impressed by the award and recognition structure in the Entomological Society of America. They have several awards for graduate students, which include national meeting expenses paid by ESA for the outstanding graduate student selected by each branch of the society from among nominations. Each subdiscipline section of ESA also has contributed paper competition at the national meeting, and a Presidential Prize is presented to an overall winner. Branches of ESA also sponsor the Linnaea Games (college-bowl type programs for teams of entomology graduate students) with first- and second-place teams from each branch competing during the annual meeting of ESA to determine overall winners. My entomologist friends suggest that the graduate student awards, and especially the Linnaea Games, have been a unifying activity in ESA and have excellent recruitment value.

It would be appropriate and desirable for the American Phytopathological Society to establish an award mechanism for graduate students. Certainly they are the future of our discipline and the Society, and they deserve recognition.