**A Guide to Scholarship Rankings**

Scholarships for post-graduate students, particularly international candidates, are becoming increasingly competitive. We can, however, undertake a number of actions to increase the ranking of our candidates. Below is a brief guide to how candidates are ranked, followed by suggested courses of action that supervisors can follow.

**Ranking scheme**

The standard criteria for ranking applied across the university is based on four categories:

1. References
2. Academic performance and thesis results
3. Peer-reviewed research outputs or other evidence of peer reviewed research activity
4. Merit-based scholarships, prizes & awards

For each of these categories, the candidate is given a value of 1 (low) to 5 (high). However, Category B carries four times the weight of the other categories. This means that “Academic performance and thesis results” drives the ranking.

The equation for determining the ranking is:

R = [A + (B\*4) + C + D]/7

With regards to these criteria, there are a number of factors that influence the score given, which supervisors should be aware of.

**References**

Two referee reports are required. In these reports, the referee has to tick seven boxes describing the candidate’s ability across a number of areas. The boxes are categorised as “Excellent”, “Very Good”, “Good”, etc. There is also room for the referee to make comments. To obtain a score from 1-5, the 14 scores (i.e. seven boxes ticked by two referees) are tallied. If all boxes ticked were “Excellent” then a score of five is given. If most boxes ticked were “Excellent” but there were also some “Very Good”, then a score of 4 is given. A score of 3 means most boxes were “Good”, and so on. *It does not matter what comments the referee makes* – all that is considered here is which boxes were ticked. Hence, a candidate with some Goods, a Very Good and the rest Excellent would receive a score of 3.5, even if both referees commented that the candidate was the strongest student he/she ever supervised.

*What should supervisors do? Before the candidate requests the referee reports, explain to the candidate how the scoring of this section works.*

**Academic performance**

Consider a candidate who has undertaken a Masters 10 years ago and received a GPA that was hardly stellar. The candidate has since done very well and has a number of first authored papers in international journals. Under the current ranking system, this candidate will be disadvantaged. Academic performance carries four times the weight of the other categories. If the candidate received mostly HD’s in his/her previous degrees, he/she will be given a score of 20 (ie 5 \* weighting of 4). If the candidate received mostly D’s and some HD’s, he/she will be given a score of 12. If the candidate received credits, then a score of 4 will be given.

*What should supervisors do? If the candidate does not receive a scholarship as he/she does not have a competitive academic performance BUT does has an excellent publication record, we can directly approach DVCR and put forward a case for accepting this candidate. This will require the supervisor to write a letter arguing why candidature/scholarship should be given.*

**Peer-reviewed research**

A score of 5 is given to candidates with a “record in publications in international journals or international conference proceedings”. In the previous faculty meeting a “record” was defined as at least two publications, one of which was first authored (note that this definition may change in future). However, do the journals have impact factors, and was the candidate first author? A candidate with only publications in no IF journals may be given a lower score (e.g. 4.5). Similarly, a candidate on several papers, but one of many authors and never first author, may be scored slightly lower at the Faculty meeting.

If the candidate has papers in review, it is vital that the supervisor knows when the paper has been accepted. Every score must be evidence-based. A paper in review will not be counted. Consider a candidate applying for a scholarship, who has a paper in review and no other publications. This candidate would be given a score of 0 or 1. BUT if the candidate shows evidence that the paper has been accepted, the score would increase: if it is an international journal the score would now be 4.

*What should supervisors do? As it gets closer to the scholarship rankings meeting, supervisors should clarify with candidates whether any papers have been accepted since the application was submitted. If yes, evidence must be uploaded into the candidate’s application. Further, supervisors should advise potential candidates that journals with no impact factor* may be *given less weight in the ranking scheme. In some cases, a journal with a very low IF may be better than one with no IF.*

*It is very possible that candidates with excellent publication records will be down weighted due to the focus on Academic Performance. If you think this may be the case for your candidate please approach the HDR committee for advice.*

**Merit-based scholarships, prizes & awards**

In a nutshell, (almost) all awards/prizes matter. A score of 5 is given if the candidate has an award or prize “beyond the institution”, e.g. external funding bodies, conference prizes, etc. Note that some countries give out scholarships to many/most students. This may not be considered in the score. It is vital that the candidate include information (e.g. in the CV) about the awarding body. This is so the committee can determine the prestige of the award.

*What should supervisors do? Check with candidates about any award. Ensure that details are clear on the candidate’s application.*

**Simplifying ranking in future**

Ranking candidates is not easy. Electronic applications are difficult to sift through and candidates typically put information in less-than-obvious (or logical) places. Supervisors can help the ranking committee by going through the candidates CV, ensuring information relevant to the above criteria is clear. Ensure that candidates know that evidence must be provided for each claim (e.g. if they have an award, provide documentation; if they have a paper accepted, upload the acceptance letter). A few weeks before the Faculty ranking meeting check with the candidates about any additions to their CV and *advise the HDR committee* (as we will need to adjust scores).

**What to do if your candidate has not received an offer**

1. If you firmly believe that your candidate deserves an offer, seek out Adam/Linda/Mariella. We can approach the DVCR for special consideration.
2. Consider other scholarship programs. For example, the Endeavour applications are due in April, and they require that the applicant has already been accepted into a program. Hence, this is an option for those who were successful with candidature but did not get a scholarship (<https://internationaleducation.gov.au/endeavour%20program/scholarships-and-fellowships/applications/pages/applications.aspx>).
3. Does one of your colleagues have a scholarship allocation that is unfilled? If so, rather than let it go to waste can we negotiate the use of this scholarship?

Linda Beaumont, December 2015