A Short History of SWPA

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Historian

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By 1971, a few women had joined ASPA and it didn't take long for them to look for inclusion in programs and on committees. So in the 1973 convention, six resolutions about the status of women in ASPA were presented and adopted by National Council. A Task Force on Women was appointed to make recommendations. Based on their recommendations, National Council created the National Committee on Women in Public Administration (NCWPA) and Joan Fiss Bishop became its leader. One of the first goals was to provide grants to local chapters to promote women. (1974-75)



Nesta Gallas became the first woman President of ASPA during the 1976-77 term. By this time several women had been elected to National Council and were beginning to make an impact on the activities and management of ASPA.

In 1979, under Elaine Orr's editorship, The Right Word manual on neutralizing language to favor both male and female was published. Such words as aviatrix were listed as being unacceptable in this new world where women were beginning to take their place in positions previously reserved for men only. The 10th Anniversary of the NCWPA was celebrated in 1981. Joan Fiss Bishop, for whom the SWPA Leadership Award honors, passed away that year as well.

In the Fiscal Year 1983 budget presented in 1982, funding for ASPA's National Committee for Women in Public Administration was proposed for deletion. The recommendation also proposed that the committee be disestablished and the Committee seek section status. This news was very disturbing to members of the Committee, especially since the second women had been elected ASPA Vice President.

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In 1982, the ASPA conference was held in Honolulu, Hawaii, and a meeting of the Committee was to occur at the conference. Not all members of the Committee were able to attend, but input was sought from all members of the Committee as to what action should be taken on the proposed de-funding, disestablishment and seeking Section status. Nancy Keeley, a Committee member, quickly drafted a list of pros and cons gathered from one on one discussion with key ASPA women and her observations. It was recognized that women comprised approximately 20% of the ASPA membership, at that time around 20,000 members. The view was expressed that there was an active, vital segment of ASPA, both men and women, who supported the advancement of women as professionals in our field and the time had come to provide a special leadership training opportunity within ASPA. As these active women deliberated the next action to take, more women were being elected to National Council and making their voices heard.

After a lively discussion in the March 1982 Committee meeting with some members participating by conference call, those who were not in favor of a section were won over by the fact that the committee would have no funding and was recommended to be disestablished. At that point four of the National Council members Nancy Keeley from Ohio, Carol Gandy from California, Elaine Cinelli from Massachusetts, and Kathy Hensley from Virginia and South Carolina, sat down and wrote the first justification for becoming a Section to be presented to the National Council.

On May 25, 1982, the Chair of the National Committee for Women in Public Administration, Christine Gibbs (Springer), submitted the application for a Temporary Section for Women in Public Administration to the ASPA National Council. In just three months, more than enough ASPA members to start a section had indicated their support in writing for section status. The Committee met on July 9th, 1982 in Washington, DC to discuss the application for Section status and next steps. At the National Council meeting in July 1982, Section status was approved by the Council and a small budget provided for start up costs. Jana Bagwell was appointed Chair of the Committee by the ASPA President and continued as the first Chair of the Section. Carol Gandy was appointed by the ASPA President as the Chair-elect. Janice Flug was appointed Secretary-Treasurer of the new Section. The members of the Committee became the

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members of the new Section and mostly continued to work on the same projects they had been working on in the Committee. The Memorandum of Agreement between the Section for Women and ASPA was signed by the Section Chair on September 28, 1982 and by the ASPA Executive Director on October 13, 1982 and SWPA had been given birth. Jeanne Marie Col developed training materials to be used in the ten regional conferences to explain the Section's establishment and to recruit new members. In this same year, the Section was active in supporting and obtaining ASPA National Council support for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Through the years SWPA has provided opportunities for many women in ASPA to participate in roles they never dreamed of. Several of our members have now served as ASPA President. We've sponsored many developmental workshops and program sessions. Our annual social event and breakfast are highlights of the annual conference. The section has been recognized for its successes rather than for failures and is still a vibrant example of woman power in public administration. The Section's scholarships and awards have recognized a long list of contributors to the field of public administration in practice and academia.

As ASPA celebrated 75 years of service in the field of public administration in 2014, our women's section had just started its fifth decade of contributions and service with much to look forward to and challenges for each and every member to continue to move forward.

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