

The National Judges' Training Program - 1992

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AQ Volume 23, Number 1 - Spring 1992, pages 62-63

With the growth of the AOS judging system over the years, the need for more standardized judges' training has become increasingly apparent. By the end of 1991, there were 14 judging regions and nine supplementals judging regions compared to 11 regions and seven supplementals just 10 years earlier, with an average of 34 new students entering the program each year. This works out to roughly 100 students in training in any given year. With this number of potential judges, consistency in training the basic procedures and philosophies of the system is fundamental.

The concept of a National Judges' Training Program began in 1975 when Dr. Kenneth Wilson was asked to chair a subcommittee of the Committee on Awards to study the feasibility and content of such a program. In 1976 their report was presented to the COA with recommendations which were approved and put into effect with publication in the January 1977 Awards Quarterly. Among these recommendations were:

1. The appointment of a director of student training in each region and its supplemental centers.
2. The maintenance of progress records for each student open to review by any accredited judge in the region.
3. The request that each region hold training seminars at least twice a year, with all the members of the judging committee attending.
4. The creation of a student advisor program.
5. A basic list of subject matter for student judge training.
6. The creation of a National Training Coordinator (NTC) position within the COA to coordinate training and act as a liaison between the regional training directors and the COA.

From 1982-1986 and 1987-1988 Mr. Clif C. Curry and Dr. James R. Fisher, respectively, assumed the NTC position. During this period information on types of training activities and the degree of participation by judges in each region was tracked. The concept of training for ALL judges was emphasized and the recommendation that each region hold at least two full-day training seminars each year in addition to regular training sessions held on the designated judging dates became a requirement with the Seventh Edition of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition.

Mr. Edward S. Wright was appointed NTC in 1988 and began an analysis of the progression of training in the regions during the preceding years and originated the NTC files as a depository of training materials which could be available to the regional training coordinators upon request. A significant portion of these are being compiled into a Training Aids Manual which will be made available to the regional training coordinators.

By 1990 the COA felt the time was right to organize and update the ideas that had been accumulated and asked me to develop a comprehensive national training program. The basic criteria which I felt were essential to such a program were flexibility, completeness and compliance with the Handbook. Numerous approaches were considered and investigated that would cover the material necessary for student training while being flexible enough to allow the regions to implement it as their needs warranted. What had to be assured was exposure of all trainees to the same basic training as prescribed by the Handbook.

The most logical idea of a three year training curriculum at the national level was studied at length and finally rejected. Some of the most significant problems encountered with this approach were the staggered entry of students into the program, the variable numbers of students, from region to region and the resources of the regions. All of these were situations which I felt could not be well-served by a regimented program and would best be dealt with at the regional level.

The resulting program is short and germane to the basic training mandated by the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, while remaining flexible and open-ended. I decided to leave it in outline form for ease of reference and revision and for better tracking of which had and had not been covered. Treatment of the listed topics over the student's three-year term will assure that every student in the system has received the same basic training. A brief synopsis of the program is presented at the end of this article. All topics prescribed by the Handbook are treated in the complete version, but because of space constraints the expansions of topics do not appear here. Any interested judges/trainees are encouraged to request the complete program outline from their regional training coordinator or from me.

The Training Aids Manual mentioned earlier was born of my own practical experience when I was appointed regional training coordinator for the Southwest Region's newly created supplemental center in 1990. Although I had ideas about training which were certainly not new, I found myself faced with formulating much of the material from scratch. Some material I wanted to create myself, but some was so standard that I was sure I was reinventing it. The NTC files passed on to me by Mr. Wright contained a good, though not complete, representation of training materials from many of the regions and I drew on these from time to time.

There are no doubt many regional training coordinators who find themselves in the same position I was, so the idea of compiling these materials for a reference made a great deal of sense. The manual contains items such as examples of assignments and quizzes, study guides, various blank forms (attendance, student evaluations and progress reviews, presentation evaluation, point scoring record, etc.) which can be copied and used as is or modified to suit a region's needs, an index to Awards Quarterly articles, an inventory to the National Training Coordinator's files for other available materials, etc.

The concept is twofold: 1) It will provide immediate access to materials a regional training coordinator may wish to use rather than develop himself, and 2) it should stimulate ideas to build upon the material already available as well as to originate new items. The most positive aspect of the latter is the creation of new or modified resources. The regional training coordinators are encouraged to develop such materials and send them to the National Training Coordinator for inclusion in the NTC files. This will assure a broad base of regional perspectives for the continued evolution and improvement of the Training Aids Manual.

The responsibility for producing competent judges lies with the regional committee as a whole and all accredited judges are expected to assist in training when requested by the regional training coordinator. Conversely, the regional training coordinator should avail himself of the varied expertise of the accredited judges. The students are entitled to the broadest perspectives on judging that are possible.

Nor should the continuing education of accredited judges be neglected. The twice-yearly judging seminars are excellent opportunities to present subjects of current importance outside the realm of basic student training but essential to the progress of judging as a whole.

By taking the approach that we are all students of orchids and never stop learning, we can better serve the orchid-growing public and assure the continued respect of the judging system and its personnel throughout the world.

AOS NATIONAL JUDGES' TRAINING PROGRAM

1. ORIENTATION - Includes responsibilities of AOS judges, operation of the regional center, training program, methods of evaluation.
2. THE AOS JUDGING SYSTEM - Includes award categories, comparison with other judging systems, use of Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, Awards Quarterly and Register of Awards
3. THE JUDGING PROCESS - Includes mechanics of judging, evaluation of plant material, show (ribbon) judging.

4. JUDGING EXHIBITS
5. JUDGING THE MAJOR GENERA - Includes criteria, point scales, foundation species, hybrids, and current trends, genera.
6. ETHICS - Includes standards, objectivity, conflict of interest, courtesy and conduct.
7. PHILOSOPHY OF JUDGING
8. ADJUNCT TOPICS - Includes hybridizing trends in major genera, basic rules of nomenclature and taxonomy, genetics, etc.
9. CRITIQUE OF TRAINING PROGRAM - Anonymous review from trainees to help the training coordinators in locating and improving the program's weak points.