

MEMO TO: GCLS Executive Committee
CC: Independent Review Committee Members
FROM: Virginia Dodge Fielder, Ph.D.
SUBJECT: GCLS Membership Survey – Results
DATE: May 30, 2017 (Revised on 6/6/2017 to include only summary results)

On May 5, GCLS members eligible to respond – 593 in all – were sent a personalized email asking them to participate in our GCLS Membership Survey, the results of which are reported in this memo. The email, distributed with the help of Carleen Spry, read:

*As many of you know, the Independent Review Committee (IRC) has been working hard the past ten months on recommendations for how the GCLS awards process might be improved. Now, we need your help on two important recommendations: what to do, if anything, to improve the **Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award** and the **Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design**.*

So, please help us by following the link shown below and completing our 2017 GCLS Member Survey on these two specialty awards. We need to hear from you even if you typically don't vote on these awards. That way, we'll know impediments to voting, as well as recommendations for new approaches. Here is the link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JVBD53S>

Please answer the survey only once, so we can adhere to the principle of “one member, one vote.” BTW, IRC members – Donna Brown, Jane Chen, Virginia Dodge Fielder (chair), MJ Lowe, Elaine Lynch, Leigh Howell, Rosa Moran and Sharon Owens – won't be voting due to our “independent status.” None of us is currently on the GCLS board, nor are we participating in the 2017 judging process.

Your responses will be completely anonymous, unless you choose to provide an email address to receive summaries of prior IRC research reports. If you include your email, it will be kept confidential by the committee chair, who is using her own SurveyMonkey account to receive and process the data.

For results to be included in our final report to the GCLS board by mid-June, your survey must be completed no later than Monday, May 22. Results will be included in presentations at the GCLS convention in July, as well as posted on the GCLS website shortly thereafter.

Thanks so much for your help!

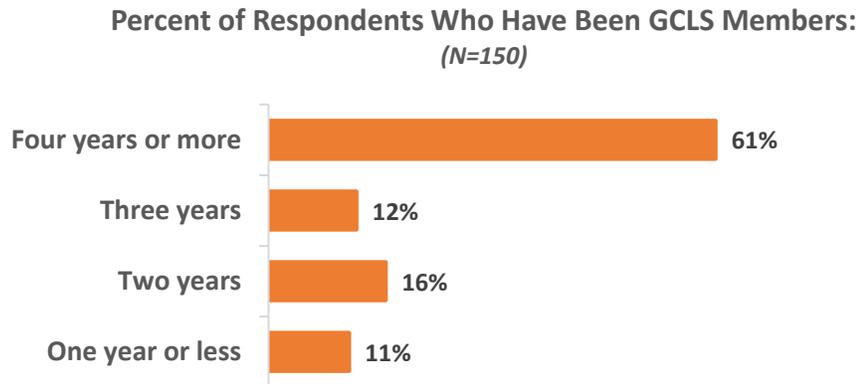
*Virginia Dodge Fielder, chair
Independent Review Committee
Independent.review.committee@goldencrown.org*

When the response period closed on May 22, 150 GCLS members had responded, representing a 25.3% response rate. Of those, 35 provided email addresses to receive summaries of prior IRC research reports, which were sent by the committee chair no more than two days after the request was received. Presumably, people who answered our survey are highly interested in the Ann Bannon and Tee Corrine awards and are therefore likely to be among the 211 members who voted in the 2017 competition.

In this memo, you will find a discussion of respondent characteristics and a summary of findings, including related open-end comments. Please pay greatest attention to the quantitative results (i.e., percentages), as they denote the “weight” of opinion, while “selected comments” reflect the “range” of opinion. Note that this memo does not contain recommendations based on the findings, since results from other research will be included in our ultimate recommendations to the GCLS Board of Directors.

Respondents

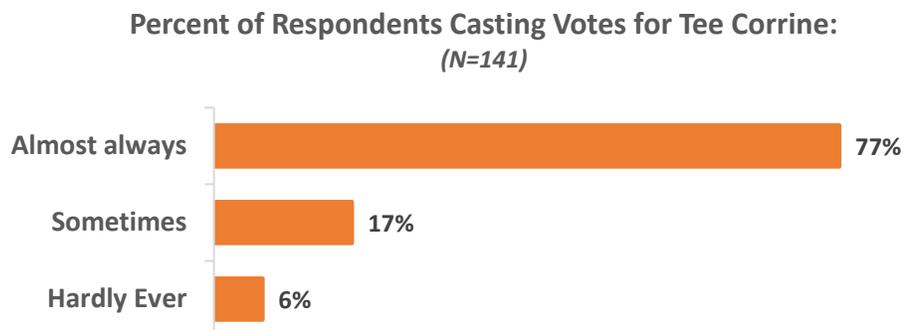
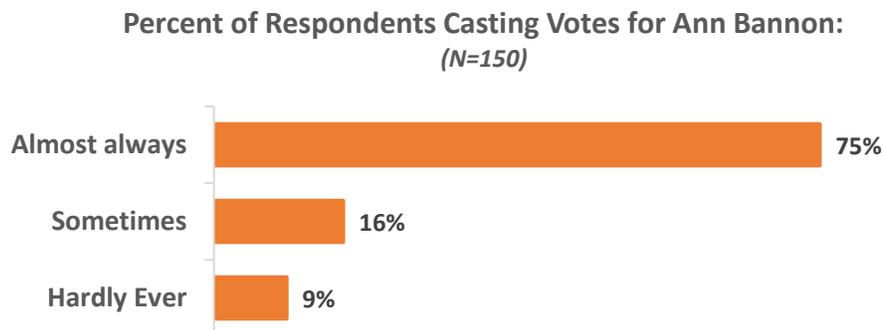
By May 22, 150 GCLS members had responded to our GCLS Membership Survey. Of those responding, 92 (61%) said they had been GCLS members for four or more years, while 58 (39%) had been members for three or fewer years. Here are the specific breakdowns on reported length of membership:



All 150 respondents completed questions on their overall impressions of the “specialty awards” competition for the Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award and the Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design, as well as the question on whether they typically cast votes for Ann Bannon. After answering those questions, nine respondents terminated their survey, thus reducing the number of respondents completing the remainder of the questionnaire to 141.

In the final accounting, 128 GCLS members answered all questions about the Ann Bannon award, and 133 answered about Tee Corrine. That left 13 people to answer questions as to why they “hardly ever” voted for Ann Bannon and eight to answer similar questions about the Tee Corrine competition.

According to GCLS records, approximately two-thirds of GCLS members did *not* vote in the 2017 specialty awards competition. As shown below, this contrasts sharply to our membership survey, in which fewer than one in 10 said they “hardly ever” voted. Thus, nonvoters are dramatically underrepresented in our survey, and their responses should be considered qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

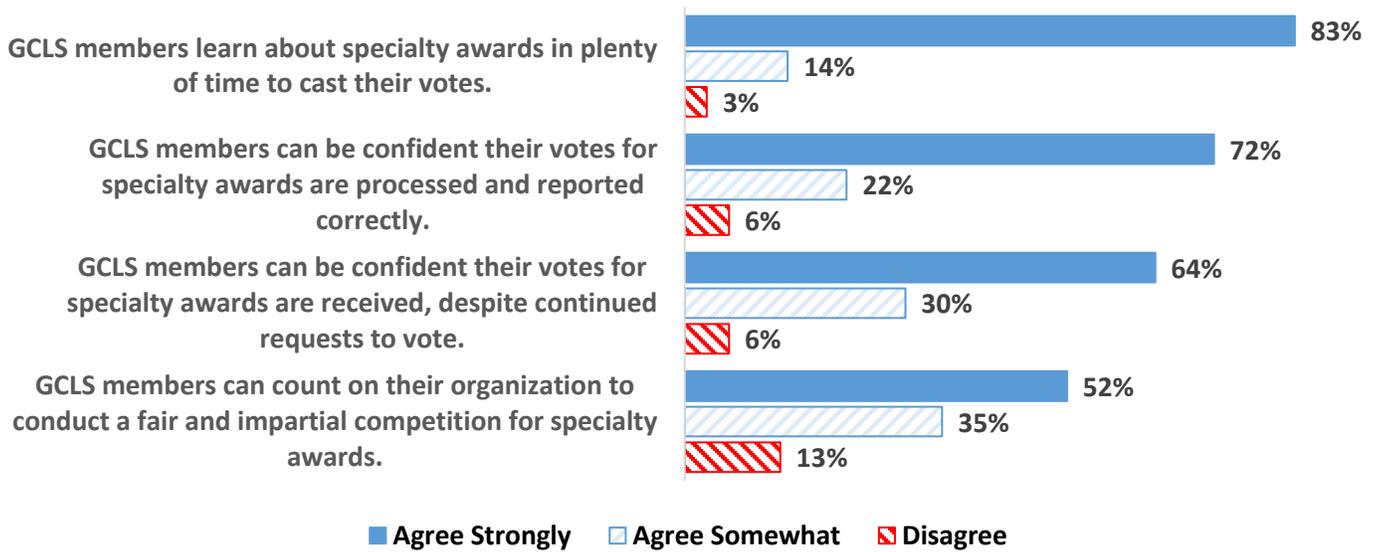


Overall Impressions of Specialty Awards

Generally, GCLS members had highly favorable views of the specialty awards competition for the Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award and the Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design. Overwhelming majorities said they had plenty of time to cast votes for these awards and felt confident their votes were received, processed and reported correctly.

Impressions also were positive, though less so, on this summary item: “GCLS members can count on their organization to conduct a fair and impartial competition for specialty awards.” Overall, 52 percent agreed strongly with this statement and 35 percent agreed somewhat.

Percent of Respondents Who Agree or Disagree That:
(N=150)



Length of membership made a difference on one of the four items. People who had been members for four or more years were considerably less likely to agree strongly (43%) than were members of shorter duration (66%) that “GCLS members can count on their organization to conduct a fair and impartial competition for specialty awards.”

| PERCENT WHO AGREE STRONGLY THAT: | LENGTH OF GCLS MEMBERSHIP | |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Four or More Years (N=92) | Three or Fewer Years (N=58) |
| GCLS members learn about specialty awards in plenty of time to cast their votes. | 83% | 84% |
| GCLS members can be confident their votes for specialty awards are processed and reported correctly. | 71% | 76% |
| GCLS members can be confident their votes for specialty awards are received, despite continued requests to vote. | 61% | 69% |
| GCLS members can count on their organization to conduct a fair and impartial competition for specialty awards. | 43% | 66% |

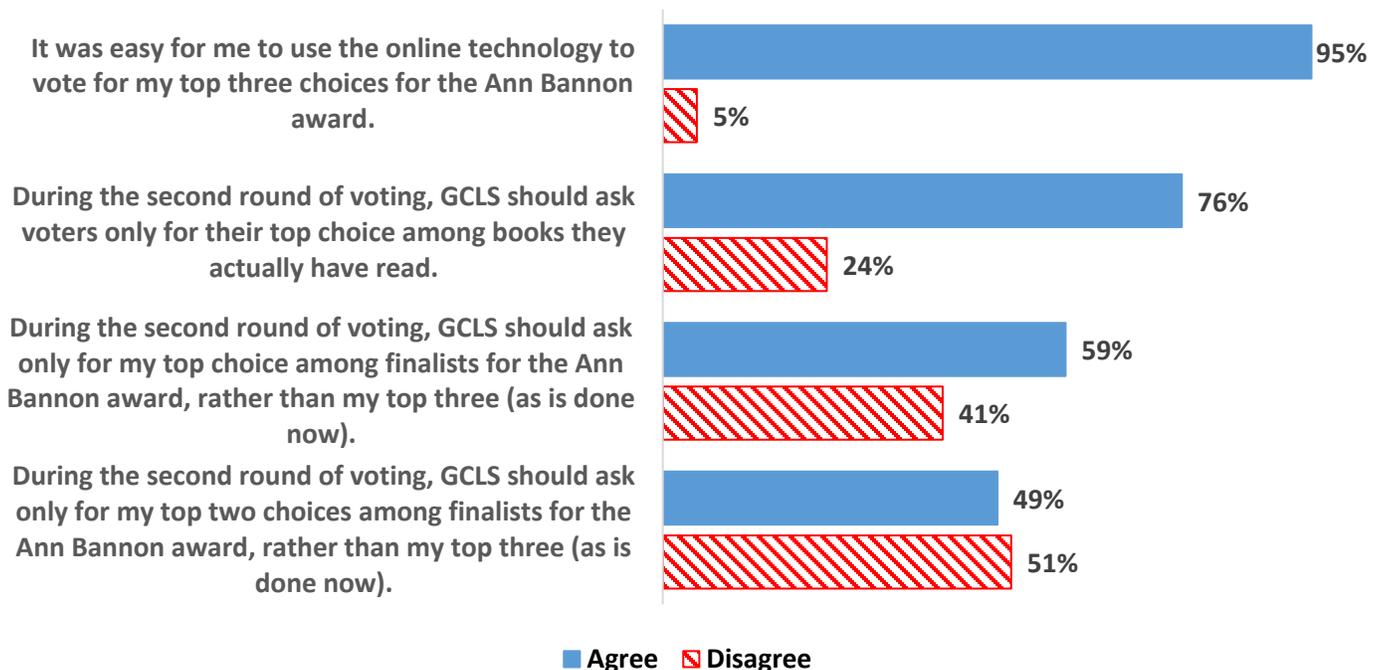
Ann Bannon Voters

Voters in the Ann Bannon competition overwhelmingly agreed (95%) that it was easy “to use the online technology to vote for my top three choices for the Ann Bannon award.” Three-quarters (76%) also agreed that during the second round of voting, GCLS should ask voters only for their top choice “among books they actually have read.” In open-end comments, voters remarked on the difficulty this latter sentiment presents:

- *I do feel that voters in the Ann Bannon award should only be able to vote on books they've read, although I admit, I'm not sure how this would be monitored.*
- *I think readers should signify by their votes that they actually have read each of the books they vote for at any stage in the process. If not, the award is for author popularity and not the quality of any one book. Of course, how you verify this is a quandary.*
- *While we shouldn't require that people have read the books for the Ann Bannon award, I do think there should be some language that strongly recommends that this be the case.*
- *I agree that it's a good idea to ask that readers have read the books before voting for the Ann Bannon award. Perhaps somehow asking readers to rate the book on certain criteria (perhaps similar to criteria provided for judges in the main categories) would be a good way to encourage people to think critically in selecting the books they are voting for. Otherwise, it does seem that the Popular Choice awards might be as much about the popularity of the author as they are about the book.*

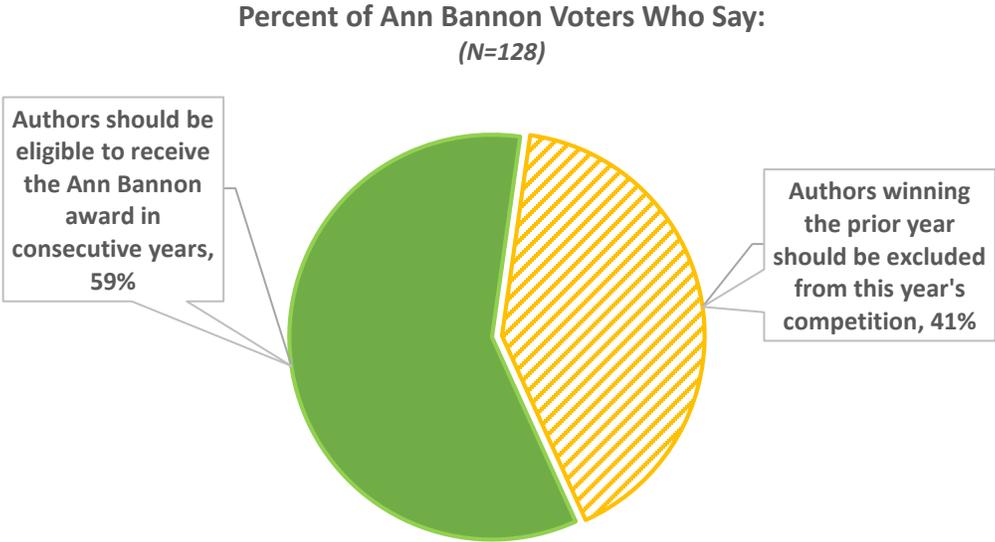
Opinions were fairly evenly divided on whether, in the second round of voting, members should be asked for only their top choice (59% agreed/41% disagreed) or their top two choices (49% agreed/51% disagreed), rather than the top three choices asked for currently. Taken together, these two questions represent only a slight majority endorsement for changing the current practice and asking voters for only their top choice in the second round. Length of GCLS membership had little impact on the results.

Percent of Ann Bannon Voters Who Agree or Disagree That:
(N=128)



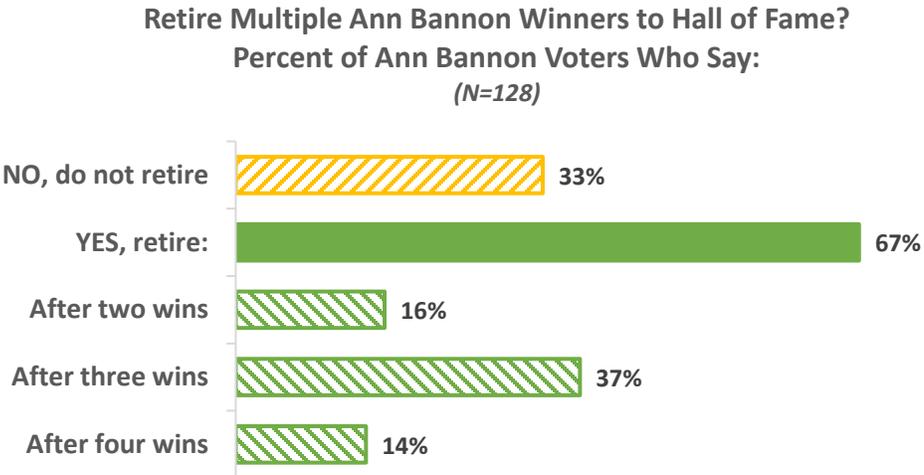
Ann Bannon voters were asked this tradeoff question: *“Some GCLS members feel the same author should be eligible to receive the Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award in consecutive years if her work is selected by GCLS members. Others think authors who won the prior year should be excluded to open the door to new winners. Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel?”*

Voters showed a slight preference for allowing authors to receive the Ann Bannon award in consecutive years, as six in 10 (59%) chose this option. Newer GCLS members were almost as likely as longer-term ones to say winners should be eligible in consecutive years – 55 percent vs. 61 percent, respectively.



Voters also were asked their opinion about this approach: *“Another proposal for opening the door to new winners would create an ‘Ann Bannon Award Hall of Fame.’ Authors winning the Ann Bannon award multiple times would be retired to this Hall of Fame, thus becoming ineligible to receive the award in the future.”*

Viewed one way, a cumulative two-thirds (67%) endorsed retiring Ann Bannon winners to a Hall of Fame: 16 percent after two wins, 37 percent after three wins and 14 percent after four wins. Newer GCLS members were slightly more likely than longer-term ones to favor retiring the award – 72 percent vs. 64 percent, respectively. Viewed another way, a substantial cadre of voters either don’t think the Ann Bannon award should be retired at all (33%) or should be retired after four wins (14%), presumably a very long period.



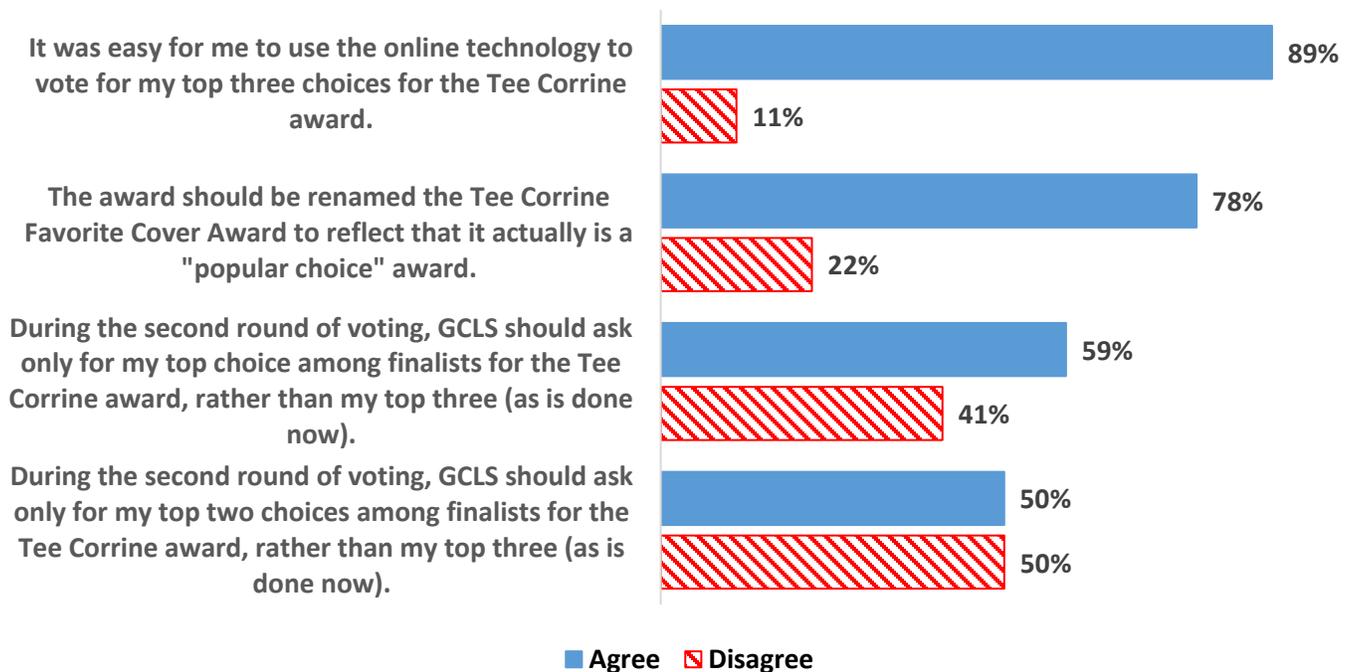
Tee Corrine Voters

As with Ann Bannon, voters in the Tee Corrine competition overwhelmingly agreed (89%) that it was easy “to use the online technology to vote for my top three choices for the Tee Corrine award.” Three-quarters (78%) also felt the award should be renamed “the Tee Corrine Favorite Cover Award to reflect that it actually is a ‘popular choice’ award.” Here are some related comments:

- *I think these are the most honest awards we have as they are at least labeled as popularity contests.*
- *Changing the name to "favorite cover" would seem to negate the need for the award. If that decision is made, I would seriously rethink the reason for introducing the category in the first place—and I would definitely remove Tee Corinne's name from the award. It also negates any sense that the organization seeks to promote quality and raise the bar for the visual integrity of all our books.*
- *The Tee Corrine award helps to encourage excellence in design and should continue because even if someone has not read the book, they can vote on an engaging cover design. I think it involves more people and is less likely to be influenced (than Ann Bannon) by a personal campaign among friends of an author.*

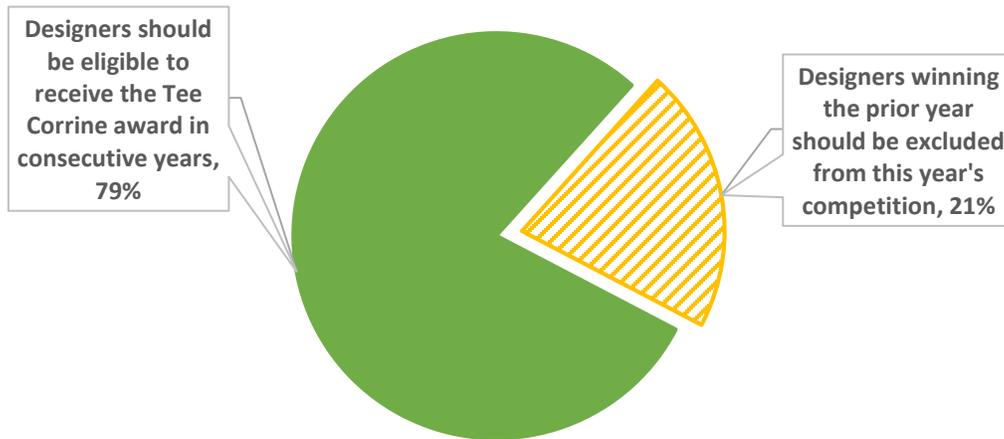
As with Ann Bannon, opinions were fairly evenly divided on whether, in the second round of voting, people should be asked for only their top choice (59% agreed/41% disagreed) or their top two choices (50% agreed/50% disagreed), rather than the top three choices asked for currently. Again, taken together, these two questions represent only a slight majority endorsement for changing the current practice and asking voters for just their top choice in the second round. Length of GCLS membership had virtually no impact on the results.

Percent of Tee Corrine Voters Who Agree or Disagree That:
(N=133)



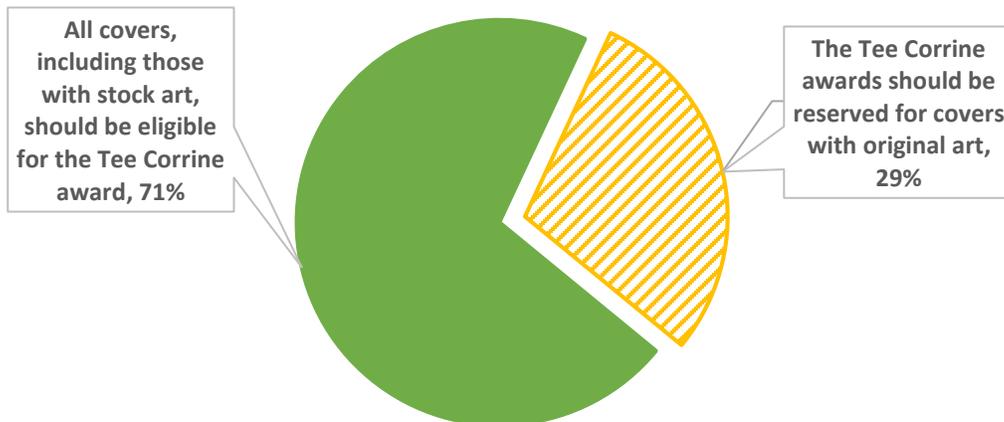
Tee Corrine voters were asked this tradeoff question: “Some GCLS members feel the same cover designer should be eligible to receive the Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design in consecutive years if her work is selected by GCLS members. Others think designers who won the prior year should be excluded to open the door to new winners. Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel?” Voters overwhelmingly endorsed allowing designers to receive the Tee Corrine award in consecutive years, as eight in 10 (79%) chose this option.

Percent of Tee Corrine Voters Saying:
(N=133)



Opinions were equally clear when Tee Corrine voters were asked this tradeoff question: “Some GCLS members feel the Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design should go only to those books with original cover art. Others think any cover should be eligible, even if it uses stock art. Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel?” Seven in 10 voters (71%) believe all covers, including those with stock art, should be eligible for the Tee Corrine award.

Percent of Tee Corrine Voters Saying:
(N=133)



For both tradeoff questions related to the Tee Corrine award, length of GCLS membership had little impact on results.

Nonvoters

As noted earlier, nonvoters are dramatically underrepresented in our survey, and their responses should be considered qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. Altogether, 13 respondents said they “almost never” vote in the annual competition for the Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award, and eight said they “almost never” vote for the Tee Corrine Award for Outstanding Cover Design.

Based on these few responses, neither problems with the online technology nor concerns about the process are impediments to voting. Rather, the main reason people don’t vote for the Ann Bannon award is because they “haven’t read enough of the books” competing for the award, followed by “the same people win over and over again” and “I don’t vote because I don’t care enough” to go to the trouble of voting. Regarding Tee Corrine, nonvoters don’t care about the award, think the same people win over and over again, or don’t vote because they “don’t want to study all the covers competing for the Tee Corrine award.”

| REASONS FOR NOT VOTING FOR SPECIALTY AWARDS: | ANN BANNON AWARD (N=13) | | TEE CORRINE AWARD (N=8) | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| | Major/Minor Reason | Not A Reason | Major/Minor Reason | Not A Reason |
| I don’t vote because I don’t trust GCLS to process and report my votes correctly. | 0% (n=0) | 100% (n=13) | 0% (n=0) | 100% (n=8) |
| I don’t vote because I can’t figure out the online technology to vote. | 0% (n=0) | 100% (n=13) | 13% (n=1) | 87% (n=7) |
| I don’t vote because it is too much trouble to vote twice – once to determine finalists and a second time to determine winners. | 8% (n=1) | 92% (n=12) | 13% (n=1) | 87% (n=7) |
| I don’t vote because the same people win over and over again anyway. | 54% (n=7) | 46% (n=6) | 25% (n=2) | 75% (n=6) |
| I don’t vote because I don’t care about the Ann Bannon/Tee Corrine award. | 46% (n=6) | 54% (n=7) | 50% (n=4) | 50% (n=4) |
| I don’t vote because I haven’t read enough of the books competing for the Ann Bannon award. | 85% (n=11) | 15% (n=2) | NA | NA |
| I don’t vote because I don’t want to study all the covers competing for the Tee Corrine award. | NA | NA | 25% (n=2) | 75% (n=6) |

Other reasons for not voting included these open-end comments:

- *Popular books are rewarded by sales. I see no reason for books written by major authors or authors very well supported by larger publishers or a large inner circle of friends to be recognized.*
- *I'm an author and I generally know the nominees personally in some capacity, so I'm basically recusing myself. Like the Ann Bannon, I generally know the people who created the covers in some personal capacity.*
- *I think the "popularity" awards, what you call the "specialty awards," are an insult to finalists whose books were judged, presumably by a significant number of judges, and found to be of sufficient merit to be named finalists. The Ann Bannon award in particular sees the same handful of authors as finalists year after year and seems to have a lot to do with their "likability" as people. Goldies carry weight and I believe it undermines GCLS's credibility as a giver of important awards in the field of lesbian fiction to offer these "popularity contest" awards.*
- *Covers I find award worthy don't usually fit into the "norm", so my vote would be in the minority. Hard to pick when the covers may appeal for non-standard reasons.*
- *I'm honestly not sure I'm qualified to judge cover art.*
- *I think covers should be judged on merit by those skilled in the field of graphic art, not selected by popular vote.*