Gender and Education Committee
Comparative and International Education Society

Feedback report to CIES President and CIES Board of Directors

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Introduction

This report comprises feedback from a number of Gender and Education Committee (GEC) current and former chairpersons on how CIES can best support the work of this committee. At the request of CIES President Maria Teresa Tatro, a short email was sent to committee members who have served or are currently serving as chairs over the years (total N=11). The email asked for responses to the following questions:

1. How can CIES help support the work done by the Gender Committee?
2. How can CIES help make the work of the Gender Committee more visible?
3. Any other ideas / suggestions?

An open exchange of responses followed, with members sharing and expanding upon each other’s comments. All responses were gathered within approximately ten days.

Feedback and Recommendations

Based on the above questions, respondents provided a number of thoughtful ideas and insights which have been divided into five themes: 1) the role of the committee; 2) the annual CIES conference and Gender and Education Committee events; 3) monitoring gender equity in CIES; 4) information collection, access, and use; and 5) governance. Background information, feedback, and suggestions relating to each of these themes will be discussed below.

Roles of the Gender and Education Committee

As stated in the CIES constitution, the purpose of the GEC is “to foster attention to gender issues in the CIES and promote the inclusion and professional development of women.” The GEC fulfills these responsibilities by serving as a monitor of gender equity in various CIES activities and also by creating a rich program of presentations, workshops, and discussions on gender and education research, which take place during the CIES conference. In addition, the GEC serves as a networking hub for CIES members who are interested in and/or conduct research on gender and education.

In order for CIES to support the GEC’s activities and initiatives, it is important to first acknowledge and understand the GEC’s function within the organization.
Additionally, recognizing the roles of the GEC provides useful context for this report, since many of the respondents’ comments and suggestions relate to facilitating the GEC’s ability to perform these roles. Specific details about the GEC’s participation in the annual CIES conference and its work as a gender equity monitor will be addressed in the following sections.

**CIES Conference and GEC Events**

Committee chairs expressed a keen interest in receiving support from CIES for the annual Gender Symposium and Workshops. One of the most basic ways CIES can support these events is through event logistics. Responses on this point included the following direct quotes:

- The G&E Committee is one of the most visible in the Society. It would help if CIES conference organizers give it a large room to organize the conference workshop and/or symposium. In 2010, the assigned room for the symposium was hopelessly small and difficult to locate.
- Provide adequate time/space in program for GC events.
- Promote the symposium/workshop prominently in the conference program, website, and on site.
- Highlight GC events in programming.
- Avoid scheduling conflicts in the conference with the New Scholar’s workshops (as many of the new scholars would attend the gender symposium), the board meetings (since the GC almost always has active members of the committee on the board), and other gender sessions.

In addition to the above responses, several chairs expressed a desire to have a reliable plan for allocating conference space to the GEC and promotion of GEC events in the conference program rather than having to renegotiate these terms year after year. One suggestion for facilitating this process is to have GEC members “serve on the subsequent CIES Conference Program Advisory Committee.” This would help the GEC coordinate event logistics with CIES and would also provide the GEC a platform for keeping CIES informed about its ongoing work.
A final suggestion on the topic of the annual conference was for CIES to provide more financial support to the GEC for the purpose of inviting scholars from outside of the United States to participate in the Gender Symposium and Workshops. There were a few different suggestions for how to go about increasing funding for visiting speakers. First, the funding formula for inviting speakers could be based on the committee’s membership size. A second suggestion was to up the amount currently offered (around $300) to: “Two nights lodging in the conference hotel, waiver of registration fee, flight assistance up to $1000, support for applications to the Open Society and UREAG Travel funds for speakers.” A third suggestion was for CIES to set aside general funding for speakers from economically poor countries whose areas of expertise would be of interest to the GEC as well as other committees or Special Interest Groups in the organization. That way, the visiting speaker could participate in multiple events (including the Gender Symposium) benefitting a wide range of CIES members. Regardless of the way funding is set aside for this purpose, one respondent astutely pointed out that there is frequent discussion about wanting diverse participation in events but a lack of resources often prohibits the participation of scholars from low-income countries. Increasing CIES’ financial support in this capacity would help encourage more diverse involvement.

Monitoring Gender Equity in CIES

As one of the committee chairs mentioned in her response, “The gender committee began...to assess inequalities in the conference representation of men and women, and to challenge the society to be more gender equitable. CIES has made great strides in this.” Along these lines, many respondents offered excellent suggestions as to how CIES can support the GEC in their continued efforts to advocate for gender equity. Suggestions included:

- Collect gender information\(^1\) through the conference registration system so that the GEC and others can easily pull reports on the gender

\(^1\) The GEC acknowledged that a simple “male or female” designation on registration materials does not adequately capture gender information for all CIES members or
make-up of participants, paper submitters, presenters, panel chairs, discussants, invited speakers, and award recipients. This is common practice for other professional societies.

- Collect gender information in the general CIES membership application. Again, this would assist the GEC in efficiently providing accurate information to the Board of Directors, including an annual gender count of CIES membership.
- With CIES support, continue monitoring the publication of women scholars in the *Comparative Education Review*. This already takes place in collaboration with *CER* editors, but the process could be improved upon and/or expanded.
- Support the GEC in monitoring the gender of award nominees and recipients.

All in all, chairs of the GEC acknowledged the progress that has been made toward resolving gender disparities in CIES activities, and they are motivated to continue monitoring gender dynamics within the society so as to further this progress.

Archival and Membership Information

Several respondents to the email mentioned wanting CIES support for the collection, storage, and secure access of a few types of information useful to the GEC. First, CIES could offer support in archiving materials from past GEC symposia and business meetings. Specifically, CIES could make secure, private space available on their server for the storage of GEC documents. Storing and passing down these documents to future GEC leaders will help maintain the historical memory of the committee and will thereby support continuity and consistency of GEC activities. Symposium programs for 2005 through 2010 are stored on the CIES website, but additional secure space would be needed for other archival documents.

Second, members expressed interest in receiving support (financial or otherwise) in updating and improving the Gender Directory. This would include creating an updated conference participants. One or more members of the GEC would happily volunteer to advise CIES on options for best practices in collecting this data.
membership directory with names and contact information of Society members with a gender or women’s studies interest. In addition, there has been discussion about how to make better use of the Gender Directory so that, as one respondent explained, “there can be more networking, and a more active give and take of ideas and announcements.” Keeping individuals’ contact information reasonably secure and private is a priority, but so is making information available to facilitate communication between members with similar interests.

**Governance**

To provide historical context, several chairs indicated that gaining status as a standing committee in the CIES constitution was no simple task for the GEC. Since receiving this status, the GEC has functioned with a good deal of autonomy and become a strong, self-governed committee with more than 200 members. As one respondent mentioned, “One of the wonderful developments of the G&E Committee over time is that its members have played a substantial role in electing their own leaders and that their leaders have been allowed to act with full discretion in organizing the committee’s program for the CIES conference.” Other chairs pointed out that the autonomous nature of the GEC is beneficial because it helps support the growth of a stable committee membership; promotes volunteerism, organizational longevity, continuity, and a strong sense of ownership; and maintains an environment of openness and democratic processes.

With the support of CIES, members of the GEC would like to preserve their governing autonomy in the following ways:

- By continuing the practice of allowing the full GEC membership to nominate and elect its leadership during the annual business meeting. Chairpersons are elected to serve three years, with a vice-chair serving for one year alongside the current leadership prior to taking on the chairship.
- By welcoming committee member nominees from the CIES president with the understanding that all members wishing to hold leadership positions in the committee are subject to the democratic election process of the committee.
• By ensuring that the language of the CIES constitution protects the governing processes mentioned above.

• By improving upon the educative process by which new CIES presidents and board members learn of the GEC’s history, ongoing work, and governing practices. Specific suggestions on this point included:
  
  o Invite a GEC chair to serve as “an ex-officio member of the board or participate in some portion of the annual board meeting.”
  
  o Encourage the board to “adopt a resolution that the standing committee chair(s) serve on the subsequent CIES Conference Program Advisory Committee serving President Elect.”

Taking these steps would foster a collaborative, supportive affiliation between CIES and the GEC and, in turn, would help the GEC in continuing to conduct the excellent work for which it has become known over the years.

Conclusion

The robust exchange of ideas that resulted in this report is an indication of the enthusiasm and commitment of GEC members to improving upon the work of the committee and to creating an environment in which committee activities can thrive. The respondents appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts in this format with President Tatto and the Board of Directors and look forward to continuing the discussion as to next steps for supporting the GEC.