

AAN News & Opinion

Fellow selection process

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This year, 46% of applicants nominated for Fellowship in the American Academy of Nursing (AAN) were admitted (55 of 119 applications). This compares with a mean selection rate of 48.8% over the past 5 years. For applicants who were not selected and for their sponsors, questions invariably arise about the selection process and what might be done to strengthen an individual application. The purposes of this article are to update the information about the selection process and reinforce strategies to ensure that each application best reflects the accomplishments and impact of the contributions of the candidate. Given the excellent reviews that already have been provided by co-chairs of previous Fellow Selection committees that focused on understanding and addressing the selection criteria,^{1,2} the emphasis in this article is placed on the process. The goal of the Fellow Selection Committee is to admit all candidates who meet the selection criteria. The criteria are broad and intended to reflect the wide range of potential contributions to nursing and the health of the public.

Organizing the initial review groups:

To organize the initial review groups, the Fellow Selection Committee uses processes that are designed to ensure that each application is carefully and consistently evaluated. The committee consists of some individuals who are elected by the Academy membership and some who are appointed by the Board. This mix of elected and appointed individuals is intended to ensure broad representation of Fellows with different areas of expertise and different kinds of roles. Because reviewing every application by all committee members is not feasible due to the volume of applications and the time required in thoroughly reviewing each application, the committee members are divided into initial review groups of dyads or triads, depending on the total number of committee members. The groups are balanced for geographic diversity, diversity in types of positions (eg, practice vs. academia) and areas of

expertise. The goal of this step of the process is to organize the initial review groups to bring different perspectives to bear in fairly reviewing each application.

Managing potential conflicts of interest:

The next step in ensuring fairness and consistency in the selection process is identifying potential conflicts of interest that selection committee members might have with applications. Potential conflicts of interest are defined as any real or perceived conflict based on current or past work or professional relationships. After the application deadline, but before receiving the applications for review, members of the Selection Committee examine the applicant list and identify potential conflicts so these applications are not assigned to them or to their group. When a specific application is discussed at the face-to-face meeting, any member with a potential conflict of interest leaves the room.

The initial review process:

The next step in assuring fairness is providing for multiple levels of review for each applicant. All members of the Fellow Selection Committee participated in an orientation conference call that reviewed the application instructions for the current year, the review process, and the criteria for evaluation. After this orientation, the first step in the review process is that each member of the dyad or triad individually reviews and scores each application as: (1) meeting the criteria for admission; (2) not meeting the criteria for admission, or (3) somewhat equivocal, suggesting the application needs further discussion. The dyads or triads then meet by telephone and review all applications assigned to that group. An initial review group score is assigned to each application and is based on the individual scores and on the group discussion. These scores are then forwarded to the Academy headquarters for tabulation and for presentation at the face-to-face meeting of the committee.

Co-Chair review process:

At the same time the initial dyad or triad review process is occurring, the co-chairs of the committee review every application. Although this process is time-intensive, it is done to ensure consistency across the

reviews of all applications and across groups. Initially, the 2 co-chairs follow the same process as the dyads. Each co-chair individually scores each application and then the co-chairs have a phone conversation and develop their group score. The group scores of the co-chairs are then compared with the group scores of the dyads and triads to identify any “discrepant” scores. Discrepant scores are one where one group scores a “1” and the other scores a “3.” In each case of a “discrepant score” (eg, group rates a 3 and co-chairs a 1 or group rates a 1 and co-chairs a 3) applications are added to the list of applications to be discussed at the face-to-face meeting.

Face-to-face meeting:

The night before the 2-day face-to-face meeting, committee members meet to discuss procedures for the meeting, including: (1) managing conflicts of interest, (2) the criteria for selection into the Academy, and (3) the process to be used for the next day’s meeting. Committee members receive a list summarizing the combined preliminary scores applications received from the dyad/triad group review process and co-chair review processes, and they are asked to identify any further applications that they would like discussed by the full group.

The purpose of the face-to-face meeting is to ensure that any application for which there is a question as to the appropriate outcome is reviewed and discussed by the entire group so the best outcome can be reached. At the 2-day face-to-face meeting, all applications that receive a 2 are discussed, as are all applications with discrepant scores. Additionally, any application that a committee member feels would benefit from a full group discussion are added back to the list before the 2-day face-to-face meeting begins. Finalizing the full list of applications to be discussed at the face-to-face meeting is the first order of business at the meeting. All applications that receive a 1 or a 3 are not discussed further unless they met one of the conditions just discussed. Reviewers with conflicts of interest do not participate in the discussion if a particular application with which they have a conflict is being discussed in terms of whether or not it should be added to the list for discussion at the face-to-face meeting. This entire process helps assure that applications are reviewed by as many people as are necessary to ensure reliability in the process, but it also helps assure that the process was not unduly burdensome in terms of the time required. Also, the process ensures that for any application where there is doubt as to the most appropriate outcome, the expertise of the entire group is used to aid in a decision.

Each application that was discussed over the next 2 days is presented by the initial dyad/triad group and the

strengths and weaknesses of the application are discussed. After thorough discussion of each application based on the selection criteria, the committee votes by simple majority to determine whether or not to admit each applicant. By the end of the meeting, the result is that the committee has determined for every application discussed whether the applicant is to be accepted into the academy or not.

Presenting an application that adequately represents a candidate:

Other authors have spoken about need for consistency and adequately addressing the selection criteria in both applicants’ and sponsors’ statements.^{1,2} The clearest applications are those in which the applicants speak directly to the selection criteria and identify his or her contributions to nursing in a direct way. Although it is important to indicate how the applicant’s work has been disseminated, this does not always show the actual impact of the work. Applicants and sponsors who articulate both how the work was disseminated—whether by publication, presentations, media productions, interviews or other means—and how it changed or influenced practice or policy, are providing stronger statements about the applicant’s contributions. Applicant and sponsor statements should be consistent and complementary in order to emphasize a coherent body of work that has contributed to nursing.

The information that is provided on the Academy website is extremely helpful to sponsors and applicants as they are preparing applications.³ This year, for example, although there were detailed instructions regarding how to prepare a curriculum vita (CV), the committee still had difficulty finding supportive information on a number of curriculum vitae because there were many that did not follow the detailed instructions provided. This CV problem made the committee’s task in finding supportive information unnecessarily difficult.

This year, there were a number of applications that did not make a clear case for why the applicant’s contributions exceeded job expectations. Applicants and sponsors are again recommended to read the detailed discussions of job scope provided on the Academy website (particularly the Schmitt and Sparacino memorandum of 1998 that is accessible on the Academy website at the site listed below) and the information that is provided in the articles referenced below.

This year, there were again a number of applications that were “early” in terms of the timing of their submission. That is, the applicants were clearly doing important work but had not yet gotten to the point in that work that the impact of the work could be evalu-

ated. Careful mentorship by sponsors is important to decide when application to the Academy is most appropriate—at a point when work has been conducted that has a clearly identifiable impact is able to be identified.

Summary

Ongoing discussion of the criteria for Fellowship in the Academy is necessary to keep up with evolving standards of excellence in the field. Likewise, continually updating and improving the processes used by the Fellows Selection Committee to ensure that the criteria for admission are fairly and consistently applied is important for achieving the mission of the Academy. Sponsors play an important role in assisting those whom they believe are potential candidates for Fellowship in the Academy to determine when these individuals meet the criteria, and to assist their candidates with preparing the applications. The processes described in this article represent a partnership between Academy

members and the members of the Fellow Selection Committee to ensure that our colleagues are appropriately honored for their contributions to nursing and that the Academy can collectively contribute to the future of nursing and healthcare.

The authors thank the members of the 2006 Fellows Selection Committee for their roles in refining and implementing the processes described in this article. The authors also would like to acknowledge the assistance of Rebecca Gade, Administrative Coordinator for the American Academy of Nursing.

References

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