ICA Public Relations Division

Guidelines for the Robert Heath Award

1. Overview

The Public Relations Division of the International Communication Association establishes the “Robert Heath Award for Impactful and Innovative Public Relations Research” to recognize foundational journal articles in the field of public relations and strategic communication based on their innovativeness and impact. The award is based on an endowment collected by numerous members and friends of the division around the world. It bears the name of Robert L. Heath, professor emeritus at the University of Houston (USA) and honors his contributions to public relations scholarship.

The award will be granted every second year to the author(s) of an outstanding article in the field published in English in one of the core academic journals of the field or in renowned academic journals in related disciplines during a period of five precedent years defined in the call for each round. The winning article will be selected in a two-stage process based on a) impact, as shown by the citations reached, and b) innovativeness, as judged upon by an internationally diverse Heath Award Committee. Details are explained below.

2. Roles and responsibilities

The Division’s leadership team, represented by the Chair, is responsible for nominating and overseeing the Heath Award Committee (including the Chair) and for organizing the award presentation during the Division’s business meeting at the Annual ICA conference. It will also provide an award certificate and the prize money for the winner(s). The prize will be paid by interests generated from the endowment. The amount of the prize money may therefore vary; it will be determined and announced before the start of the respective competition. The Division leadership will – if necessary – propose updates of these guidelines based on suggestions from the Heath Award Committee or own considerations and seek approval of the membership.

The Chair of the Heath Award Committee is responsible for organizing the selection process. She or he will regularly update the division’s leadership team on progress or challenges, send a report including information on the winner(s) to the Division leadership, and evaluate the award process after each round (including proposals for modifications of the process or these guidelines, if suitable). She or he should be senior member of the Division and professor, associate professor, senior lecturer (or comparable), preferably with experience as previous member of this committee or similar juries or editorial boards.
The Members of the Heath Award Committee are responsible for judging within the process. They will (together with the Chair) vote and take the final decision on the winner(s). They are also free to decide that no award will be given.

The composition of the committee shall reflect the diversity of the ICA PR Division in terms of national affiliation (country of workplace), ethnicity, and gender. Committee members should not be current editors or regional editors of journals that nominate articles, and not be part of the current Division’s leadership team.

Overall, the Heath Award Committee shall be composed of 7 persons (one Chair plus six members). Committee members should be willing to serve more than one period. When appointing or reappointing members, the Division’s leadership will take care that there is a normally a mix of sustaining and new members.

3. Assessment

First, the Chair of the Heath Award Committee will initiate the process in the summer preceding the award presentation * by inviting the editors of the key journals in the field (Annex 1) to nominate the three most impactful and innovative article published in their journal within the five previous years using an online form. ** Every editor shall provide the number of citations to date listed by Google Scholar and a PDF version of those three articles. Moreover, the Chair of the Heath Award Committee will announce a call for nominations for articles published in English within the same period in peer-reviewed communication journals or in journals covering other disciplines published by renowned academic publishers (with the exception of the public relations journals already covered above). All current members of the ICA PR Division are entitled to nominate one article using an online form. Self-nominations and nominations by advisees or advisors/mentors are not allowed. Members need to provide the number of citations to date listed by Google Scholar, a PDF version of the article for review purposes, and a short rationale (approx. ten lines of text) why the article is innovative. The Chair of the Heath Award Committee will evaluate these nominations and add a maximum of 8–10 articles to the list. This will result in a pool of peer-reviewed journal articles that have shown impact on the body of knowledge in the field of public relations and strategic communication.

Second, the articles will be distributed to all committee members for review. Each article should be evaluated by two committee members. The Chair of the Heath Award Committee will ensure that nobody will judge publications (co-) authored by him- or herself, by academic advisees or mentors, or by close colleagues and project partners. Committee members have to declare their impartiality. Each paper will be scored for its innovativeness (Scale: 1 not significant – 5 very significant) and it will be noted whether it is recommended for the award (no / maybe / yes). Innovativeness should be judged by the extent to which the article breaks new ground conceptually and theoretically (e.g., does it make a difference in how we think about, research, teach or practice public relations?)

Every committee member can nominate up to two articles. For each nominated article, she or he writes a short appraisal (approx. ten lines of text) why the article is innovative and impactful and deserves the award.

This will result in a shortlist of nominated articles.
Third, the shortlisted articles will be distributed to all committee members along with the appraisals, but without the scores. All committee members will vote on all shortlisted articles once again. They have one vote for the winner. In case of a tied result, the vote of the Chair of the Heath Award Committee will count twice.
This will result in a winning paper for the Robert Heath Award.

Finally, the Chair of the Heath Award Committee will inform the Division’s leadership team and – after approval – the winning author(s) and the editor of the respective journal. Winners must not be communicated prior to the award ceremony at the following ICA conference.

The overall timeline for the Awards process has been outlined in Annex 2.

* E.g. in summer 2022 for the 2023 award that will be given at the ICA 2023 conference.

** E.g. publication years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 for the 2023 award.

**Annex 1: Key journals in the field**

Editors of the following peer-reviewed journals shall be invited to nominate (ranked by Scopus index):
1. Journal of Public Relations Research
2. Public Relations Review
3. International Journal of Strategic Communication
4. Journal of Communication Management
5. Corporate Communications: An International Journal
6. Public Relations Inquiry
Annex 2: Overview of the timeline, articles and reviews needed

For each edition of the award

Committee setup and award announcement
- Call for nominations via the newsletter
  (personal invitations might be useful, done by Division head or existing Chair of the committee)
- Appointment of committee including Chair of the Heath Award Committee
- Annual ICA Conference: Informal committee meeting & Award announcement
- Call for nominations issued to journal editors and ICA PR members (via online form)

Preselection of impactful articles from the last five years
- Nominations by journal editors create a pool of impactful articles: 18 articles
  (6 journals x 3 articles) =
- Nominations by Division members (articles in other journals): 10 articles (max.)
  August
  pre-checked

First evaluation round
- Each article will be reviewed by 2 committee members
  - 7 committee members (including chair), so everyone needs to do 8 reviews: 56 reviews (max.)
    Each committee member needs to read 8 articles
    - Provide SCORE for 8 articles
    - NOMINATE 1-2 articles for the award
    - Add a SHORT RATIONALE for nominated articles only
    This will create a shortlist of min. 1 to max. 14 articles

Second evaluation round
- The shortlisted articles will be reviewed by all committee members: 1-14 articles
  Early January
  Each committee member will vote on the winning article based on rationales from the first round
  - Provide VOTE only (who shall receive the award?)
  This will identify the winning article 1 article (winner)

Award presentation
- Informing winners and motivate them to attend the annual ICA conference
- Prepare award document, press release and (if necessary) handover video with winners
- Announce and give award at ICA Annual Conference, PR Division Business meeting

Notes
- In the following editions of the award, a portion of the article pool identified by impact may remain unchanged, as five subsequent publication years will be considered. This means that some of the oldest articles (year 1 & 2 if the award will be given bi-annually) will leave the pool and the most recently published impactful articles be added. However, articles not previously nominated by editors might climb to the top in a journal if citation statistics for a specific year are evaluated at another point of time. Such articles would replace another article from the same journal and year in the pool.
- In any case, the workload will be less for sustaining committee members in following years, as they will have already read some articles.
- This also means that an article that was not selected as winner in a given year can still be judged differently in the next round, as the impact and freshness of some concepts or studies might be assessed differently over time.

*Note.* These guidelines have been prepared by the ICA PRD Heath Award Rules Committee (W. Timothy Coombs, Flora Hung-Baesecke, Betteke van Ruler, Bey-Ling Sha, Maureen Taylor, Chiara Valentini, Ansgar Zerfass) in 2020/21. They were approved by the members of the ICA PRD in the September 2021 referendum and thereby put into effect.