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History of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession

Records archived at the National Council of Teachers of English indicate that the origins of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession dates back to 1978. The early group of 139 members called themselves the “4Cs ? Exchange.” Their stated purpose was “sharing.... listening....thinking....responding....laughingplanning” and they convened at the women’s luncheon in Kansas City. The minutes of this meeting indicate that the group had first convened the year earlier in 1977 in Philadelphia. Additionally, the group published a newsletter with the intent of acknowledging the impact of all the feminist energy and commitment within the group, to channel some of the humanistic power swirling “over luke-warm soup, limp lettuce and greasy chicken,” and to assert a founding momma’s right to defer to the energy and vision of the young.

The group asked the CCCC officers to authorize a “4C’s Women’s Committee with members not to be designated 4Cs chair. Items of business included circulation of letters explaining why 4C’s would not assemble in convention cities located in states that had failed to ratify the ERA; passing a resolution on Sexism in Language,” creating a liaison between the committee and the 4Cs officers, and editing the newsletter.

Additionally, the group sponsored sessions at the annual meeting that concerned issues of interest to women. They questioned the masculinist format of reading papers/lecturing in panel presentations; made efforts that supported, highlighted and disseminated feminist work in the discipline; and coordinated a hospitality/discussion hour with wine and cheese.

Evidence suggests that the group continued to work informally and openly until records indicate in 1989 that it was officially listed as a standing committee under its current name. By this time the Committee’s work included offering a half-day Women’s Open House for the purpose of informal networking and “R and R” for CCCC women; submitting a proposal for a half-day preconvention workshop, “Demarginalizing Women’s Ways of Writing”; and sponsoring a SIG session to elicit proposals for Committee work from CCCC women and to form CCCC panels; have a women’s table in the exhibitor’s hall; send a copy of the “Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications” along with a cover letter to members of the Association of Departments of English. Minutes indicate that the Committee, even then, was seeking ways to determine the need for daycare at CCCC conventions.

A gap in history exists in that which has been recorded in the archives until 1994. Then Chair of the then officially named Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, Elizabeth Flynn requested an investigation of the feasibility of conducting a study of the status of women in CCCC and sponsored two sessions at the 1995 CCCC that were coordinated by the committee. The sessions focused on issues such as discrimination, harassment, and diversity.

Throughout the second half of the 1990s, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession worked in three primary areas: 1) support scholarly and feminist work in composition/rhetoric by sponsoring proposed sessions for the CCCC convention, which included a proposal to institute an Outstanding Article on women’s Issues in Composition Award; provide SIG and other fora for women to discuss the material conditions of their professional lives; and provide moral support and leadership to the preconvention Feminist Workshop.

Chairs on the record include

Karen Hollis 1987-1990

Elizabeth Flynn 1994-1996

Joy Ritchie 1997-2000

Heather Bruce 2001-2006

Eileen Schell 2007- present

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