

## Ranking to Achieve Better Equity

By

Wayne A. Wiegand, RSF Trustee

As I see it, RSF trustees take two kinds of mindsets into the interviewing process. The first is: "I would like to give everyone a scholarship." The second is: "We can't give everyone a scholarship, so we **have** to make decisions."

For the past three years I have watched and listened to RSF discussions on the finer points of the evaluation instruments trustees take into the interview, but no matter the resolution of those discussions, the two mindsets identified above still influence perceptions in the actual interviews, and automatically affect the numbers interviewers assign to students.

Case in point: I previously led one team of RSF interviewers of student applicants, while another trustee led another at the same school. After both teams conducted interviews in the morning, we met to compare scores both teams were giving students. It was immediately obvious that because the other team largely possessed the first mindset, they were giving higher scores than the team led by me. That troubled both teams, because we quickly recognized the students being interviewed by my team were in effect being punished by my mindset. From past experience I also recognized that those trustees possessing the first mindset had a tendency to give high scores and thus pass on to co-chairs of the Scholarship Committee the responsibility for deciding who would ultimately get scholarships. This burdens co-chairs with what seemed endless amounts of time deciding among students given high scores that they had never met.

So here was my solution. Yes, each team should use the evaluative instrument to assign numbers to each student interviewed, but each team would also rank these students against each other. Thus, if each team interviewed 10 students, each team would rank those students 1-10. And if it so happened that two teams went to one school, each team would report its rankings and scores to SC co-chairs, but in the end it would be the rankings—not the scores—that determined who would get scholarships. Thus, if RSF interviewed 100 students but could fund only 75 scholarships, 3/4s of the top-ranking students from each school (one may have had 10 applicants and thus the

top 7 would merit scholarships, while a second may have had 20 applicants and the top 15 would thus merit scholarships).

This practice does two things. First, it forces interviewing teams—consisting of those who actually talk to students—to make decisions **that day** about how these students compare one to another. (In my opinion, this is where the decision should reside.) Second, it greatly minimizes the biases of the two mindsets and entirely eliminates the need for SC co-chairs to pull their hair out with endless discussions about who should get scholarships and who should not based on inflated scores in the case of interviewing teams possessing the first mindset, and deflated scores based on interviewing teams possessing the second mindset.

In the end, I think this practice makes the process fairer, more efficient, and much less time-consuming, especially for the SC co-chairs. The latter can much better use the time saved to determine who gets the add-ons.