

# Women's Caucus Minutes

History of Science Society

Phoenix Meeting

20 November 2009

Co-Chairs: Marsha Richmond (Wayne State University), 2007-2009,

Susan Rensing (University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh), 2008-2010

Welcome and attendance sheet passed around

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## Old Business: Announcements

- Women's Caucus sponsored session for the meeting: "Women's Strategies for participating in Science," 9:00am Friday morning.
- Childcare initiative news (Gina Rumore, GECC)

The GECC has done a wonderful job putting a structure in place for a collaborative/cooperative child-care system that can be used in the future.

Gina: GECC developed this structure in co-operation with HSS, responding to liability issues. They sent an email out to folks, advertising a commons room was available unofficially for childcare. No takers on childcare this year. In part this may be because the call went out too late for those planning on attending to be able to count on child-care. Gina calls for ideas?

- Need to start earlier to arrange childcare plans. -See how much real interest there is, then HSS can step up.
- Jay Malone looking for anecdotal comments to collect about needs from members.
- Other societies that do this? Gina had a bad experience at another conference. Karen Reeds: "25 years ago she dealt with this same issue, she is sorry that it is still a problem." Still, we have a strong group of people committed to this issue. Anecdotal info and suggestions should go to GECC or Gina Rumore. System is in place, so now we can start earlier.
- Separate infant from childcare? No. It's a co-operative, which works around legal issues. Must have 2 adults present at all times.
- Introductions of members
- Mentorship program news (Thanks for Taika Dahlbom and Joan Cadden)

The mentorship program arose from a suggestion by the Women's Caucus in 2007. This program provides mentors who are paired with those attending HSS for the first time, and especially junior folks, at a reception held the first night of the meeting. The aim is to introduce new members to the society and provide tips that might make the experience more enjoyable. Taika, with huge support from Joan Cadden, has run the program brilliantly and it was a complete success this year as well as last year. She will provide a fuller report later.

For next year, Taika needs to be replaced. GECC is accepting self-nominations for this position. If Joan is not interested in continuing in her role of connecting volunteers to be mentors with

new mentees, WC will also need a replacement. The system is now well established, and so it does not involve a great deal of organizing. However, the process needs to be initiated by September, so that the relationships between mentors and mentees are formed weeks before the conference.

### **Employment survey (Jacqueline Wernimont)**

Collaborative effort with GECC and Women's Caucus. On-line survey was developed this year. We sent out invitations to participate in the survey to 100 job and fellowship opportunities. We received self-reporting responses from 33 and were able to determine some information regarding another 6 jobs. Therefore we had data on 38/100 jobs. 77% of jobs were temporary or post-doc. 19: HPS was primary. 84% said PhD in hand required. Gender disparity was not apparent overall as a trend. 5 permanent jobs: 4 went to women. It is still a problem that institutions are unwilling to report regarding gender as well as minority status. No minority candidates. On-line ads for jobs are mandatory, often exclusively. Full report will be published in the January newsletter and will be available on the GECC blog.

Discussion:

Q: In the past, there was tracking of teaching vs. other kinds of academic jobs.

A: This year HSS only tracked academic jobs, rather than science writing, etc. But hard to capture those jobs, since not necessarily advertised on H-Net.

Q: Has there been a reduction on tenure track jobs over the years?

A: Last 5 years = decrease. But, not a decrease since 1973. So, yes and no. Overall, there is a steady and small # of tenure track jobs.

Much appreciation to Jacque for doing a fantastic job with the survey. Employment survey has been done by the WC since 1973. It is a lot of work to do this. Volume of data is unsatisfying, 38% response rate. Questions remain on how to get better reporting.

Q: Can we tap human resources?

A: No: HR representatives claim they are not authorized to respond. Need to sleuth and find the dept. person who did the hiring/search committee person. Shouldn't be this disconnect, but there is.

Q: Can we search by people who get the jobs and apply for them?

A: How to do that?

Q: What about the job wiki?

A: Good idea, but once people get jobs, people don't tend to read it anymore.

Q: What about contacting depts. with lots of grad students to report.

A: Good idea.

Q: How about approaching Diversity committees?

A: Hard to sleuth all this info with just a couple of people working on the survey. How to pool resources?

Q: How about using the GECC blog?

Q: Separate out “who got the job” from “who applied, how many, etc.” Separate out easy questions from hard questions.

A: This results in uneven data, which ends in a weird report. History of Science is porous.

Q: How about HSS asking institutions to provide data to us about any position they advertise on the society’s website?

Q: What about collaborating with the American Historical Association?

A: Need to do this, but how? Should this be in new business? Yes. [Note: Please see the Follow-up Report from the GECC, below.]

- Women in Science website (Report from Georgina Montgomery (Michigan State University) regarding the Women in Science Digital Collections initiative)

After Judith Zinnzer, who created the Women in Science website lost support for hosting it, Michigan State University stepped up with Matrix (which hosts H-Net) to take it over and transferred pages over. Mostly these were related to mathematics in the 18th century. Goal is to have primary resources on-line. Challenge now is to try to expand more primary resources. Looking for biographical info on women scientists. Site has been expanded w/ MSU collections: cookbooks, historian of food, women in botany collection. Georgina has sent out 2 announcements in HSS newsletter for more individuals to contribute source material, but so far has had few responses. She called for submissions in order to expand the site. It has the potential to grow large. Her goal is to apply for grants to underwrite project, but she needs others invested to help with the project. Rights and copyrights issues will be handled by MSU. This is a chance to showcase one’s own scholarship.

Discussion: Suggestion: Mostly likely funding is NSF K-12 Education \$\$\$. This audience will be most important for funding. Kids need to write reports on scientists. Call for folks to get involved. Going to be a great project!

Suggestion: Contact European Research Council for their sources. Also, add link to this site at HST program websites. For further information, contact Georgina: [montg165@msu.edu](mailto:montg165@msu.edu)

- Ida Stamhuis (Free University, Amsterdam): Women’s Commission of the International Union for HPS.

Every 4 years the IUHPS has a meeting. The last one was July 2009 in Budapest, and the next one will be in Manchester in 2011. Commission established by Margaret Rossiter and Sally Kohlstedt. Current President re-elected. Small council that organizes meetings and symposia. European conference of history of science is next year in Barcelona. This organizes off-year meetings as well. Next meeting will be in Paris. Please look for announcements of these meetings. Contact Ida about this if you’re interested: [stamhuis@nat.vu.nl](mailto:stamhuis@nat.vu.nl)

- Discussion about how to provide sufficient funding for the annual breakfast costs.

HSS provides \$300 annually, and while the costs vary each year depending on the hotel, it's generally around \$900. Thus, the WC needs c. \$600 in donations to cover the costs of breakfast for the 60-odd members who regularly attend. This year's donations are under that amount, despite the kind generosity of several individual donors.

Up until a few years ago, the WC breakfast was funded by HSS. In 2007, donations covered expenses, but last year the Society had to make up for a shortfall. This year donations raised via registration again are less than costs, which averages \$12/person, but we calculate that \$15/person will allow us to cover the costs of grad students.

Discussion: Many people noted that it wasn't clear on the HSS annual meeting Registration page that the "donation" to the Women's Caucus fund was for the breakfast, and hence they did not contribute. Suggestion: collect this year, for next year's breakfast, so that people don't forget. Another person suggested that we pass the hat now, so that we can cover this year's costs. This resulted in \$245 collected! [Note: The final tally by the Executive Office is: the breakfast cost \$928 and with HSS's \$300 contribution, the Women's Caucus took in \$1148. So, that leaves \$220 to carry over for the 2010 breakfast meeting in Montreal.]

Suggestion: We need to have the Executive Office revise the Registration page for next year's meeting to make clear the "donation" to the Women's Caucus is to cover the cost of breakfast, and suggest that members contribute a minimum of \$15 (and that additional donations will cover graduate student costs).

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## New Business

- A discussion about the current status of women in the profession (Betty Smocovitis (University of Florida))

Betty noted patterns in the invitations lists, guest lecturers, panels, etc. for the various events connected with the Year of Darwin that showed gender disparity. It would appear that many events had gender imbalance. This seems like a disturbing pattern for the Darwin year, but no hard statistics. A few conferences were better, but these were often organized by women. The content of the scholarship is also frequently gendered toward reinforcing an ideological bent towards the "great men of science" notion. She wondered whether other folks in WC have also been noticing a recent trend towards gender disparity.

Discussion: Those invited to participate in high-profile events are often senior figures in the field, and hence the list partly reflects age imbalance as well. Many of the organizing committees tend to invite prominent figures and are often unwillingly to extend invitations to young scholars, which then crosses over into gender. Status is thus also part of the phenomenon.

Suggestion: Should the WC publish an editorial in the HSS newsletter about this topic? Another complication is that there is no similar women's caucus within other organizations, such as ISHPSSB (International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology), and philosophers do not seem as interested in women's issues.

The history of the Women's Caucus is interesting to note in this regard. In 1973, when the Women's Committee was first formed, there were very few women in the profession. Now, although there are a lot of women in the history of science and women are well represented on society committees and various leadership positions, women can still often be sidelined. Perhaps this is an off-shoot of the anti-affirmative action era? Recent trends seem to indicate that young people should not get complacent. We still have to be vigilant about promoting women within the profession and focusing on gender issues.

Q: Should we designate folks who might want to encourage the formation of an ISHPSSB women's committee? A: Yes.

Suggestion: We need more women on organizing committees. Arguments based on numbers are not effective. Conferences favor prestige and authority. Response: There were women who were more qualified who were not being invited.

Crosstalk: Given the current status of women in the profession, what should be the future direction of the Women's Caucus? What problems and issues should we focus on, and how should we best proceed in the future?

Suggestion: Use listserv to further this discussion.

- Recognition of members who have passed away this year.

Olga Amsterdamska passed away this year. Ida Stamhuis noted that she worked in science studies and the history of biology.

- Nominations and election of a new Senior Co-Chair

Karen Rader nominated. Any other nominations? None offered. Call for vote: unanimous. Meeting adjourned.

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## Follow-up Report to the WC from the Graduate and Early Career Caucus

(Jacque Wernimont)

With respect to the childcare initiative and the job survey, the GECC would like to formalize our collaborative efforts. Gina Rumore, who will be taking over as co-chair of the GECC (along with Lynnette Regouby), will continue to be the lead from the GECC on this issue. We would like to suggest that she have an equal partner from the Women's Caucus to help manage the work load and to continue to develop the program. I am not sure how we should select or encourage a volunteer and we welcome any thoughts that you have.

On the Employment Survey, at the GECC business meeting we discussed organizing a short online meeting with the major participants in the survey (GECC, Women's Caucus, HSS Exec, and perhaps CoRP) to discuss the goals for the survey in the coming year. I had a brief conversation with Jay about this at the meeting, and we discussed the possibility of applying for grant funding to get someone with more professional statistics experience to evaluate the survey and offer us ideas for going forward. In addition to this conversation, we would like to discuss the best way to manage the work that the employment survey requires. There were a number of very good recommendations for how to improve the survey put forth during the annual meeting, but I am wary of having this task grow further. At the same time, it seems silly to put in so much work for data that seem pretty

unsatisfactory to many. Would it be possible to also have an official WC collaborator who can participate in these conversations and the work of improving the survey?

We would also like to have a discussion about who will be in charge of this project next year. I'm now ex officio on the GECC and would consider joining a group of people working on the survey. I think this is really too large of a project to simply fall to one of the chairs of the GECC given the volume of programming that we continue to do over the year. It may be that part of what the GECC needs to consider is having a person on the committee who is dedicated to this task, but we'd like to talk more about that possibility.

The GECC would love to hear any suggestions/thoughts/recommendations that you might have on either childcare or the employment survey.