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# ***GCLS AWARDS PROCESS***

## **Membership Meeting Update**

*Prepared by*

*2017 Independent Review Committee*



*July 6, 2017*

# ***Four Primary IRC Goals***

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- **Conduct an independent review** to ensure the quality, integrity and prestige **of the GCLS awards process**, a key component of GCLS's stated mission: "to recognize and promote lesbian literary work."
- **Make recommendations for how awards process can be improved** so best books have an even better chance of being recognized as Goldie finalists and Goldie winners.
- **Suggest ways to implement recommended improvements** in the 2018 awards and beyond.
- **Develop** survey instruments, metrics and other devices as **benchmarks for subsequent reviews**.

# Two Related Questions

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## ➤ What does “**independent**” mean?

- No member of the IRC is currently on the GCLS board or participating in the judging process for books published in 2016, 2017 or 2018 – thus fulfilling the requirement for an **independent “external” review** as sanctioned by the GCLS Board.

## ➤ **Who** is on the IRC?

- **Jenny Fielder** (chair): Retired corporate executive and market researcher for newspaper industry. GCLS member for six years. Attended nine conferences with partner KG MacGregor.
- **Donna Brown**: GCLS member since beginning. Served as Goldie judge for one term. Avid reader and Xena: Warrior Princess fan. Administrative Assistant for sheriff’s department.
- **Jane Chen**: Won Goldie in 2010 writing as Trinity Tam (with wife Nell Stark) for *everafter*. Has attended three conferences. Marketing VP and Harvard grad.
- **Leigh Howell**: Attended seven GCLS conferences with sister, Lynne Pierce of Lesfic Unbound. Former editor for Blue Feather Books. Lives with husband Steve.
- **MJ Lowe**: GCLS member since 2004. Served on Board of Directors in 2008-2010 and as Awards Administrator for 2012-2014. Librarian by trade and training.
- **Elaine Lynch**: Attended 11 conventions. Served as Goldie judge five times. Been reviewing books since 2005. Married to GCLS Trailblazer Lee Lynch. Retired Quality Control specialist.
- **Rosa Moran**: GCLS member since beginning. Attended all conferences and awards ceremonies. Served as judge for four years. “Techie” by trade and training.
- **Sharon Owens**: Avid reader belonging to GCLS for seven years. Attended five conferences. Been presenter at awards ceremony. Retired library worker and former attorney.

# Six Primary Action Steps

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- **Participate as “faux nominator” and “faux judge”** for real-time experience with GCLS awards process.
- **Evaluate effectiveness of OpenWater online awards management software** for accepting, processing and judging Goldie nominations.
- **Contact key stakeholders** via qualitative and quantitative surveys for opinions on ways to improve the awards.
  - **Awards administrators and board liaisons** (*findings from 11 of 12 reported 8/15/16*)
  - **Publishers** (*findings from 11 of 12 reported 9/22/16*)
  - **Awards nominators** (*findings from 32 of 107 reported 11/21/16*)
  - **Goldie judges** (*findings from 15 of 31 former 2015 judges reported 12/12/16; findings from 43 of 69 2016 judges reported 3/19/17*)
  - **GCLS membership** (*findings from 150 of 593 reported 5/31/17*)
- **Analyze key metrics** to supplement survey results (*findings reported 1/5/17*).
- **Propose awards categories and category structure** for 2018 and beyond (*completed 4/10/17 and revised 6/6/17*).
- **Incorporate relevant best practices** of other book awards.

# ***Five Key Recommendations***

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- I. Encourage participation.
- II. Promote transparency.
- III. Clarify specialty awards.
  - Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award
  - Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design
- IV. Refine judged categories.
  - For 2018 Goldie Awards
  - For 2019 Goldie Awards
- V. Address judging concerns.
  - For 2018 Goldie Awards
  - For 2019 Goldie Awards

# ***Key Recommendations and Brief Rational***

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## ➤ I. Encourage participation:

- The Goldie Awards provide an **important service to the lesbian community** by shining a spotlight on books of high quality.
  - **Involvement by GCLS members is vital** to the awards process – particularly by volunteers who serve as judges, awards administrators, board liaisons and Goldie presenters.

## ➤ II. Promote transparency:

- Integrity and transparency are absolutely essential to the awards. Unfortunately, **integrity has been called into question** by some, and the **process isn't as transparent as it could be**.
  - **Not knowing the identity of judges** subsequent to the competition exacerbates the issue.

## ➤ III. Clarify specialty awards:

- GCLS members have **favorable views of the Ann Bannon and Tee Corrine awards**. No clear majority emerged for substantive changes.

# ***Key Recommendations and Brief Rational***

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## ➤ IV. Refine judged categories:

- **Category descriptions should make it easy** for authors and publishers **to choose the most appropriate categories** in which to nominate their books.
- **Traditional Contemporary Romance** and **Debut Author** are **unevenly represented** in judges, finalists and winners, based on their overall size and importance to the GCLS reading community.
- Goldies are devalued when **one can become a finalist simply by entering a small category.**

## ➤ V. Address judging concerns:

- Perceptions are fairly common that **some judges** are more influenced by “**fandom**” when they rate a book than they are by **literary merit.**
- **Dearth of feedback** to entrants (and other judges) on how titles scored exacerbates judging concerns.

# ***I. Encourage Participation: Board Response***

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## ➤ **IRC Recommendations:**

- Find new ways to recognize **volunteer judges** for the significant contributions they make to GCLS.
- Extend the term of **awards administrators** to benefit from prior experience.

## ➤ **Board Response:**

- The board **will personally acknowledge judges** through correspondence and at the GCLS awards ceremony.
- We will offer **a free year of membership** after three consecutive years of judging service, starting with 2017 judges.
- We will **extend the term of awards administrators** from two years to three years with one year overlapping.



## ***II. Promote Transparency: Board Response***

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### ➤ **IRC Recommendations:**

- Make sure **GCLS members have plenty of opportunity to learn** about, comment on, and participate in IRC work.
- At the 2017 Goldie Awards ceremony, **list the names** of all those who judged this year's competition.
- Utilize **OpenWater** online awards management software to the extent possible, given the high marks it receives from awards administrators, nominators and judges.

### ➤ **Board Response:**

- Following the membership meeting, **IRC members will participate in a one-hour session** so GCLS members can get detailed information on their work.
- **Names of judges** will be listed in alphabetical order at Saturday's awards ceremony. Going forward, the application form will include an opt-out option for judges who do not want their names made public.
- We will name an **"independent auditor"** from among GCLS membership to audit finalists and winners to assure they are consistent with those identified by OpenWater.

# ***III. Clarify Specialty Awards: Board Response***

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## ➤ **IRC Recommendations:**

- For the **Ann Bannon and Tee Corrine awards**, continue allowing authors and designers, respectively, to **receive the award in consecutive years**.
- Include **descriptions and judging guidelines** on ballots to help guide voters.
- Stipulate that **all covers**, including those with stock art, should be eligible.
- Provide a **link for purchasing books named as finalists**:
  - Thereby **encouraging members to read Ann Bannon finalists prior to voting** in the second round.
  - Thereby **encouraging GCLS members to look at additional elements** (how the cover reflects the book's content, whether it appeals to the intended audience, etc.) **in the Tee Corrine competition**.

## ➤ **Board Response:**

- We agree with these recommendations, though **implementation issues** must be resolved prior to providing a link for purchasing books named as finalists.
- We request additional research to determine why **only one-third of eligible GCLS members typically vote** for the specialty awards.

# ***IV. Refine Judged Categories: Board Response***

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## ➤ **IRC Recommendations for 2018 Awards:**

- **Separate Traditional Contemporary Romance into three subcategories, each requiring a happy or hopeful ending:**
  - Contemporary Romance: Short Novels (40,000 to 70,000 words)
  - Contemporary Romance: Mid-Length Novels (70,001 to 85,000 words)
  - Contemporary Romance: Long Novels (85,000 plus words)
- **The word count distribution works out this way, based on 2017 TCR entries:**
  - **Short Novels** – 26 entries, or **36.1% of TCR entries**
  - **Mid-Length Novels** – 25 entries, or **34.7% of TCR entries**
  - **Long Novels** – 21 entries, or **29.2% of TCR entries**

## ➤ **Board Response:**

- **Beginning in 2018:**
  - Contemporary Romance categories will be revised in accordance with the recommendation.
  - OpenWater will be asked to include word count in submission forms.
  - We will consider a minimum 40,000 word count for novels submitted in judged categories.

# IV. Refine Judged Categories: Board Response

## ➤ IRC Recommendations for 2018 Awards:

- Aggregate categories so there are **at least six entries** for judging to proceed.
- Adopt a **25% - 10% Rule** to determine finalists and winners based on the number of category submissions:
  - 25% of entries are finalists
  - 10% of entries are winners

## ➤ Board Response:

- After rejecting three prior sliding scales submitted by the IRC, we agree this rule should be adopted, beginning with the 2018 awards cycle.

Number Entries Submitted	CURRENT POLICY				25% - 10% RULE			
	Finalists		Winners		Finalists		Winners	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2	2	100%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%
3	3	100%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%
4	4	100%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%
5	5	100%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%
6	6	100%	2	33%	2	25%	1	10%
7	7	100%	2	29%	2	25%	1	10%
8	8	100%	3	38%	2	25%	1	10%
9	8	89%	3	33%	2	25%	1	10%
10	8	80%	3	30%	3	25%	1	10%
11	8	73%	3	27%	3	25%	1	10%
12	8	67%	3	25%	3	25%	1	10%
13	8	62%	3	23%	3	25%	1	10%
14	8	57%	3	21%	4	25%	1	10%
15	8	53%	3	20%	4	25%	2	10%
16	8	50%	3	19%	4	25%	2	10%
17	8	47%	3	18%	4	25%	2	10%
18	8	44%	3	17%	5	25%	2	10%
19	8	42%	3	16%	5	25%	2	10%
20	8	40%	3	15%	5	25%	2	10%
21	8	38%	3	14%	5	25%	2	10%
22	8	36%	3	14%	6	25%	2	10%
23	8	35%	3	13%	6	25%	2	10%
24	8	33%	3	13%	6	25%	2	10%
25	8	32%	3	12%	6	25%	3	10%
26	8	31%	3	12%	7	25%	3	10%
27	8	30%	3	11%	7	25%	3	10%
28	8	29%	3	11%	7	25%	3	10%
29	8	28%	3	10%	7	25%	3	10%
30	8	27%	3	10%	8	25%	3	10%
31	8	26%	3	10%	8	25%	3	10%
32	8	25%	3	9%	8	25%	3	10%
33	8	24%	3	9%	8	25%	3	10%
34	8	24%	3	9%	9	25%	3	10%
35	8	23%	3	9%	9	25%	4	10%
36	8	22%	3	8%	9	25%	4	10%
37	8	22%	3	8%	9	25%	4	10%
38	8	21%	3	8%	10	25%	4	10%
39	8	21%	3	8%	10	25%	4	10%
40	8	20%	3	8%	10	25%	4	10%
50	8	16%	3	6%	13	25%	5	10%
60	8	13%	3	5%	15	25%	6	10%
70	8	11%	3	4%	18	25%	7	10%
80	8	10%	3	4%	20	25%	8	10%

NOTE: EXCEL formulas used for rounding to the nearest whole percent.

# ***IV. Refine Judged Categories: Board Response***

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## ➤ **IRC Recommendations for 2019 Awards:**

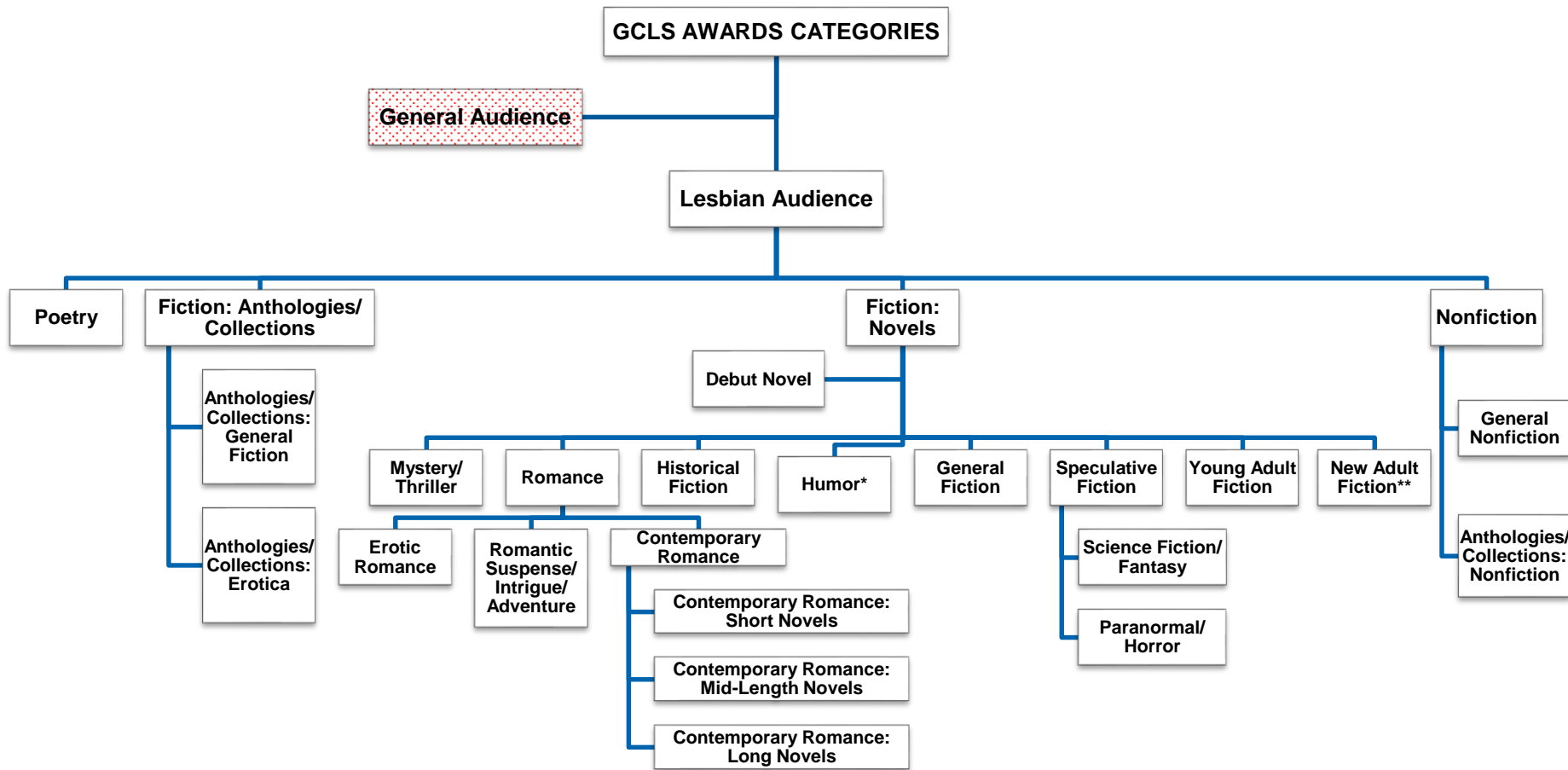
- Segment categories into four primary, mutually exclusive groups: **Poetry; Fiction: Anthologies/Collections; Fiction: Novels; and Nonfiction.**
- Change the Debut Author category to **Debut Novel**, restricting submissions to first-time novels.
  - **Require all Debut submissions to be entered in a Fiction: Novels category.**
    - This requirement eliminates entries in Poetry, Nonfiction and Fiction: Anthologies/Collections from the competition. Only five of 56 Debut entries in 2016 were from these categories.
  - **Let top, non-genre-specific scores determine finalists and winners.**
- Approve requests for two additional categories: **New Adult Fiction** and **Humor.**
- Stipulate the time period for **Historical Fiction** to be **at least fifty years in the past**, dropping the confusing exception for authors “not alive at the time of those events.”

## ➤ **Board Response:**

- We agree with the **Debut Novel** recommendation and tentatively agree with category structure recommendations, beginning with the 2019 awards cycle.
  - We encourage the IRC to seek additional feedback on an alternative proposal to aggregate the two **Erotica** categories and to promote **Humor** to a primary category.
- The “fifty years in the past” recommendation for **Historical Fiction will be adopted for the 2018 awards.**

# IV. Refine Judged Categories

## Proposed Category Structure for 2019 Awards



\*Humor: Ranges from light and bubbly, to dark and warped, and includes comic situations, wry observations, satirical setups, or all of the above and more. This category would include any work of fiction that tells the story primarily through humor in any of its many forms.

\*\*New Adult Fiction: The main focus of the plot must revolve around new adults and/or new adult issues. New adult protagonists are in the 18–30 age range. New adult fiction focuses on life after legal age, and how one deals with the new beginnings of adulthood such as leaving home, developing sexuality, and negotiating education and career choices.

# ***V. Address Judging Concerns: Board Response***

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## ➤ **IRC Recommendations:**

- **Disqualify poorly formatted, unreadable** ebooks.
- Authorize the IRC to **recruit GCLS members** for subcommittees:
  - To review and propose changes, as appropriate, in how judges are recruited and assigned to categories, the composition of judging panels, blind judging, feedback to entrants and other **judging-related issues**.
  - To revise, pretest and publish **evaluation instruments** for all judged Goldie categories in time for the 2019 awards.

## ➤ **Board Response:**

- **For the 2018 awards**, there will be only one corrective opportunity to submit a **viable ebook for judging** (in three different formats). Printed books also must be of sufficient quality. Non-compliers will be excluded from the competition.
- We authorize extending IRC work for another year to look thoroughly at **(1) judging-related issues** and **(2) evaluation instruments** to recommend improvements for 2019 and beyond.

# ***IRC Future Action Steps: WE NEED YOU!!!***

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- Publicize all recommended **category descriptions and judging guidelines** for feedback from GCLS members. Make adjustments as necessary.
- Recruit GCLS members for subcommittees to review and propose changes, as appropriate, in how **judges** are recruited and assigned to categories, the composition of judging panels, feedback to entrants and other judging-related concerns for the 2019 awards.
- Recruit GCLS members for subcommittees to revise, pretest and publish **evaluation instruments** for all judged Goldie categories in time for the 2019 awards.
- Work with awards administrators and liaisons to **implement recommended improvements** in the 2018 and 2019 awards.
- Recognize that **participation of readers, authors, editors, publishers and those with judging experience will be vital** to accomplish these action steps.

