

The Midwest Sociological Society

Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence

Description

The MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence recognizes departments that have created innovative programs, curricula, and teaching and learning strategies for the effective education of students, either graduate or undergraduate, in the discipline of sociology. The award carries a cash prize of \$1000.

Rationale

The Midwest Sociological Society is “dedicated to building community among sociologists and to advancing sociological knowledge, teaching, and practice for social scientific purposes and social betterment.” An award that promotes strategies and recognizes exemplars for teaching reform and revitalization will advance the mission of the Midwest Sociological Society in three ways.

- Communities are built through assembly, ritual and ceremony, when the ideals that inspired the founding of the group are recalled and reaffirmed. Calling together the membership at the annual meeting to honor exemplary leadership in teaching helps to advance the first purpose of the Society, building community among sociologists.
- A standing committee of the MSS, the Committee on Teaching and Learning, exists to advance sociological knowledge about the contexts and methods of curricular and extracurricular learning and to disseminate information about the pedagogies that work most effectively in those contexts. The creation of a teaching award helps to fulfill the mission of the Society with respect to its second purpose, the advancement of sociological knowledge, teaching, and practice.
- Educational institutions at all levels from high schools to graduate programs would be eligible to apply for the award. The award thereby fulfills a subgoal of the Society’s mission statement, to encourage “the professional development and careers of its members, at all educational levels.”

Many sociological societies offer teaching awards. The MSS would be unique in limiting the award to departments (and sociology programs in mixed-discipline academic units). Teaching reform and revitalization is a collaborative effort often backed by institution-wide resources and leadership. Adding new programs, courses, technologies, and requirements, assessing their effects, establishing structures of coordination, and obtaining and maintaining the consent of stakeholders takes years of effort. Making departments the recipient of the award reflects a sociological understanding of the teaching and learning reform process and rekindles the idea of the department as a key unit of membership in the Society.

Criteria

1. The MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence recognizes the collaborative efforts of departments to improve teaching and learning, not the particular achievements of individual teachers.
2. Departmental honorees will be recognized for specific programs or curricular and pedagogical innovations undertaken or revitalized within the five years preceding the application.
3. Departments must submit a three-to-five page application (double-spaced), plus supporting documents, explaining the changes they made in their graduate or undergraduate programs and provide evidence of the effectiveness of those reforms. [continued next page]

4. Departments are encouraged to apply for the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence when they have
 - Revitalized programs and curricula that have long been recognized as effective and exemplary
 - Instituted new programs, laboratories, courses or requirements resulting in measurable gains in enrollment, graduation rates, student honors, student publications, graduate school admissions or other achievements
 - Or completed a self-study or program evaluation that demonstrates positive changes in student learning.
5. Applications for the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence are limited to departments of sociology (and sociology programs within mixed-discipline academic units) residing within the nine-state region of the Midwest Sociological Society. However, programs and departments outside the region also may apply if a majority of the unit's sociology faculty have been at-large members of the MSS for at least five years and participate regularly in the Society's annual meeting. All applicants should have a history of involvement in the annual meeting of the MSS.

Procedures

1. The Executive Director of the MSS will publicize the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence in a timely manner each year in such outlets as *The Midwest Sociologist*, the MSS web site, the MSS annual meeting, and other appropriate venues.
2. Nominations will be solicited and examined annually, but the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence will be granted only in years when the Committee on Teaching and Learning feels that a nominated department truly has made commendable changes in program, curriculum or pedagogy. The Committee on Teaching and Learning is solely responsible for determining the standards that applications must meet to receive the award.
3. Departments should submit their applications to the Executive Director of the MSS, who will forward them to the MSS Committee on Teaching and Learning for evaluation. Applications are due each year by November 15th. Award decisions will be made each year by January 31st. The Executive Director of the MSS or the Chair of the Committee on Teaching and Learning will notify all award applicants of the Committee's decision by February 7th.
4. The lifetime of a nomination is five years. During the lifetime of the nomination, departments may update their applications to incorporate new evidence of effectiveness in teaching and learning. Such revisions will not constitute a new application and will not reset the nomination clock. Departments may also withdraw their application and make a new one if they have substantially revised their programs, curricula or pedagogy since the original application. The nomination clock will be set from the date of the new application. Applications that are being held over to the next year will be stored in the office of the Executive Director.
5. A winner of the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence may re-nominate itself no sooner than ten years after the receipt of its previous award, e.g. the winner of the 2008 award may submit a new application by November 15th, 2017.
6. The winner of the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence will receive a check for \$500 to be used for campus programs and events in support of teaching and learning. There is no second or third place award.
7. The current chair of the Committee on Teaching and Learning will describe the winning department's achievements during the awards ceremony at the annual meeting of the Society. Representatives of the department or program should be present to accept the award in person.
8. Winners of the MSS Departmental Award in Teaching Excellence will be asked to recount, either orally or in writing, how they spent the \$500 prize money. This information will be relayed to the membership at the next awards ceremony or in the Society's newsletter, *The Midwest Sociologist*.