



NATIONAL  
COMMUNICATION  
ASSOCIATION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: NCA Distinguished Scholars  
FROM: Trevor Parry-Giles, NCA Executive Director  
DATE: October 17, 2018  
RE: Diversity, Inclusion, and the NCA Distinguished Scholars Program

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Pursuant to a request from the NCA Executive Committee, and reflective of several discussions by the Executive Committee, I am writing to address the persistent issue of diversity and inclusion as concerns the NCA Distinguished Scholars Program.

As I am sure you're aware, the NCA Distinguished Scholars (DS) were created by an act of the (then) Speech Communication Association's Administrative Committee in 1991. The selection of the first group of DSs was entrusted to a committee of four SCA presidents (Dennis Gouran, Mark Knapp, Gustav Friedrich, and Michael Osborn) and the chair of the Research Board (Thomas McCain). From there, the DSs were responsible for selecting each new class of awardees.

In 2008, the selection and voting process for NCA Distinguished Scholars changed after consultation between the existing Distinguished Scholars and a group of NCA's leaders. Nominations would only be allowed from existing DSs and awardees would be selected via this process:

1. At least two-thirds of the living Distinguished Scholars must vote. Any retired Distinguished Scholar may elect to withdraw from further voting without affecting this requirement;
2. The ballot will allow those voting to select nominees in rank order. The voter may vote for, in rank order, up to one half of the total nominees. In the case of an odd number of nominees, the number of ranks will round up. For example, if there are 8 nominees, the voter may rank up to 4 nominees. If there are 9 nominees, the voter may rank up to 5;
3. A nominee who is not ranked by at least 50% of those voting will be dropped from further consideration;
4. The remaining nominees will have their ranks tallied. Nominees will get points based on each rank. For example, if the voters have been asked to rank up to three nominees, a first-place rank will count three points, each second place rank will count two points, and each third place rank will count one point. The number of points for each rank will vary depending on the number of nominees and rankings. The ones with the highest totals will

- be selected as Distinguished Scholars;
5. If there is a tie, the tie will be broken in the following manner. The person receiving more first place ranks will be chosen. If there is no difference, the person receiving more second place ranks will be chosen. If these are the same, the persons have precisely identical scores and the tie will require a run-off ballot, which will be administered by the Executive Director of NCA.

In 2015, the process was revised again, and now allows for nominations to come from anyone who is a NCA member. And, since the 2008 changes in the selection process, the NCA Executive Director has been tasked with issuing a report to the DSs concerning the inclusion of gender and inclusivity in the DS nomination and selection process. Mechanisms for discerning the race and ethnicity of nominees and/or awardees are not provided, making accurate reporting difficult and speculative.

Each year, when the DSs are announced, the Executive Committee and the National Office invariably hear the same refrain from concerned members regarding the lack of race and gender diversity among the newly selected DSs. For example, in 2018, the Executive Committee received a petition signed by hundreds of NCA members and other members of the discipline concerning the lack of diversity and inclusion in NCA journals—somewhat unrelatedly, the “Lack of Diversity” petition also noted that “each year despite nominations of senior scholars of color, NCA’s Distinguished Scholars remain an overwhelmingly white institution (sic).”

Table 1 demonstrates both the accuracy and inaccuracy of this claim; there is little doubt that the Distinguished Scholars are now and remain predominantly (almost exclusively) white and male. At the same time, the data reveal that very few “senior scholars of color” are nominated to become Distinguished Scholars. Since 2008, 122 individuals have been nominated as Distinguished Scholars, with 66 percent of those nominated being male and just 2 percent (three scholars) being scholars of color. Forty-two scholars have been named NCA Distinguished Scholars since 2008; of those, 69 percent are male and just one is a scholar of color.

Year	Male	Female	Scholars of Color
<b>2008</b>	11 nominated 3 selected	7 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>2009</b>	8 nominated 3 selected	3 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>2010</b>	10 nominated 3 selected	2 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>2011</b>	7 nominated 2 selected	3 nominated 2 selected	0 nominated
<b>2012</b>	10 nominated	3 nominated	0 nominated

	4 selected	0 selected	
<b>2013</b>	8 nominated 3 selected	5 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>2014</b>	4 nominated 3 selected	5 nominated 1 selected	2 nominated 1 selected
<b>2015</b>	2 nominated 1 selected	1 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>2016</b>	8 nominated 2 selected	3 nominated 2 selected	0 nominated
<b>2017</b>	7 nominated 3 selected	4 nominated 2 selected	1 nominated 0 selected
<b>2018</b>	4 nominated 2 selected	4 nominated 1 selected	0 nominated
<b>Total</b> <b>122 nominated</b> <b>42 selected</b>	81 nominated (66%) 29 selected (69%)	41 nominated (37%) 13 selected (31%)	3 nominated (2%) 1 selected (2%)

Table 1. NCA Distinguished Scholar Nominations and Selections, 2008-2018

As the “chief administrative authority” for NCA (between LA meetings), NCA’s Executive Committee is, rightfully, concerned about the lack of racial diversity and inclusion among the existing Distinguished Scholars and the prospects for meaningful change in this situation given the calcified nomination and selection procedures. As you may know, NCA’s mission was recently revised by the Executive Committee to include the following: “NCA supports inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace, and in the classroom; NCA supports and promotes policies that fairly encourage this diversity and inclusion.”

In keeping with this commitment, the Executive Committee would like to convene a meaningful conversation with the DSs soon concerning reforms in the nomination and selection process that may yield a more diverse and inclusive future for the NCA Distinguished Scholars Program.