

Comments on the Creation of a Student Judge Training Program

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The idea of granting awards to plants and exhibits was a basic part of the American Orchid Society from its beginning. Initially, awards were made informally, and those individuals with considerable background and experience served as judges. As the Society membership increased and as more individuals became interested in exhibiting and evaluating orchids, the need for both standard rules for judging and the recognition and accessibility of experienced judges began to be felt. What had started informally now needed a formal codification. This resulted in the publication of the American Orchid Society's Handbook on Judging in 1949.

A new approach was made in the evaluation of orchids. A Committee on Arrangements, appointed by the American Orchid Trustees in December of 1948, established a monthly Judging Center in New York City to which plants could be sent for evaluation from anywhere in the country. This Committee on Arrangements later became the Committee on Awards. The success of the idea of a Judging Center and the development of a satisfactory point scale system led to the extension of Judging Centers into three additional areas, Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco, in 1955. Honolulu was added in 1959. This growth has continued until at the present time there are eight Regional and nine Supplemental Judging Centers. With the growth of Judging Centers came the evolution of the standards of qualifications for judges. Many societies and regions instituted judging training programs. Some survived until the present time; most were started and since faded out.

In the latter part of 1974, the Committee on Awards formally recognized the necessity for a uniform Student Judge training program. It appointed a committee to study the feasibility of such a program, its content and methods of implementation. The COA realized that the value of this type of program lay out only in creating a guide for Student Judge training throughout the American Orchid Society but also in increasing the quality of judges and judging, and in maximizing the equality of opportunity for individuals to become judges. The Subcommittee on Student Judge Training consisted of a representative from each Judging Region and included Dr. Stephen H. Fearheller, Northeast Region; Mrs. Lewis C. Vaughn, Southeast Region; Mr. Dalton Watson, Southwest Region; Mr. Wayne Miller, Pacific Northwest Region; Mrs. Henry J. Severin, Pacific Central Region; Mr. Ernest Hetherington, Pacific South Region; Mr. J. Milton Warne, Hawaii Region and Dr. Kenneth S. Wilson as Chairman and representative of the Mid-America Region. Mr. Miller asked to be replaced in 1976 and was succeeded by Mr. C. H. Gallion for the Pacific Northwest Region.

The membership of the Subcommittee was completed in early 1975. Study began with an extensive synthesis of the materials on training practices in each Region, forwarded to the chairman by the parent Committee on Awards or by the members of the Subcommittee. These materials gave a picture of what then comprised Student Judge training programs thereby indicating what the important intentions of a training program should include. This synthesis made possible several basic conclusions. First, and of prime significance, all Regions agreed that there was a need for a uniform training program for Student Judges. Second, it was evident that there was a great heterogeneity in the training programs for Student Judges in the United States at that time. Some Regions had a well-developed program in progress; others had either a meager or no program at all. Most Regions were in need of formal organization aimed at accomplishing specific objectives. These objectives became the central focal point for consideration by the members of the Subcommittee. Once determined, the Subcommittee could then decide how such objectives could best be accomplished, hoping eventually to create a workable and comprehensive program which would be the result of equal input from all Regions.

Within the flow of correspondence among the members of the Subcommittee, the objectives of a training program became apparent. All agreed that the Student Judge must be trained to evaluate and recognize plants as to floral quality, botanical distinction and outstanding culture. In addition, a Student Judge should learn how to appraise the artistic composition and effectiveness of orchid exhibition. In the final analysis, the design of the training program needed to provide the background and confidence for proficient judgment.

Due to the diversity of awards granted by the American Orchid Society, one type of prescribed training would not suffice. Therefore, the approach to Student Judge training would have to be a varied one. It should provide opportunity for a range of information gained from the observation of judging practice, from personal participation and from the more formal experience that a classroom provides. As an adjunct to this, the Subcommittee believed that communication between Student Judges and Accredited Judges was absolutely essential. A time period in which Student Judges could address questions to Accredited Judges, and vice versa, was necessary. This type of interaction could best furnish the circumstances favorable for the evaluation of a Student Judge. The Subcommittee knew of no better way to determine whether or not the personality of an individual would blend effectively into the community of judges.

A problem salient in the formation of a Student Judge Training Program concerned determining what a Student Judge should know for selection and prior to training. This problem finally became an impediment in the process toward the completion of the Training Program. As a result, the Subcommittee requested clarification of this gray area from its parent Committee on Awards. The Committee on Awards responded with the

appointment of a Subcommittee on Student Judge Selection. This minimized an existing difficulty leaving the way clear to finalize a training program.

During the March 1976 Trustees' Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the finalized Student Judge Training Program was submitted in a report to the Committee on Awards. The program represented both a composite picture of what was then being done in certain Regions and what the Subcommittee hope would ultimately be put into effect. It was recommended that each Region create a Director for Student Judge Training. In addition, the Subcommittee requested that each Supplemental Judging Area appoint a Director. The Subcommittee realized that devoted and competent personnel were important for effective Student Judge Training. It would, therefore, be the duty of all Directors to enlist such support. Records would be kept on each Student Judge's progress and activities, open for review by any Accredited Judge within the Region.

The necessity to coordinate Student Judge Training on a national level required that a Coordinator be named. This individual would not only coordinate Student Judge Training but would maintain proper liaison with the Committee on Awards. The Subcommittee recommended that a training center with facilities and materials necessary to sustain the Training program be established within each Regional and Supplemental Judging Area.

Each Region was requested to hold Training Seminars at least twice a year. Participation in these seminars would involve all members of the judging community. Attendance by Student Judges would be required. Student Judges could gain considerable experience and self confidence by composing and giving programs. Several of these programs could become a part of the Training Seminar schedule. Topics could be assigned to or selected by the Student Judge. At the end of the program the Student Judge would be rated by a team of Accredited Judges.

The report advised that, upon acceptance into the Training Program, a Student Judge should be assigned to two Accredited Judges who would act as sponsors. These would serve as counselors to the Student Judge throughout the training period, providing two-way liaison between the Student Judge and the Judges of the Region. They would deal with any possible problems and would be responsible for the progress of the individual. It was stated that there should be a frank exchange of comments between the Student Judge and his sponsors concerning the training experiences and methods. This could provide valuable feedback to those involved in the Training Program. In the event of improper conduct or unsatisfactory progress, the Student Judge would first be advised of the situation. If improvement were not noticed, the individual would be notified by the Director of Training of his or her termination. If the Student Judge felt that he had not been treated fairly, he would have recourse through a hearing by the Judging Committee as a whole. This should

be at the discretion of the Training Director and the two Accredited Judges sponsoring the individual.

The subject matter proposed for the Student Judge Training Program could be separated into two classes on the basis of the instructional approach to be made. One class could concern topics involving the use of self-instructional materials, simple and inexpensive equipment which the Student Judge could utilize at a time and place of his own choosing. This audio-tutorial and audio-visual approach could be effective in Regions where it was felt that a monthly training period would cause an unnecessary drain on instructional personnel. Each topic should be organized and developed into taped instructional units supplemented by written materials, drawings and color slides wherever possible. In certain instances, the topic of study could be enhanced or accomplished by a prescribed set of reading assignments. The Committee on Awards would bear the responsibility for the development of all materials to be used in the Training Program. Duplication care and distribution would be the responsibility of the Training Center. These instructional units would be reviewed and discussed after their use during a training session.

The second class could involve a variety of instructional strategies. The range of information included here would require a more formal approach which only the observation of and participation in the judging practice could provide. Classroom instruction would also be necessary. This training would be done with live plant materials whenever possible. The Subcommittee strongly recommended that all preliminary training be done at the Training Centers. Judging procedures, point scoring and the objectivity of judging should be initially started at the Training Center since it was felt that Student Judges are otherwise often influenced in their judgment and therefore in their training, by the circumstances of the occasion rather than by the plant involved. The practice of requiring Student Judges to attend AOS approved shows and judgings at the Regional and Supplemental Judging Centers, where they can observe or participate in judging, was and is an important part of Student Judge training and should be continued.

The report stated that a regular testing program should be maintained at the Training Center. The results from this testing program would become part of the Student Judge's credentials for possible advancement. Each test would be scored and reviewed with the Student Judge. Major examinations could be given at the time of the Annual Meetings of the various Regions.

The Committee on Awards approved the major part of the Student Judge Training Program as submitted by the Subcommittee on Student Judge Training during the AOS Annual Meetings in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1976. Upon their recommendations it was subsequently approved by the Board of Trustees on October 15, 1976. The Training Program became effective with the publication of the regulations, procedures and subject matter in the

January 1977 issue of the Awards Quarterly. These actions were met with a variety of emotions from members of the judging community, varying from wholehearted acceptance to a moody apprehensiveness. In Regions with a well-established training program, concern centered on how the present program and methods should be changed to meet the standards of the new Training Program. In Regions with poorly developed or nonexistent programs, the primary concerns centered on how to begin, how to solve their particular problems and how to provide for the various experiences necessary during the training period.

During the AOS Trustees' Meeting in Chicago, Illinois in April 1977, the appointment of a Coordinator for Student Judge Training became a reality. Since I had served as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Student Judge Training, the Training Program, its objectives and concepts, was not a new concern. Several problems common to many Regions were already being met. We felt that the greatest aide to establishing a standardized program lay in providing some form of guide. This was attempted with the creation of a schedule of topics and exercises to be covered during the three-year training period for a Student Judge. The schedule was designed to utilize the variety of instructional strategies previously mentioned. In conjunction with this, a tape was made on one of the topics to demonstrate the audio-tutorial method. It was simplistic in its presentation. Both the schedule of topics and the tape have now been sent to a majority of the Regional and Supplemental Judging Centers. It was hoped that this would motivate qualified and experienced individuals in judging throughout the American Orchid Society to create similar materials to be used to train Student Judges. These units could be exchanged and used at all Judging Centers. In this manner, the expertise of individuals throughout the country could be used to enrich the Training Program.

The purpose of the materials was not to regiment all Regions, requiring them to do the same thing the same way. The emphasis of the Training Program is on flexibility while still maintaining a comprehensive program. Everyone should understand that the crucial aspect of standardized training requires that all Student Judges have basically the same breadth of knowledge included in the topics at the end of the three-year period of training. The sequence of the topics and the instructional strategy is left to each Director of Training. It will also be his or her responsibility to evaluate the progress of the Student Judge group as a whole and, if necessary, to change the instructional plan to better the result. The science of orchids, their breeding, culture and evaluation are dynamic, and there will be need for reassessment of the subject matter of the Training Program periodically.

The objective of this Student Judge Training Program is to produce future Judges who, in addition to their judging expertise, will be able to give lectures or programs, to appear before any type of audience with a certain amount of social finesse and to represent the American Orchid Society in a creditable manner. This will add to the wealth of the judging

community. Success in obtaining these intended goals depends upon the involvement, concern and dedication of the individuals charged with the administration of the Program. If successful, they will deserve the credit. As Coordinator, I have been impressed with the enthusiasm and devotion of the personnel in charge of Student Judge Training at the various Regional and Supplemental Centers. The Program, as it stands now, is in its infancy. Will it progress to adulthood? Time only will reveal its desirability, its legitimacy and its workability. I am confident of the result but, as a parent once said, "I wish I could have the foresight of hindsight to help this child grow."