Spring 1979

A Sampling of Regional and Caucus Reports to the February CC Meeting

The Feminist Press

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grams? Can we formulate strategies for combating homophobia on campuses? In the community? Chris Bose and Elaine Reuben also offered introductory remarks from the perspective of their own work experiences, Reuben commenting that "women's studies is the lesbian of the disciplines." The discussion took cerebral, personal, and emotional turns, and ended with an acknowledgment from Bunch of the inevitable pain of confronting this issue. We will put up with the pain, she advised, only so long as our work is valuable to us.

After dinner, the meeting stretched on until midnight, encompassing such topics as the viability of caucuses within NWSA, the future of the Association's relationship with The Feminist Press, and an agenda for the Delegate Assembly at Kansas. At the closing session on Sunday morning, Council members established the National Coordinator's salary; discussed procedures for electing the new Steering Committee in Kansas; evaluated the site and process of the weekend's meetings; and assigned implementation of remaining tasks. Several Council members agreed to chair committees or take on special tasks of the Council: Barbara Parker (Rocky Mountain/Southwest Region) will convene the Standing Conference Committee, whose immediate task is to confirm a 1980 Convention location; Lori Gold (Southeast Region) will facilitate a Job Exchange at the Kansas Convention; Kay Towns (Mid-Atlantic Region) will organize the agenda and the development of pertinent position papers for the Delegate Assembly—which will be chaired by Toni McNaron (Lesbian Caucus) and Shauna Adix (Southwest Region); Barbara Hillyer Davis (Treasurer) accepted the position of temporary chair of the Finance Committee.

Icy runways, long ticket lines, delays, and what turned into the worst snowstorm in fifty-seven years of D.C. history faced departing Council members. Though the weekend perhaps failed to achieve what one Council member described as "the euphoria of Maiden Rock," the Council had nevertheless confronted both the vision and the dues. The National Coordinator, the Steering Committee, and the Conference Coordinators deserve special thanks for their commitment to reward expectations now turned toward a spectacular First Annual Convention.

**NWSA Coordinating Council Meeting Participants, February 1979**

Council members: Clare Bright (Northwest); Jan Meriwether (North Pacific); Billie Wahlstrom, Lilyan Frank (Pacific Southwest); Barbara Parker (Rocky Mountain/Southwest); Evelyn Beck, Sandra Moore (Great Lakes); Barbara Taylor (South Central); Moira Ferguson (Midwest); Maija Blaubergs, Lori Gold (Southeast); Kay Towns (Mid-Atlantic); Judith Fetterley (New York); Barbara Jacobs-kind, Pat Gozemba (New England); Susan Cayleff, Pamela Farley (Lesbian Caucus); Susan Shaffer (K-12 Caucus); Elizabeth Baer (Student Caucus). Council Alternates: Linda Dolive (North Central); Jeanne Ford (South Central); Elizabeth Kincaid-Ehlers (New York). Chris Bose (Secretary); Barbara Hillyer Davis (Treasurer); Emily Abel, Debby Rosenfelt (Conference Committee); Florence Howe, Shirley Frank (Women's Studies Newsletter); Donna Allen, Jo Gillikin (Newsletter Advisory Committee); Elaine Reuben (Coordinator); Sharon Hagan, Donna Whittlesey, Denny Johnson-Claggett (National Office); Mary Shippley (stenographer).

**A Sampling of Regional and Caucus Reports to the February CC Meeting**

**Midwest Regional Report**

The Midwest has continued its efforts toward strengthening regional and national membership, adopting a constitution, and planning for the National Convention to be held in our region from May 30 to June 3, 1979, at Lawrence, Kansas. At the October steering committee meeting we decided to postpone a regional meeting until after the national meeting. At the Overland Park, Kansas, steering committee meeting, April 14-15, we had hashed out the state versus regional orientation of the group, taking into account that Iowa had opted not to send a representative. We had also discussed guidelines for drawing up our constitution and the state of our regional finances.

By the time of our next steering committee meeting, on October 13-14, in Kansas, our constitution had been drawn up. The constitution is now in final form for ratification by the members of the Midwest regional summer meeting, to be held in conjunction with the National Convention in May.

**New York Regional Report**

Although the constitution states that national membership is not required for regional membership, we strongly urge the support of the national organization since we recognize that the existence of the regional organization is dependent on the strength of the national organization.

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**New York Regional Report**

The major activity during the past year has been the planning of and organizing for our second regional conference, to be held on March 23-25 in Dryden, New York, at Tompkins Cortland Community College. At our previous regional conference, October 1977, we made a decision to focus future regional conferences around issues of particular interest to our various constituencies, e.g., community and two-year colleges, lesbian women, Third World women.

In addition, a decision was made at the previous conference to provide time and...
NWSA NEWS AND VIEWS

space at the beginning of the next conference for lesbian women to meet and share discuss the problems specific to their situation. The discussion which preceded this decision was intense, involved, and lengthy. The major concern expressed was how the nonlesbian women would feel—excluded, overwhelmed, in the midst of a lesbian plot, when they had simply hoped for some useful syllabi, etc. The solution to this concern was to run a workshop on homophobia for nonlesbian women concurrent with the meeting of the lesbian caucus. Both meetings will take place Friday evening at the start of the conference. The model seems admirable. It provides an opportunity for lesbian women to identify each other early in the conference so that the possibilities of networking for support, information, etc., are maximized. Equally important, it provides an opportunity for confronting tension-producing phenomena directly and immediately rather than indirectly and belatedly; and it provides a mechanism whereby the conference itself can function as a kind of large-scale CR group dealing with central feminist issues and infusing a certain level of consciousness into the entire proceedings of the conference....

The program for the conference was developed by means of an initial flyer inviting proposals. Response was superb—almost 30 proposals....

Our coordinating council, based on the model of the NWSA Coordinating Council, is made up of representatives from the various constituencies, delegates at large (2), and subregional coordinators (4). The two NWSA Coordinating Council representatives are members ex officio. Since the formation of our coordinating council at our first regional conference in October 1977, we have had four meetings...in the homes of coordinating council members at minimal expense....

The New York Region is well organized. It should be noted, however, that membership on the NYWSA coordinating council is heavily upstate. There is a definite need for a subregional organization for New York City and environs. (Judith Fetterley)

NORTHWEST REGIONAL REPORT

... NWWSA currently has about 100 members and a treasury of approximately $700. This represents considerable growth from a year ago. The association was revitalized by the holding of the October 1978 conference (after a two-year lapse) and the election of an enthusiastic steering committee which is dedicated to building a viable organization responsive to the needs of women’s studies programs and individuals in the region....

Planning is under way for the NWWSA conference next fall, which will take place in the Moscow, Idaho/Pullman, Washington, area. Funding is being sought from the state humanities commissions to supplement our meager regional budget. The planning committee hopes to put together a conference which will reach women studies scholars; women in politics, service, outreach; and women searching for community.... (Clare Bright)

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGIONAL REPORT

... Most of the people who have worked hard within the region for the past two years have burned out, resigned, or are presently working on the National Conference. New members have been mostly students who get trained, work, and then move away.... In order to overcome some of the problems within the region, we have had meetings of all sizes and made numerous telephone calls. We even had one meeting attended by steering committee members and the Conference Coordinators which was facilitated by an outside person. The only regular ongoing activity of the region is the newsletter, which is published every other month.... (Lilyan Frank)

ROCKY MOUNTAIN/SOUTHWEST REGIONAL REPORT

The Rocky Mountain/Southwest Region of NWSA is one which remains a challenge to NWSA. The region has not yet formed a stable organization. In part this is a result of a number of geographic boundaries. The four-state area covers an enormous land area, is divided by a mountain range, and there is little in our daily lives that provides links of any kind. We share no athletic conferences; the areas for professional organizations exclude certain states in our region, and most often include others, particularly Wyoming; we are not all in the same HEW region; and there is very little else to bind us beyond our interest in feminist education....

There have been two attempts since the Founding Convention to organize this region. One was an experimental newsletter started by Gail Baker at the University of New Mexico. That effort failed.... The second regional effort also failed—a regional conference planned for Fall 1977 in conjunction with a conference already planned for Utah....

Colorado has been very fortunate to have a strong state organization, which we have used as a springboard for NWSA. Colorado is the one state in this region which has had fairly stable administrations for women’s studies programs....

The late-breaking news which practically discounts everything written above is that The Ford Foundation has funded the Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROWN). The base of the Institute is the University of Arizona, and we can all thank Myra Dinnerstein for the work she has contributed to making this happen. It can mean wonderful things for this region because the funds are designated for the four-state NWSA region, and the money has been granted for almost all of the things which we so desperately need. The money is primarily for travel to bring people together, for a regional newsletter, and for research seminars. There is also money for an organizational meeting of key people in this region, which will probably occur in the fall. The grant does not begin until the summer, but Myra Dinnerstein suggests that people in this region should plan a preorganizational meeting at Kansas in May. (Barbara Parker and Shauna Adix)
SOUTHERN CENTRAL REGIONAL REPORT

The South Central Women's Studies Association includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. A small group of women from those states met at the NWSA Founding Convention and became the first steering committee for the regional association. The current membership includes more than 200 people. Regional dues are $5 per year.

The steering committee has met twice to plan the 1979 conference, which is scheduled to be held at Texas Women's University in Denton on April 20-22. The SCWSA Newsletter, published six times a year, is about to begin its second volume with the February issue.

The SCWSA has, like the National Women's Studies Association, operated on a tenuous budget. Two members made loans (later repaid, with interest) to the association from their personal savings so that we could finance the first conference. One of the same people has advanced money again for the costs incurred in arranging the second conference. Our fund raiser has written a letter which will go to area businesses, foundations, and other philanthropic sources, along with a sample copy of the newsletter. We have modest hopes that her efforts will bring in extra funds, but we are counting only on dues, T-shirt sales, and any small amounts of money cleared after conference expenses are paid.

A problem even more serious than financial uncertainty is the lopsidedness of our membership distribution. The vast majority of SCWSA members are from Texas. The next largest group (though only a fraction of the Texas contingent) comes from Oklahoma; Arkansas has a scattered few; and Louisiana is almost totally unrepresented in the regional association. Nobody from Louisiana attended the Founding Convention, and we have no state coordinator for Louisiana on the steering committee.

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL REPORT

The annual regional conference will be held February 23-25, 1979, at Johnson City, Tennessee. Tennessee was chosen as the site of the conference, as it is the only state in the Southeast Region that has ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. At the conference, the Southeast Region will vote on the following recommendations [about the state of Virginia] as options and subsequently make a recommendation to NWSA concerning a possible change in the regional boundaries:

(a) The entire state stays in the Mid-Atlantic Region.
(b) The entire state moves to the Southeast Region.
(c) There is some sort of geographical division of the state between the two regions.

(Maija Blaubergs)

LESBIAN CAUCUS REPORT

... The lesbian newsletter call for workshops, and the work done by caucus representatives and others to generate proposals, have resulted in much activity and planning for the Convention in Kansas. After collating, synthesizing, and developing proposals for participation in the four sessions the caucus has been allocated for the Convention, we have devised four thematic divisions: Lesbian-Feminist Projects—Community Alternatives; Curriculum and the Classroom Experience; Teaching and Researching Lesbian History; Lesbian Culture—Our Voices. In addition to the sessions sponsored by the caucus, several were passed on to the planning committee.

Activities planned for the spring include a newsletter, a hospitality room at the Convention and a handout on information and events of interest to lesbians, planning caucus meetings and elections, and making a programmatic meeting available to caucus members on questions toward the development of a sense of lesbian feminist aesthetics in lesbian experience, as a means of internal education and developing material for future sessions open to anyone.

STUDENT CAUCUS REPORT

Undeniably, the caucus has several problems. By its very nature, the student caucus is composed of NWSA members without travel budgets, without mailing budgets, without, in many cases, a sense of what a caucus is, how it should function, without administrative skills to make the caucus a vocal force within the Association and for feminist education.

On the other hand, an Association that exists "to promote feminist education at every level and in every setting" would be very one-sided if it were composed of faculty and not of students. Student issues are very real: distributive credit, loans for part-time students, potential careers for women's studies majors, appropriate feminist on-campus day-care facilities. Students need support from NWSA and NWSA needs the voice of students.

What, then, are possible structures, approaches to fuller student participation? Perhaps the caucus, as it is being developed, should be envisioned as a presence at meetings, Conventions, in policy-making; this would give students a voice, an official channel, but not require them to function on a nationwide basis between Conventions. Another possibility is to have students participate in the caucus and/or Association on an internship basis; in a sense, this would allow NWSA to function as an educational institution within its own ranks and to promote feminist education in a very real way: by instructing students in feminist politics, by giving them a paradigm for building networks and for gaining administrative skills. (Elizabeth Baer)