



COUNCIL ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

2024-2025 Elections

Nominations and Leadership Development Committee: Divisional Seat Candidates

Position Purpose: The Nominations and Leadership Development Committee (NLDC) is a year-round committee that is responsible for working with CUR leadership and staff to assess the qualities, skills, and diversity needed in board leadership in each election cycle; Solicit and identify top-tier candidates for Board level positions; Engage in a fair and transparent process of vetting those candidates to put forward a qualified and strong slate; Oversee the process of leader selection/election; and as needed, be available for input into the orientation and onboarding of each cycle of board leadership.

Needed Qualifications:

- **Equipped leader:** An individual able to bring a set of demonstrated leadership experiences as servant leader, administrator, manager, or key contributor.
- **Strategic Thinking:** Forward thinking leader, able to put what is best for the organization above all else
- **Commitment to the Mission:** A strong understanding of and commitment to the organization's mission and goals.
- **Confidentiality:** Ability to maintain confidentiality throughout the nominations process and beyond.
- **Analytical Skills:** Ability to assess candidates objectively, considering diversity and the organization's needs.
- **Time Commitment:** Availability to attend meetings and engage in discussions, especially during peak nomination periods.
- **Collaboration:** Willingness to work closely with other committee members to identify and develop potential leaders.

There are 6 individuals running.

You may vote for all of the candidates presented to be elected to divisional seats on the national NLDC.

Candidate information is presented on the following pages. Click on each candidate name below to be taken to their Information In the document.

- [Alexa Sand](#)
- [Carol Strong](#)
- [Kevin Bonine](#)
- [Patricia Soto](#)
- [Silvia Ronco](#)
- [Tina Zecher](#)

Alexa Sand, Utah State University

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

Outside of CUR (where I feel that as chair of the Division of Arts and Humanities I contributed to helping several people, including Jennifer Thorington Springer and Amy Woodbury Tease move into leadership roles), I have also been involved in identifying and elevating faculty leadership at USU through my role in the Office of Research. A specific example is my work with Dr. Elizabeth Vargis. Dr. Vargis, a biological engineer, first came to my attention through her mentorship of undergraduate researchers in her lab -- as I watched her develop a number of students to very high levels of attainment, I realized that here was someone whose practices and philosophy of mentorship could be impactful beyond just her own lab, department, and college. In 2020, I selected her to be the keynote speaker for our statewide undergraduate research symposium, and in 2021-23, I worked closely with her to secure her a role within the Provost's office as the campus expert on mentorship. The qualities I saw in Elizabeth that I think make a great leader are 1) fearlessness -- the ability to publicly and constructively critique one's self and one's organization 2) flexibility and compassion -- the ability to adapt one's practices to specific environmental situations or individual needs, 3) high ethical standards and a commitment to the University's mission of teaching, research, and service, and 4) perhaps most importantly, the energy and commitment to go above and beyond what is required and try new things, build others up, and elevate the whole organization. I feel that while formal leadership development programs are great, their real value lies in giving us a chance to get to know potential leaders on a 1:1 basis, observe them in action, and measure how their practices align with organizational goals and values.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Inclusivity in leadership is important because it ensures a variety of perspectives, personal styles, and problem solving expertise at the top of an organization, preventing the all-too-common "groupthink" that can stifle creative solutions. In terms of an organization like CUR, inclusivity can mean many things, including representation from a spectrum of institutions serving diverse populations and student needs. I think we already do a good job focusing on including less resourced institutions such as public, urban 2-years, but we can do more. Since funding tends to be a major barrier for our members from under-resourced schools pursuing roles as organizational leaders, I would love to see us have a small fellowship that would support a few developing leaders from these types of institutions. My own path into research leadership at USU came from an inclusion initiative (there were no women and no humanists in university research leadership at the time); the "faculty fellowship" provided me with a small stipend and a year's experience where I attended leadership meetings, collaborated with OR staff and leadership to develop programming, and led a small initiative on my own. Recently, the current VPR and I reinstated this program (which her predecessor had cancelled) and are bringing along a young data scientist, supporting his work to improve understanding of and access to AI resources across campus. I don't know that a fellowship model alone would "ensure" more inclusive nominations, but it would certainly signal to membership that we want to cultivate diversity in our leadership,

and that we value those who are working from positions of economic disadvantage (often with students who are the most under resourced as well).

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

I have served on many search committees in my time at USU, both in academic units and in the Office of Research. Inside candidates, and outside candidates with whom I or one of the other committee members have some kind of external relationship are not uncommon. The approach I have learned through these experiences combines transparency with confidentiality. The hard questions about conflict of interest must be asked: committee members need to reveal any prior relationships or knowledge of candidates, but any information discussed in committee must be kept strictly confidential. References must be scrupulously checked, equally for all candidates known and unfamiliar alike. In general, a standardized rubric based on the role description can be helpful in ensuring that all candidates are evaluated equitably. One very effective practice is to have a non-voting, disinterested ombudsperson serve on these committees. In the case of CUR, this could be a division chair or committee chair from another area, or another volunteer. It might, in fact, be a good practice more generally for CUR leadership committees to have a non-voting member well versed in bylaws who does not comment on the candidates or matters under discussion, but only calls the committee to order when at risk of a bylaws violation.

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

My current university role, as Associate VP for Research, is highly collaborative, and I work with both upper administration, staff, faculty, and students campus wide, so I do have a fair amount of wisdom gained from experience that I bring to the collaborative type of work that is described here. My network of colleagues across the country, built through over 15 years of engagement with CUR includes individuals at all stages of their career, in disciplines as diverse as data analytics and philosophy, so I feel I would be well placed to use those connections to solicit candidates. I also have connections in the world of B2E due to my prior career in that sector, and I think some of those folks would very much be interested in board level work with CUR. As far as the vetting process -- my prior service on the NVC for CUR, and my extensive work with hiring, scholarship selection, and grant reviewing in my capacity as AVP positions me well to identify and trouble-shoot issues within the candidate review and selection or election. By submitting this application, I am indicating my availability to serve as a consultant, as well, on orientation and onboarding. I've recently completed an extensive leadership training program here at USU that focuses on exactly the types of issues around hiring and onboarding that will be crucial to this committee's work.

Carol Strong, University of Arkansas - Monticello

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

Identifying leadership talent can be daunting, as there is no single checklist to identify quality leaders. Obviously, a good leader must have effective communication skills, but what this means can vary across organizations. Identifying top communicators means watching how they address / talk with people around them. Additionally, they must be self-aware / confidently flexible in their assessment of which attributes will best address the situational needs they encounter. In volunteer organizations (in particular) they must moreover focus on creative ways to inspire others to act collectively towards a common goal, all while empowering each member of the collective whole to act with purpose. Finding quality leaders thus requires an eye for assessing contradictions – in identifying people who are self-confident yet flexible, empathetic while remaining true to their principles, focused on success but not afraid to use unexpected events to their advantage, and pragmatically strategic with an openness to creativity and change. Several years ago, I helped select the next Dean of my division at UAM. We had a diverse group of candidates from different types of university, with diverse personalities. The ‘right’ choice meant considering each candidate from different perspectives / according to various criteria, including where they went to school, their experience(s), how they answered questions, how they talked about serving as Dean, and whether they had what it took to teach at an open enrollment university. After narrowing the list down and holding interviews, we chose someone who was both classically trained and a first-generation college student. He was someone who saw teaching as more of a calling, rather than a means to paychecks and/or an opportunity to aggrandize themselves. He was someone who could be a role model for faculty and students alike and had a commitment to finding ways for our students to succeed.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Inclusivity is key to the success of a volunteer organization focused on cultivating research / critical thinking skills within diverse academic divisions. After all, the ability of traditional academics to understand / predict the educational needs of those with different educational backgrounds is limited. Indeed, the ideas stemming from the projection of what someone thinks about a situation will not be the same as conclusions steeped in conversations with those with first-hand knowledge of the problems to be addressed. This mixture of voices must moreover be a purposeful blending of long-held traditions and fresh ideas about how organizations are run. Rather than being a zero-sum game, diversity involves canvassing seemingly competing voices to find innovative ways forward. To this end, a key part of any vetting process would be to think of ways to get candidates to articulate how their unique perspective will enhance the overall functioning of CUR during the application / interview process(es). Moreover, the selection committee must not have foredrawn conclusions and/or preconceptions about what a ‘perfect’ candidate might look like or what characteristics they embody. To ensure that processes are not forced, each candidate’s resume, as well as their responses to key questions, must be considered respectfully with the goal of finding someone with a passion for service leadership and a commitment to the tradition of UR. Recently, I assumed the Chair position for the Monticello Tree Board. Up

until last year, this committee had been populated mostly by professors in the social sciences. We were avid workers but were not knowledgeable about how to best pursue quality urban planning. After seeking out members from the Forestry Department, as well as interested members of different communities in Monticello, the MTB now serves the various interests of the diverse groups populating the various communities in Monticello.

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

Developing leadership potential is about skills building. While every individual will not be comfortable being a leader in all settings, everyone can find areas where they excel and display leadership potential. And every situation can lend opportunities to develop leadership skills. Consequently, the process of identifying someone with leadership potential is an interactive and evolving process that targets the obvious skills of a candidate but also anticipates the potential for ethical dilemmas. Most importantly, strategies must be in place to find leaders who serve the interests of the organization collectively, as opposed to those pursuing singularly, self-interested goals. To avoid personal bias, selection committee members cannot anticipate which candidate(s) will succeed (or not). Rather than having unidimensional definitions of good leadership, they must also strive to see individual candidates as aggregates to assess how their individual skills / talents will serve their organization. In terms of fairness, blind reviews of all incoming nomination packets could be followed by group discussions (using names) during the selection process. Alternatively, reviewers could serve on either the nomination committee (which narrow the candidate pool down to official nominees) or the vetting committee (which considers the quality of the applications / looks for integrity violations). Everyone could then come together to make the final selection. Most importantly, the results of the selection process cannot serve the interests of the committee. The individual chosen must instead enhance the overarching goals / objectives of CUR. Finally, the committee must ensure that whatever rules / regulations are upheld by the organization are applicable to all candidates. If one candidate is given an opportunity to overcome past transgressions, they must all have the same chance. Without these safeguards, the system becomes corrupted, and the leadership choices become unrepresentative of the people the leader is meant to lead / serve.

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

I have been active with the Social Sciences Division (SSD) of CUR since 2012 and served as SSD Chair (2017-2020). In service to the CUR Advocacy Group (2013-2019), I participated in advocacy seminars at the 2018 CUR ABM and Biennial Conference; I have also met with Arkansas' Congressional Representatives individually and with students (19 in total). At UAM, I served as Chair of the Faculty Assembly (2016-2018), was Chair of the UAM Adhoc Faculty Senate Creation Committee (2017-2019), and served as the UAM Faculty Representative during state-wide discussions of UA System Board Policies 405.1, 405.4 and 470.1 (2018). As a faculty advisor for Alpha Chi and Pi Sigma Alpha, I have supervised 127 students presenting work at 45 different conferences, including CUR World Congresses in Doha (Qatar) and Oldenburg (Germany). As a board member for the Arkansas Political Science Association (ArkPSA), I organized / hosted two state-wide conferences on my campus (2016, 2024). I even did a 2020 TedEx UAM Monticello talk on the value of UR. Most recently, I served on the selection committee to choose the 2024 Winthrop Rockefeller Institute (WRI) Distinguished Lecturer and hosted the first WRI sponsored, Civic Arkansas Listening Sessions in Southeast Arkansas (both at UAM in 2024). When combined, I have demonstrated a long-term commitment to the pursuit of UR and hold the perspective that it should be open to all students, not just top performers. I have experience in vetting and selecting potential leaders for many different organizations and have knowledge of educational processes in the U.S., Australia and Germany. I have also written two books on political leadership and authority. Finally, I have shown myself to be reliable when working on committees, take issues of confidentiality very seriously, and enjoy working with people from diverse backgrounds in the continued pursuit of UR.

Kevin Bonine, The University of Arizona

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

As an example: I served on the board of trustees of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM; annual budget of about \$12M) in Tucson, Arizona for 11 years. During my time on the board I spent two years as vice-chair, two years as chair, and two years as immediate past chair. As a trustee and part of the executive team it was my responsibility to work with colleagues to identify leaders for various positions on committees and on the board, including the chair that followed me. Criteria I used to help inform my suggestions and decisions included integrity, willingness to commit to the role, appreciation of diverse perspectives, putting the organization's needs and successes above their own, ability to steward effective dialogue among trustees and others, a data-informed decision maker, and ability to communicate effectively, professionally, and concisely. In searching for ASDM affiliates that could be good leaders it was important to get to know them and recruit from communities and areas of southern Arizona that were not already well represented. In so doing we were able to diversify the executive team, bringing in more female and Indigenous voices than had been the tradition. I would apply similar thinking and approaches to identify leadership talent within and for CUR. To the list above, I would add the need to have a matrix of talents, abilities, and perspectives across the collective leadership team. Identifying appropriate individuals to fill matrix gaps requires a combination of intentional and effective recruitment, building relationships, networking, and mentorship.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Inclusivity is especially important for an organization like CUR that aims to make transformative undergraduate experiences equitably accessible to all students regardless of socio-economic status, skin color, or other elements of diversity found throughout society. By having leaders that embrace inclusivity and represent diverse perspectives CUR will be able to achieve its mission of providing high-quality mentored experiences for all students, not just some students. Key components of inclusivity include representation, a sense of belonging, confidence, and agency. This is true also for the professional development opportunities and other CUR activities that serve the larger community of professionals and champions that make high-quality undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry possible at campuses across the country. The NLDC needs to articulate the desired suite of talents and expertise that would comprise an effective board and seek qualified applicants from myriad corners of the higher-education landscape. Knowing that some diverse perspectives are harder to come by than others, it is noteworthy and laudable that CUR has leadership development pathways already in place and is thinking creatively about how to expand the pipeline (and/or multiply the pipelines) that will lead to inclusive leadership on the board. As an NLDC member I would both focus on the immediate needs regarding recruitment for board leadership, but also hope to spend time thinking about how to reach and build relationships with potential leaders five or ten years before they might actually be a CUR board member. Strategies consistent with this approach that I have used in the past include selecting folks for smaller leadership roles, mentoring them, and then helping them embrace and be effective in ever-larger leadership roles with greater responsibility and impact.

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

Sensitive decisions, ethical dilemmas, fairness, integrity, transparency, and confidence all need to be taken into consideration when vetting and selecting board candidates. NLDC members must be held to the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and confidentiality. Selection criteria need to be articulated in advance and publicly. Conflicts of interest will likely arise as the broader CUR community includes many connections that cut across the organizational structure of CUR. These COIs need to be surfaced and articulated within the NLDC process and deliberations so that all members are able to understand the influences acting on each member, requesting recusal when appropriate. Allowing self-nominations builds in a level of equitable access that is consistent with inclusivity and belonging. An approach to reviewing nominations more fairly is to remove names and affiliations from the nomination packet prior to dissemination to the NLDC. It would be appropriate to ask NLDC members to sign a conflict of interest statement, agree to maintain confidentiality of nominee identities, and agree to not share content or outcome of deliberations. Files and documents containing personally identifiable information should be secured from present or future release. Perhaps the most important step in maintaining fairness and integrity is to seek individuals to serve on the NLDC who will uphold and promote these elements of board member recruitment and selection.

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

I have served in a variety of leadership roles in higher education and in the community. These include chair (2018-2020) of the board of trustees for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, being part of the leadership team at Biosphere 2 (2013-2024, and where I am still co-PI for our NSF REU summer program), service (2024-present; I will chair this committee in 2025-26) on the faculty status (promotion and tenure) committee in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment, executive director (2021-2023) of the Heads Network at the University of Arizona which represents more than 200 heads and directors across campus in dialogue with university leadership, executive director (2023-present) of the office of Undergraduate Research and Scholar Development (URSD) at the U of A, director for education (2020-present) in the Arizona Institute for Resilience (AIR), and other unit-level, university, and community leadership roles. Most recently I am co-leading, with Kimberly Sierra (and Heather Haeger is an engaged colleague in this work), a cross-campus Undergraduate Research Alliance to help coordinate and grow the many excellent undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry efforts distributed across the U of A. These roles and experiences have grown my ability to lead collaboratively and identify diverse and talented individuals to share in leadership responsibilities. Specific skills include navigating challenging or crucial conversations, being appropriately persistent, bringing together diverse perspectives, and articulating a common vision that a group can work toward (and that donors want to fund!). Moreover, I have been involved in onboarding new trustees to the ASDM board and as part of other area non-profits. I believe I can bring to CUR and the NLDC my welcoming, collaborative, and level-headed approach to advancing the mission of institutions of higher education in service of students – especially in the area of high-impact practices such as undergraduate research.

Patricia Soto, Creighton University

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

I have extensive experience identifying awardees for professional society awards, including the Biophysical Society and the American Physical Society (Biological Physics). Although awardees are not necessarily leaders, their profiles often reflect the science leadership that the community values most. At the Biophysical Society, I was invited to join the awards committee after discussing the criteria for the newly created 'Primarily Undergraduate Institution Award' with the then society's President. I contributed to selecting awardees for this and two other awards by identifying strong alignment between the candidate's profile, their institution's mission, and the society's goals based on explicit and contextualized evidence provided in their applications. Similarly, I evaluated candidates for the Early Career Award at the American Physical Society (Biological Physics), focusing on their contributions within their subdiscipline, their promise for future impact, and their potential to lead scientific discovery. Currently, I chair the American Physical Society (Biological Physics)'s Travel Awards Committee.

I learned to recognize individuals who exemplify future leadership. In the context of CUR, evaluating leadership talent seeks alignment with CUR's mission, evidence of translating that alignment into actionable influence, and demonstrated success in decision-making, community building, and collaboration. I identify running a vigorous research group with undergraduates as with leadership and entrepreneur skills equivalent to running a small "academic start-up".

I identify leaders with evidence of transparent communication, engagement in strategic thinking and discussions, and embracing challenges while challenging others. I would apply these indicators to identify and nurture leadership talent within CUR. The professional journeys of such nominees should reflect a commitment to advancing undergraduate research (in the components of science development and mentoring) and building community.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Inclusion and equity are not just goals but essential practices for effective leadership. They are demonstrated through actions that consider a holistic view of candidates, encompassing demographics, professional training, community-building experience, life journey, and evidence of their ability to challenge the status quo constructively. My perspective is informed by professional training in four countries, which has made me sensitive to the nuances of culture, language, and socialization patterns, and their impact on leadership and collaboration.

As a member of the editorial board of The Biophysicist Journal, I work closely with authors who represent the future of biophysics education. Some authors come from diverse backgrounds and require mentorship to ensure their voices are heard. Part of the role I embraced is to coach them to present their perspectives authentically,

supported by contextualized evidence. This mentorship results in published manuscripts and prepares authors to take on leadership roles within the community. My approach has proven effective as I co-organized webinars for two years (during COVID) targeted at the education community of the Biophysical society. Also, I currently organize webinars for the PICUP (Partnering in computational physics) community. Curating a list of speakers for the webinars benefits the speakers (emergent leaders) and the audience (gets inspired by the speakers) and creates a dynamic that enriches the professional community.

To promote an inclusive leadership pipeline at CUR, I would implement strategies such as actively seeking nominations from diverse demographic indicators, creating transparent evaluation criteria, and mentoring emerging leaders. From my own initiative, I have taken leadership courses that helped me design effective undergraduate research experiences (and also re-calibrate my teaching practice). Therefore, I would advocate for leadership development programs focused on learnable best practices for effective leaders, encourage collaboration across diverse professional journeys, and provide platforms for traditionally marginalized voices.

In my experience interacting with CUR, the community does cultivate a leadership pipeline that reflects the diversity of the membership. Many members, including myself, feel valued and supported.

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

Leadership development and nomination processes require careful attention to fairness and integrity, particularly when navigating ethical dilemmas. A key factor in maintaining these principles is recognizing the influence of unconscious biases. Before the award selection process at the Biophysical Society, I participated in a reading on unconscious bias, which reinforced the importance of self-awareness. At my institution, I have led efforts to promote awareness of unconscious bias by facilitating implicit bias tests, including during Teaching Assistant training and a departmental retreat. These activities enhance awareness of my own biases and encourage others to recognize and mitigate their biases.

Fairness and integrity are further upheld through structured evaluation tools like rubrics. In my experience, developing and sharing a rubric with applicants ensures transparency and allows evaluations to be grounded in clear criteria. For example, during my work on the Biophysical Society awards committee, the rubric helped align evaluations with the award's mission and reduced the potential for biased judgments to overshadow evidence-based decisions.

In the awards committee I am chairing and in the Biophysical society, we disclosed Conflict of Interest. I rely on open, structured discussions with committee members when ethical dilemmas arise. A shared commitment to fairness guides these discussions and often includes reviewing evaluation criteria to ensure alignment with organizational values. For instance, we revisit the rubric and contextual evidence if there is disagreement about a nominee's suitability. If needed, we hear evaluators' voices and follow up with a vote from the whole committee. Additionally, I advocate for diverse committee representation to further safeguard the integrity of the process.

I ensure that leadership development and nomination practices reflect fairness, integrity, and equity supported by bias awareness, transparent evaluation practices, and collaborative decision-making,

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

Based on my experience on awards committees at professional societies, I have developed an evidence-based approach to evaluating applications using a combination of metrics: demographics, scientific contributions, and contextualized performance trajectory. For board leadership selection at CUR, I recommend first identifying the qualities, skills, and expectations for each election cycle. Then, seek applicants who align with CUR mission and demonstrate evidence of communication, collaboration, and action. The pool of nominees should reflect a diversity of professional trajectories and perspectives. The vetting process should reflect an assessment of qualifications against the established criteria and an understanding of the effects of systemic barriers. Once each committee member has written their evaluation, a document that collects all evaluations should be shared with and read by all committee members. Then, the committee members engage in a conversation to decide on the candidates.

I also recommend implementing a detailed onboarding process to support our incoming leaders. Explicit guidance on goals, expectations, and procedures will maximize the contributions of leaders coming from diverse professional pathways.

Silvia Ronco, Research Corporation for Science Advancement

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

Identifying leaders is at the core of my role as a Senior Program Director at Research Corporation (RCSA), a private foundation that supports scientific research at colleges and universities nationwide. At RCSA, I direct the Cottrell Scholars program, an interactive network of 500+ faculty members in Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy Department. One example here is Keivan Stassun (Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Vanderbilt University), a member of the Cottrell Scholar community who I nominated for a MacArthur Fellow Award and was awarded to him in 2024. The criteria used for Keivan's nomination included his excellence in science and education (institutional and beyond), his consistent commitment to diversify STEM academic environments, and his outstanding leadership starting the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation to maximize neurodiverse talent within the workforce. As a member of NLDC, I will use the same general criteria to identify CUR leaders, including excellence in undergraduate research, a strong commitment to CUR's mission and strategic goals to help advance the organization into the future, and the ability to identify "the future needs" of undergraduate research, emphasizing the importance of bringing diverse voices together. Lastly, it is crucial to identify leaders with a strong understanding of CUR governance and how to make strategic decisions wearing the "CUR" hat.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Inclusivity in leadership roles is central to excellence, trust, open communication lines, engagement and a sense of belonging. In my view, effective nominations and leadership development practices need a combination of communication and assessment strategies. Effective communication approaches reach out to broad audiences, raise awareness of opportunities and encourage wide participation of leaders at different stages of their careers (established vs. emerging). Special emphasis should be given to members with great potential who are not considering leadership opportunities or think they are not quite ready for these roles. The second piece is a strong assessment strategy that quickly identifies the qualities of needed members in each election cycle, and is used in synergy with database records for inclusive identification of high-achieving candidates.

For five years (2018-2023), I served as a member and secretary of Nominations and Elections (N&E), a council-elected committee of the American Chemical Society. In this committee we kept extensive records of qualified candidates and were mindful of diversity needs. N&E prepared slates for ACS Board members and members of other Council-elected committees and supervised the election process. N&E also organized Town Halls prior to ACS elections where candidates explained their ideas. Also, as a past President of CUR and a long-time CUR volunteer, I have nominated (or encouraged self-nominations from) several exceptional candidates that became Board members or members of the presidential path. At CUR, I also served as a member of the Nominations Committee and the Nominations Vetting Committee and the Chair of the Chemistry Division Nominations Committee.

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

Confidentiality, respect, professionalism, fairness and inclusiveness are mandatory in this role. Open discussions at the committee level need to stay confidential and not shared outside the committee walls. Personal opinions should not dominate discussions and outcomes should reflect the criteria described in the call for nominations. Committee members should disclose potential conflict of interest and excuse themselves from providing input involving individuals they know too well for unbiased opinions. In my 21-year experience as a program director who oversees reviews of hundreds of applications per year, a dual process consisting of individual reviews by committee members followed by a group discussion where each member provides individual feedback consistently yields fair results. Individual reviews need to conform to established rubrics and metrics. If ethical dilemmas arise, these need to be discussed and resolved professionally and following an evidence-based approach, avoiding detrimental word of mouth comments. Transparency is key.

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

I believe I'm exceptionally well-qualified for this role. In my 45-year professional career, I served multiple roles, including as a faculty member and mentor of undergraduate research (assistant to full professor), the director of undergraduate research at my institution, a program manager (rotator) at the Department of Energy and a senior program director at the Research Corporation for Science Advancement. Assessing submissions and nominations is central to my current role as program director, as it is communicating with large and diverse communities of faculty and administrators at colleges and universities at the US and Canada. In addition, I have served CUR for 25 years in many different roles, most recently as President (2020-2021). Before then, I was a member and Chair of the Chemistry Division, a member of the CUR Board, and a member of the CUR Executive Committee. The combination of my experience as a program director, my work with professional organizations and private foundations, and my deep knowledge of CUR governance positions me extremely well for this role.

Tina Zecher, Northern Arizona University

NLDC Divisional Seat Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please describe a time when you successfully identified a leader within an organization or team. What criteria did you use to recognize their potential? How would you apply similar strategies to identify leadership talent in our organization?

In 2023 I was on the committee to select the faculty member who would fulfill the endowed Gummerman Professorship for the Honors College. To evaluate the candidates, I first reviewed their application materials to look for evidence of alignment with the qualifications for the position. Statements that clearly demonstrated measurable outcomes from past leadership roles were given higher consideration than broad, general claims of ability and success. I also considered the extent to which each candidate demonstrated an understanding of the needs of the position and investment in addressing those needs should they be selected. Once we had selected the candidates to be interviewed for the position, careful consideration went into the selection of interview questions. Together, we crafted questions that created an opportunity for each candidate to elaborate on their motivation for applying, past experiences that would contribute to the role, investment in serving our diverse student population, and ingenuity in sharing their research and scholarship. Throughout the interview process, I listened to understand the leadership style of each candidate to get a sense of the match between the candidate and the students and colleagues. I looked for those who demonstrated thoughtfulness for how they would fulfill the responsibilities of the position, confidence in their ability to meet the requirements, and a consideration for how to best serve our most important stakeholders – the students – by meeting them where they are. If selected to serve on the NLDC, I would look for evidence of success that would help CUR reach its goals. I would look for a demonstrated commitment to practices that align with the mission and values of CUR. I would consider the unique perspective each candidate may bring to the leadership team and how that may positively contribute to the success and progression of the organization.

Please discuss the importance of inclusivity in leadership roles. How would you ensure that our nominations and leadership development practices promote an inclusive leadership pipeline? Share any relevant experiences or strategies you have employed in the past.

Including diverse perspectives, ways of knowing, and thought strengthens an organization. It means that all voices are heard and there is representation at the table which lead to better, stronger decisions being made on behalf of the organization. Inclusivity takes on many forms, including but not limited to a diversity of disciplines, professional backgrounds, gender, geographical, ethnic, and racial identities. To ensure the promotion of inclusive leadership, I will consider who may not have representation within leadership and actively encourage them to consider taking on a leadership role within CUR. In the past, I have often used personal outreach to bring in leaders who may offer a new, unique perspective to the needs of the organization. It is important to think beyond our own styles and preferences when considering the leadership pathway for others and to embrace and welcome those who may have different approaches. This helps us to learn and grow as individuals. Strategies I often employ when considering inclusivity include self-reflection, consideration for skills beyond those given priority in Western cultures, and curiosity for different ways of thinking about addressing current issues.

Leadership development often involves sensitive decisions about candidate suitability and potential. Please describe how you would handle ethical dilemmas related to nominations and leadership development. How would you ensure that fairness and integrity are maintained throughout the process?

When handling sensitive information and facing ethical decisions, confidentiality and disclosure of conflicts are critical. As a member of the NLDC, I would uphold these principles by respecting the sensitive nature of the information and conversations held throughout the decision-making process and refraining from sharing beyond the scope of the committee. I will consider my own conflicts of interest and biases that may be influencing my recommendations and disclose these to the group, recusing myself if necessary. I will also hold other members of the committee to the same standards, respectfully bringing to question any decisions that seem to be contradicting the fairness and integrity of the process. I will have the courage to challenge inequitable practices and maintain an open mind to any perceptions of my own biases in evaluating the leadership pipeline.

Please share how you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the NLDC charge.

I feel my seven years of engaged participation in CUR have prepared me to take on a leadership role within the organization by joining the NLDC. I am committed to the mission of supporting and providing high-quality mentored undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry within my work, and I am passionate about elevating those who have the same passion for these high impact practices. The leadership role I have on my own campus has given me the opportunity to work with administrators, faculty, and staff at all levels in making important decisions, and I will bring the professional practices I have developed to work effectively with CUR leadership and staff. Having served on dozens of hiring committees, I am practiced in assessing candidates for high level roles and maintaining ethical and fair practices in the review process. My education background well positions me to be a leader in developing the orientation and onboarding process of board leadership, and I am particularly excited about contributing to this effort. Most importantly, I feel my dedication, initiative, and willingness to take on any task to progress the organization will serve the NLDC well.