Pressman-Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Development Award Committee (Conevery Bolton Valencius, Chair)

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL, AAHM, 2009
JACK D. PRESSMAN-BURROUGHS WELLCOME FUND CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARD
REVIEW COMMITTEE
Conevery Bolton Valencius (chair), Keith Wailoo, and Erika Dyck
25 Feb 2009

The 2009 Competition

We received five applications, the same number as last year. The level of quality was uneven, but the pool included several very strong contenders indeed.

The selection procedure was the same as in previous years: all applicant materials were photocopied by the chair and sent to the other two committee members. Committee members judged the applicants' proposals on (1) the overall excellence and originality of the project ; (2) what it will add to the history of medicine and public health; and (3) the do-ability of the proposal to complete the project (what difference would this award make in the development of the book?) .

We conducted discussion via email (though I had planned to set up a conference call if necessary). As in past years, committee members recused themselves from discussion of proposals for which they had written letters of recommendation.

As in the past two years, members of the Review Committee have recorded comments and advice on each proposal, which the Committee Chair has collected and sent along with the notification letter. We encourage future committee members to continue to provide brief comments for each applicant. Several past applicants have mentioned the usefulness of this feedback, and we feel it is a way to provide important mentoring to all participants, not only the award winner.

2009 Award Winner

The committee is very pleased to award the 2009 Pressman-Burroughs Wellcome Award to **Joseph M. Gabriel,** who received his PhD in 2006 from Rutgers' History Department and now teaches in the Department of Medical Humanities and Social Sciences in the Florida State University College of Medicine, for his manuscript ***Gods and Monsters: Drug Addiction and the Origins of Modern America.***

In this intriguing and challenging new study, Joseph M. Gabriel sets out to trace what it means to be addicted in the United States. Through graceful writing and powerful research, he incorporates intimate aspects of personal experience alongside a piercing analysis of the central role of addictive substances in American military, medical, and commercial life. *Gods and Monsters* argues that the physical experience of strong

substances is a product not simply of social constraints but also of market forces and political anxieties. Demonstrating dramatic change in the meaning of somatic desire for a given drink or drug, Gabriel promises to enlighten old understandings of slavery and subservience: how could an activity widely understood as voluntary come to symbolize base and craven submission? Firmly locating the study in cultural history, Gabriel is poised to dig deeper into the American cultural mindset to show how attitudes towards regulation and addiction – more generally – help to explain broader phenomena. Crossing between cultural history, economic analysis, and the history of medicine, Gabriel shows us changing ideas in American culture about habits, commerce, and the relationship of people to the controversial substances that come to define them.

Suggestions for Future Competitions

We encourage future Committees to continue increasing the visibility of the Award and thus increase the number of qualified applicants. We are cautiously optimistic that the last several years' increased efforts at publicity are indeed making the Award more broadly known throughout the historical profession—but clearly more remains to be done!

The number of applicants remained constant from last year, but is still small (in 2007 we received 3 applications; last year and this year, 5). At the same time, we were pleased at the range of institutions represented, both in applicants' present positions and in their graduate programs. The fact that several applicants did not come from "big-name" history of medicine programs is a modest but still significant signal that the award is gaining broad visibility and performing effective outreach for the AAHM.

We hope that next year's committee members will continue and, hopefully, expand on efforts to publicize and increase the pool for the award.

Several efforts are already ongoing:

- continue to advertise the award in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine.*
- continue to include the Pressman-Burroughs Award in the American Historical Association's *Grants, Fellowships and Prizes of Interest to Historians*. While this *should* now be an on-going listing, the committee chair would do well to check several times that the award is indeed listed correctly in the online AHA guide: though I confirmed that the award was listed early on in the process, when I happened to check again in late fall I discovered that the online guide had made the award very hard to find on the general search criteria (it only appeared under "AAHM" as sponsoring organization, but not under the much more general "manuscript and article awards" category). I contacted the AHA to change the search parameters and for now it is correctly searchable, but it would be worth continued vigilance to make sure it stays that way!

Other efforts have to be initiated by the chair or other committee members:

- Well before the deadline and then again a month or so before the deadline, send out the text of the award to the H-NET lists. This is a free, online listing but each instance has to be initiated by committee members.
- Work to send out the announcement to newsletters including the AAHM, HSS, and probably also the AHA and OAH. This could be a significant avenue for publicizing the award!
- make further efforts to advertise on to Canadian audiences and other constituencies by doing more to send the award materials out to particular faculty members for re-distribution.
- This year, I did not ask the applicants how they had found about the competition. I probably should've: when the chair has collected that information in the past it has been useful for helping broaden publicity.

Committee Requests for the Council

We urge the Council to reform one aspect of the committee structure: Now that the award is made on an annual (rather than biennial) basis, we ask that the **committee assignments be adjusted from six years down to three years**. We feel that this would prevent any one (or two or three) people from having undue influence over the selection of the award in a particular time period. (We made this request last year as well—I suspect that it's just a technicality that it hasn't been reformed already).

[This has been done. CC]

It is a real pleasure to read so much of the upcoming and exciting work in the field. We are pleased at how well the submissions speak for the future of our field.

Thank you, on behalf of our whole committee, for the Council's consideration and interest in the Pressman-Burroughs Wellcome Career Development Award.

Sincerely,
Conevery Bolton Valencius
Associate
Department of the History of Science
Harvard University