Celebrating SSN's Inaugural Chapter Leadership Awards Recipients

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Pamela Metz

The Scholars Strategy Network is pleased to announce the winners of the inaugural Scholars Strategy Network Chapter Leader Awards. The awards were established to recognize the SSN's extraordinary chapter leaders, the scholars who lead SSN's collaborative work to inform policy and strengthen democracy in state and local chapters across the United States.

Luisa Deprez - David Brian Robertson Excellence in Leadership Award

Luisa Deprez has been awarded the David Brian Robertson Excellence in Leadership Award, which recognizes an individual who has made exceptional contributions to the development of the Scholars Strategy Network through outstanding chapter leadership. The award is named in honor of the memory of David Brian Robertson.

Deprez led the Maine chapter of SSN on two different occasions: first from 2012-2017 and then again from 2019-2021. She also co-led the chapter's working group on Social Policy and the Safety Net from 2019-2022, and helped establish regular chapter columns in the Bangor Daily News and the Kennebec Journal, two of Maine's largest newspapers.

In the words of Deprez's nominator, SSN member Ryan LaRochelle of the University of Maine: "Luisa embodies the best attributes of SSN – a lifelong dedication to publicly engaged scholarship, a commitment to do whatever it takes to make public policy work for those who are often ignored in policy debates, and the willingness to share her insights and experience with others to help them along in their careers as publicly engaged scholars."

As chapter leader, Deprez submitted a slew of public comments, wrote several SSN policy briefs, authored many local OpEds, and delivered legislative testimony on safety net issues. She connected SSN with nonprofits and advocacy groups in Maine and secured a meeting with Maine House and Senate Leadership to discuss how SSN could inform the legislative process.

In accepting the award, Deprez said, "When I began working with SSN, it was a small organization seeking to make a big difference. And it is. As I continue to read the work of fellow-scholars and their contributions to, and influence on, the policy issues of these times I feel nothing but glee and am so proud. I don't think the organization will ever get out of my bones. It is a great organization and one I have always been proud of and proud to be affiliated with. I can't think of a greater honor than this recognition."

Alabama - Outstanding Chapter Award 2023

SSN applauds the Alabama chapter's 2022-2023 leadership team—Peggy Biga, Peter Jones, Bridgett King, and Maura Mills—for receiving the Outstanding Chapter Award, which recognizes the chapter leadership team that has demonstrated notable accomplishments through the collaborative engagement of its members in innovative chapter projects.

https://scholars.org

This year, [Alabama SSN](#) organized their second "Policy-Palooza," which brought together university researchers, policymakers, and non-profit leaders to identify key health policy issues in need of research support and data. In collaboration with the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Lister Hill Center for Health Policy, the chapter issued a call for project proposals to address these needs and is now supporting two ongoing projects.

Additionally, Biga and Jones have built publicly engaged scholarship into the curriculum by launching a successful graduate certificate program in science policy at UAB to train doctoral students in how to communicate their science to policy makers. In nominating the chapter, Mieke Thomeer of the University of Alabama at Birmingham noted that, "These multiple initiatives, started even though Alabama is a relatively new chapter, show that Alabama SSN is positioned to make a policy impact and help reduce inequities in our state."

Peter Jones accepted the award on behalf of the chapter, saying that, "to those leading other chapters and those new to this especially, just keep going, because with the support from the folks at SSN national, it will click at some point. Even in a state like ours, we're starting to make headway, so thank you for this recognition."

Dallas-Fort Worth - Emerging Chapter Award 2023

The [Dallas-Fort Worth chapter](#), established in 2019 and led by [Eugenia Gorina](#) of the University of Texas-Dallas, has been awarded the inaugural Emerging Chapter Award 2023. This award recognizes a newly established chapter that has achieved notable gains in advancing the use of research to inform policy and strengthen democracy.

In the past year alone, Gorina organized a remarkable range of programming, from a well attended op-ed workshop featuring *Dallas Morning News* commentary editors Ryan Sanders and Juan Jaramillo, to public talks on education policy and SSN member meetings with K-12 leaders, to SSN's half-day TRIP training (Training Researchers to Inform Policy), to hosting a special session on "Sustainability and Social Equity" as part of the UT Dallas's annual conference of Public and Nonprofit Management. Through these activities, Dallas-Fort Worth SSN has forged local chapter relationships with the Dallas Morning News, city and regional officials, and non-profit organizations that will serve the chapter as it grows in years to come.

Eugenia Gorina mentioned when accepting the award that, "we are surprised, honored, and very proud to get the award. I have been the chapter leaders since 2022, so we're relatively young, and we're still experimenting with a lot of things that the chapter can do...We have potential members who are, in fact, engaged in a lot of policy conversations, and I view it as my task for the upcoming years to really bring those experienced faculty members into the conversation in the form of official SSN membership. So I look forward to doing more with SSN this year."