Criteria and Procedures for Outstanding Student Oral/Poster Paper Awards

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I. Background

The aim is to recognize outstanding presentations to a general audience. Therefore, greater emphasis will be placed on the presentation than on the content to account for different branches of the earth and environmental sciences.

II. Criteria

The evaluation will be based on timing, clarity of expression, effective use of illustrations, organization and logic. All of these are primarily or completely under control of the student. For presentation, a 1-5 scale will be used, with 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good But Not Great, 4 = Consider for Award, and 5 = Award Winner. A summary of some of the key criteria is provided on the score sheet, which can be used along with comments to give the judges a basis for the cumulative score. Specifics of these criteria are included in the following paragraphs.

1. Presentation of a talk:
The talk should be audible from the rear of room, with reasonably clear enunciation and absence of "um, er, you know" (some concession could be made for nervousness, and for those who are not native-English-speaking, but not too much). Time should be used effectively; the introduction should not take half the time with results crammed into the last minute. Points should be deducted for running more than a minute over maximum time, and extra credit given if the talk ends early with extra time for questions. The student should have practiced the presentation often enough to have the timing right, so there is no excuse for running over. Slides/viewgraphs should be legible from the back of room, well-labeled, and not overcrowded. The main point of the figure should be obvious without explanation. There should not be too many slides; points should be deducted for large data tables or multiple graphs on one figure. If there are questions, the student should handle them with poise, should understand the point of the question, and should be able to answer it.

2. Presentation of a poster:
Students should, again, be able to speak clearly - no "um, er, you know." They should say enough to explain any item, without going into excessive detail (unless asked for). They should explain the poster logically, starting with background and going on to results and
conclusions. The figures need not be photographic quality, but should be neat and legible. The poster should be arranged logically, not just a collection of figures tacked up in no order. The title should be readable from 3 meters away, and there should be an abstract or some short summary for people who just want to read the overall concept. Having either too much text or not enough are minuses. There should be some sort of summary diagram or list of conclusions. The figures should be designed to be informative in a poster context, not just copies of something for publication.

Extra credit might be given for a visually catchy set-up and use of color. Student should be able to handle poster alone; points should be deducted if he/she turns to the advisor for help. If the advisor attempts to take over, the judge should continue to address questions to the student.

3. Content of a talk:
Arrangement should be logical; it should explain the problem to be addressed, describe methods (briefly), present results, and draw explicit conclusions. Points should be deducted for diverging into unnecessary details. The purpose of the study should be clear, not just a description of data. At least one conclusion should be reached, and substantiated by the data. Although difficult to do, the judge will try to assess if student understands the significance of the work, or is just parroting his/her advisor. The study may not be earth-shaking, but should be elegant and contribute something new to the field: useful new data, a new model, a test of an old model. There should be evidence of familiarity with the literature and work of others.

4. Content of a poster:
Same criteria as for a talk. Data should be enough to support conclusions but not too much— a few results that show the trend are better than trying to show every single piece of data. Either verbally or visually, there should be a statement of the problem and of the conclusions. With a poster it is easier to determine whether student understands the work.

III. Procedures

1. Award Decisions. Awards will be based on the cumulative scores from the score sheet from each of the judges. The judges for the oral session decide who wins the oral presentation award. The judges for the poster session decided who wins the poster presentation award.

2. Awards Coordinator. The awards coordinator oversees the judging procedure. The main jobs of the awards coordinator is to: i) recruit sufficient judges, ii) assign papers to judges, iii) prepare and distribute scoring sheets and instructions to judges.

3. Judges will include faculty, staff, and students. Each judge will complete a standard scoring sheet for each paper (s)he is assigned, meet with the other judges at the end of the session, and decide the winner. The score sheets will be returned to the awards
coordinator at the end of the meeting. For the oral session, the judges will be encouraged to read the abstracts before the meeting.

4. Evaluation Procedure. Each eligible talk or poster will be evaluated by at least two judges. Judges should try to score each talk right after it is given (or each poster before seeing the next) so that several of them do not become blurred in their minds. The judge will probably end up trying to give the most points for what is thought to be the `best" talk. In case of a tie, judges are encouraged to provide suggestions for `extra credit" or `special considerations" and specific comments on the score sheets.

Adapted from AGU hydrology judging standards.