

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
History of Science Society
WebSite & WebPage Seal of Excellence
Evaluation Criteria

HSS SEAL OF EXCELLENCE. In late 2001 Bob Hatch presented the possibility of establishing a HSS WebSeal of Excellence to be approved by the HSS CoE and other appropriate bodies of the HSS. A proposal was soon discussed, voted upon, and eventually approved by the CoE and the HSS Executive Office. The rationale of the HSS Seal of Excellence is to encourage colleagues in the History of Science and related areas to develop and use sophisticated electronic resources in teaching, research, and public outreach. A second consideration is to establish the HSS as a clearinghouse by showcasing and supporting the highest standards of academic rigor and innovation on the web. As with many other national and international societies, the HSS WebSeal of Excellence acknowledges existing efforts and encourages new initiatives. In practice, the Seal of Excellence displayed at individual WebSites and WebPages will link back to the HSS Site where viewers will find a complete list of recipients, most with reciprocal links. The electronic HSS WebSeal of Excellence can be added easily to the recipient's WebPage or WebSite:



What follows is a brief overview of the nomination procedures and criteria for the two Seals of Excellence, followed by practical considerations in the evaluation process.

(1) NOMINATIONS - OVERVIEW

An open nomination procedure will be used for two HSS Seal of Excellence, 1) the HSS WebSite Seal of Excellence; and 2) HSS WebPage Seal of Excellence. WebSites and WebPages may be nominated by anyone. It is expected that most nominations will initially be submitted by CoE Members, and as the project becomes better known, nominations we sent by HSS members and the wider web audience.

Clear criteria for the Seals of Excellence ensure that the highest academic standards are maintained and encouraged. These Seals are granted on the basis of traditional academic criteria for teaching and research. Selected sites reflect authoritative scholarship, substantial content, and time-honored skills in teaching and public outreach. The HSS CoE will select candidates according to criteria outlined more fully below. As appropriate, the CoE will consult HSS Members and noted specialists on issues of content and audience.

(2) TECHNICAL CRITERIA

(a) Web sites must be written in a manner that provides access to viewers using widely distributed browsers. The need for highly specialized software or unusual “plug-ins” is discouraged.

(b) Web pages should be viewable on most screen resolutions. Although screen formats are trending toward higher resolutions, users with lower resolution displays should have access. For example, if page elements do not fit on a 680x480 format, unseen elements should be made accessible with scroll bars.

(c) Use of new technologies and innovative features is encouraged. Such features should be used to enhance site operation not as a substitute for content.

(d) A means to navigate the Web site should be provided; viewers should be able to navigate throughout the site and return to the entry point. Use of navigation buttons, frames, or standardized borders can provide the necessary tools.

(3) FORMAT FOR CONTENT –OVERVIEW (Please see below)

(a) Content must be developed and maintained at the appropriate level. Sites at all ‘levels’ from K-12 to university undergraduate, graduate, and scholarly research will be considered. Appropriate criteria will vary depending on the key or targeted audience.

(b) Links should be functional; Web pages should be designed to load quickly. Unnecessary gimmicks, large high resolution pictures, overuse of action icons, and background music should be avoided.

(c) Sites must post an email contact address in a prominent location and the contact person must be able to respond to inquiries in a timely manner. A standard disclaimer concerning content of links is required in accepting a Seal of Excellence.

(d) Sites should make every reasonable effort to accommodate viewers with disabilities.

(4) APPEARANCE - OVERVIEW

(1) The WebSite opening page should be designed to establish and maintain the interest of the viewer.

(2) Layout should provide a visually appealing framework to display materials with effective use of graphics, images, backgrounds, frames, and borders can enhance the effectiveness of the site.

(3) Appearance of a Web site should present a consistent appearance, a functional and aesthetic uniformity, visually by means of page format, color schemes, and identification headers, with consistent applications of text size and style. There should be standardized navigation between site pages.

(5) SELECTION PROCEDURE

(1) Judges will assign each website a rating for the basic categories of criteria above. In reaching a rating, judges will consider the specific criteria listed within each category.

(2) The average rating will be determined for each website on each of the criteria by each judge; evaluations will be ongoing throughout the year.

(3). Other Considerations: Feedback: No formal or written feedback will be provided to recipients. If recipients wish to discuss criteria and suggestions for improving the Site or Page, this is best achieved informally. Web Changes: To anticipate possible difficulties involving future changes in a WebSite or WebPage between judging and the Seal of Excellence announcement, a copy of each winning website will be stored on hard disk. This may also anticipate potential issues following receipt of an Seal of Excellence. Time Limit of Seal of Excellence: At present

there is no time limit on how long the electronic Seal of Excellence may be displayed. All pages and sites will be reviewed at least every three years to ensure timely updating and appropriate maintenance.

HSS CoE EVALUATION CRITERIA & PROCEDURES

HSS Guidelines:

Content:	50 points
Design & Layout:	20 points
General Aesthetics:	10 points
Navigation:	10 points
Creativity:	10 points

Educational, Academic & Scholarly Content: As an established international society, the HSS places emphasis on scholarly and educational content. Because the HSS WebSite and HSS WebPage Seal of Excellence acknowledge different kinds of web offerings with different audiences—from sites designed for K-12 users as well as sites designed for scholars—the criteria for evaluating content and format must be sensitive to questions of accessibility and academic level. The HSS criteria outlined above serve as a general guideline to be applied critically and creatively in considering academic merit, both scholarly and educational. Just as published scholarly reviews might differ in their evaluation of a book, it is expected that different evaluations and opinions will exist concerning the academic merit and educational value of materials found on the web. The CoE maintains that rigorous and original content is an essential element of these Seal of Excellence. Recognizing the diversity of web materials, the CoE evaluation procedure draws principally on the CoE committee. Composed of scholars, teachers, and educators, the CoE will solicit expert opinion regarding academic content, as appropriate, from the HSS membership.

Other Content Considerations: A WebSite or WebPage will usually be written in English or in special instances major European languages. All personal and institutional sites are welcome as long as content is appropriate. **Finished Sites:** A site should be completed before the consideration; "Under Construction" or "Coming Soon" notices should be at a minimum, and are at the discretion of the judges. *Site performance* - A site should have unique content or value as a contribution. *Copyright* - A site should display copyright information; evidence of copyright

infringement will end the evaluation. *Privacy Policy* - As appropriate, sites should have a standard privacy policy statement.

Design & Layout –Technical Concerns: *Compatible with any two major browsers* - A site must be compatible with Internet Explorer browsers and should function with Netscape; standard resolution is 800 X 600 and 1024 X 768. There should be no crashing or freezing with browsers, and pages should load reasonably fast. Use of background music is discouraged, as well as flashing icons, banners, pop-ups, opening windows, forced downloads, or advertising. A site should not have broken internal links, images, or obvious HTML errors. A WebSite must have functional navigation menus or at minimum internal links where returning to the home page (index) is not necessary. Simple navigation is important. There should be ‘up page’ (back to top) links provided in lengthy pages. A site-map should be available.

Creativity: A WebSite should be useful, informative, aesthetically pleasing, and attractive to the target audience. As a one-sentence statement, the WebSite or WebPage should represent something desirable and worthy of repeated visits. Links resources must be acceptable. Effective use of leading edge technologies such as Flash and other new and established offerings is encouraged. Aesthetic elements must not detract from content; if newer technologies are used they must be accessible to most target audience viewers.

Evaluation: Most sites will be visited and reviewed within 30 days of nomination. Only selected recipients will be notified and evaluations will not be shared with those nominated. HSS requests that recipients display the electronic Seal of Excellence in an appropriate manner. Sites that do not post the Seal of Excellence will not be listed in the recipients list at the HSS-CoE website. Seal of Excellence recipients will be featured with a short description and a link to their site. Decisions of the CoE evaluators are final. Re-submissions will be accepted.

CoE Evaluators: Evaluation will be undertaken by a sub-committee of the CoE consisting of CoE members, and as appropriate, HSS members with specialized expertise. Evaluators will review nominated sites with Microsoft Internet Explorer version 5.0 and/or 6.0 and/or Netscape version 6.0 and more recent versions. Operating systems are Windows 98, Windows 98 SE and Windows XP or later versions with screen resolution of 800 X 600 and 1024 X 768 and a connection of 56Kbps dial up modem and ADSL.

A subcommittee of the CoE, the CoE Web Evaluation Committee (WEC), will recommend WebPages and WebSites for approval by majority vote of

the CoE membership. The WEC will consist of three members selected from the CoE by the Chair to serve overlapping terms. As appropriate, the WEC will seek academic expertise from the HSS membership from a list of potential HSS consultants developed by the CoE and the HSS Executive Committee. The CoE assumes final responsibility for selecting WebPages and WebSites and monitoring selected sites over time. A standard academic disclaimer will appear at the CoE website.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I enter? You can enter by submitting a nomination form from this site or sending your information containing your name, email address, age, URL, site title, description, language and category to HSS Seal of Excellence.

Which sites are eligible? Personal, institutional, and in certain instances commercially supported sites are eligible. Sites written in English, Spanish, Dutch, German, French, and Italian are eligible.

Who can nominate a site? Any WebSite or WebPage can be nominated by anyone.

How long is the review time period? The review process usually takes 90 days.

What is more important to you, design or content? Both content and design are important. HSS Seal of Excellence are based on scholarly rigor and content as well as effective presentation in teaching and public outreach.

Do I have to display the Seal of Excellence? No. Although, HSS Seal of Excellence represent a prestigious acknowledgement for your efforts, recipients need not display the Seal of Excellence. However, if the electronic Seal of Excellence is not displayed at the appropriate Page or Site, those recipients will not be listed on the HSS CoE Recipient List.

Do you require a link back to your site? Yes. If the recipient elects to display the electronic Seal of Excellence, a link will be established to the HSS CoE site as well as from the HSS CoE site to the recipient's site.

Appendix: Technical Check List*

Functionality

Accessibility

- 001. breadth of browser compatibility
- 002. minimum & maximum monitor resolutions
- 003. plain text/HTML alternate entry paths
- 004. appeal to universal audience - multilingual translations, cultural sensitivity, disability access & services, etc. as appropriate

Speed & Bandwidth Sensitivity

- 005. overall page sizes & complexity
- 006. average download times
- 007. download order & image redraws
- 008. wait to first reaction/interaction times

HTML Quality

- 009. clean HTML with no faulty code
- 010. workability of active x, rollovers, applets, etc.
- 011. page titles, descriptions, keywords & tags
- 012. Java & Javascript dependency, image dependency, etc. as appropriate

Navigation & Links

- 013. navigation functionality & clarity
- 014. link integrity
- 015. quality & depth of links provided
- 016. external Vs internal link ratios for access to core information

Legality

- 017. original artwork, music, intellectual property etc.
- 018. international copyright laws are correctly observed
- 019. quotations, images & intellectual property from 3rd parties are appropriately cited
- 020. legal site content & legal site activities

Design

Graphic Design

- 021. exceptional artistry
- 022. elegance & sophistication of core design concepts
- 023. typography & font styles
- 024. interesting synergies of visual elements, etc. as appropriate

User Friendly

- 025. ease of use
- 026. aids, tools & help resources
- 027. interface functionality
- 028. clarity & simplicity

Aesthetics

- 029. visual appeal
- 030. professional appearance
- 031. artistic integration
- 032. color harmonies

Alignment & Layout

- 033. general layout & use of space
- 034. complexity & quality of tables
- 035. effective use of layers
- 036. use of borders, dividers, rules, etc. as appropriate

Integration

- 037. effectiveness of unified feel
- 038. congruence of elements
- 039. audio-visual synchronization
- 040. consolidation & reinforcement of purpose

Content

Purpose

- 041. specific mission or website goals
- 042. message & its expression
- 043. usefulness & quality of content, resources etc.
- 044. reason to return, etc. as appropriate

Interactivity

- 045. viewer interaction processes
- 046. membership & community facilities
- 047. Contacts; Links; Email lists, newsletters, newsgroups, chat
- 048. other value services provided, as appropriate

Information Processing

- 049. simplification of complex components, use of synopsis & summaries
- 050. information architecture, primary purpose, construct clarity, chunking, packaging, FAQ's & RFC
- 051. clarity, focus of attention, visibility of functions
- 052. information access - content rating systems, usability, search facility, site map, steps to destination, readability, effectiveness of image maps

Verbal Expression

- 053. clarity of grammar & use of language
- 054. articulation of complex concepts
- 055. spelling, punctuation etc.
- 056. absence of duplication & repetition

Attention to detail

- 057. absence of mistakes &/or inaccuracy
- 058. absence of incongruities
- 059. absence of dead ends & outdated pages
- 060. absence of process failures & code crash

Originality

Innovation & Lateral Thinking

- 061. uniqueness & rarity of offerings
- 062. commendable insight or utility
- 063. advanced, unusual, or clever solutions
- 064. innovation in content worthy of public merit

Creativity

- 065. originality of components
- 066. elegance & sophistication
- 067. style variation from industry fashions
- 068. creative use of resources, etc. as appropriate

Technology

- 069. effective use of leading edge technologies - Java, DHTML, active X, advanced coding, XML, CSS, peer to peer, etc. as appropriate
- 070. compression technologies, RealPlayer, Flash, Beatnik, etc. as appropriate
- 071. audio & video broadcast, use of streaming media
- 072. database integration & functionality, etc. as appropriate

Distinctiveness

- 073. resonance in memory
- 074. multi-sensory appeal & impact
- 075. strength of impression & evocative appeal
- 076. strength of "mind-print", etc. as appropriate

The Vision Thing

- 077. forward thinking
- 078. advanced solutions
- 079. leading-edge activities, etc. as appropriate

*(Adapted from ISI)

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