

CASCA Awards Committee Report April 2020

Members and Recruitment

The current members of the Awards committee are:

- Adrian Liu (2018-2021), McGill University (Chair)
- Viktor Khalack (2017-2020), University of Moncton
- Ivana Damjanov (2018-2021), Saint Mary's University
- Ruobing Dong (2019-2022), University of Victoria
- Rodrigo Fernandez (2019-2022), University of Alberta
- Laura Fissel (2019-2022), Queen's University
- Samantha Lawler (2019-2022), University of Regina

The last four members of the committee were recruited for this cycle, and special attention was paid to geographical diversity, gender diversity, and diversity in research area.

A replacement will be required for Khalack next cycle. Potential recruits include Joanna Woo, Jayanne English, and Jess McIver, all of whom were approached this year and asked to be considered for the committee in future year. The process for replacing Khalack will begin in Fall 2020. Preference will be given to potential committee members who are fluent in French, given that none of the other returning committee members are comfortable with the language.

Awards

The following prizes were awarded this year:

- Carlyle S. Beals Award: **Howard Yee**
- Dunlap Award for Innovation in Astronomical Research: **René Doyon**
- J. S. Plaskett Medal: **Simon Blouin**
- Qilak Award for Astronomy Communications, Public Education and Outreach: **Julie Bolduc-Duval**

Reflections and Suggestions

This year, we received three nominations for the Beals Award, five nominations for the Dunlap Award, five nominations for the Plaskett Medal, and one nomination for the Qilak Award. The committee felt that this was a reasonable response and in line with previous years, with the possible exception of the Qilak award. In this case, however, Bolduc-Duval was such a phenomenally well-deserving candidate that the committee felt that this was fine. (Although in future years this will of course have to be closely monitored).

One unsatisfactory aspect of the nominations was the low representation of women: out of 14 nominees, only two were women. To some extent, the situation will likely be better next year, since in odd-numbered years we award the Richer Medal instead of the Beals Award. With the former targeted at early-career researchers and the latter generally going to senior researchers,

we expect the potential pool of applicants to be more balanced. **However, the committee strongly believes that this alone will be insufficient**—the Plaskett nominees, for example, are (by definition) drawn from an even younger demographic than the Richer medal, and this year the Plaskett pool was far from balanced.

We recommend that next year, the committee play a more active role in soliciting nominations from any underrepresented demographics (including women). We look to the American Geophysical Union (AGU) for successful implementation of such a scheme (<https://eos.org/opinions/equal-representation-in-scientific-honors-starts-with-nominations> and <https://eos.org/agu-news/agu-makes-strides-in-2019-union-awards-medals-and-prizes>). In broad terms, members of the committee would serve as “shadow nominators” (in the parlance of the AGU article) to seek out promising—but potentially overlooked—nominees and to then assist their mentors in putting together nomination packages. The idea is to ease the burden of nomination, particularly since it is possible that underrepresented scientists may be less willing to ask their department chairs to nominate them.

Should the CASCA Board be open to this proposal, we would like to implement it in conjunction with the Equity and Inclusivity Committee. There are several reasons for this. First, a successful implementation will likely be a significant extra time burden on the committee (although we still believe it will be worth every minute spent!). It is therefore in everyone’s interests to spread the workload somewhat, to ensure that no corners are cut. Second, shadow nominators will have to recuse themselves from the committee’s deliberations, and we would like to avoid such recusals as far as possible, because past experience has shown that the differences between highly qualified nominees often come down to razor-thin margins. Finally, it is quite likely that members of the Equity and Inclusivity Committee are in general much more qualified than we are when it comes to matters of equity, diversity, and inclusivity.

We would also like to request a change in the composition of the Plaskett nomination package. Currently, the thesis examiner’s report is required, except in cases where the report is unavailable, in which case a new recommendation letter from the thesis examiner may be solicited. The committee found that it was often difficult to compare candidates when one nomination package used a letter while the other used a report. We recommend that going forward, the default request is to ask nominators to solicit a letter from the external examiner, with the examiner’s report as an acceptable fallback if a new letter cannot be contained.

Finally, during the prize nomination/deliberation process, the chair of the AGM LOC expressed to the chair of this committee that it can be frustrating to plan the AGM without knowing the identities of prize winners, since the winners are entitled to give long talks at the AGM. While there is little that can be done regarding the timing—the committee debated the pros and cons of moving the prize deliberations and ultimately decided that the current timeline was the best—it may be prudent to provide the AGM LOC chair with **some** advanced information. Clearly this will need to be done confidentially and will not solve all of the timing problems. However, partial information for the AGM LOC chair may be better than none at all. For example, if most nominees for a particular prize are researchers in a particular field, the LOC chair will know that

it is overwhelmingly likely that there will be a long form talk on, say, galaxy formation. One way to accomplish this goal would be to make the AGM LOC chair an *ex officio* member of the Awards Committee.