

Proposal – Women of Color Section

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Support: Signed petition of support by over 200 NCA members

Summary:

The proposed Women of Color Section will create and strengthen the intersectional unity of women scholars across disciplines in the Communication field. The National Communication Association (NCA) clearly concerns itself with honoring intersectional identities and embodied experiences in academia. This is evidenced across the 49 Divisions and 7 caucuses that NCA currently sponsors. These divisions and caucuses, however, still require women to dissect parts of their identity, rendering the totality of their identity invisible. More specifically, the current sections that NCA offers include the following: Communication Centers, Community College, Elementary and Secondary Education, Emeritus/Retired Members, Master's Education, Student, and Undergraduate College and University Sections. Once again, these sections establish fixed boundaries of scholarly identity regarding the resources scholars seek out, the objectives and commitments scholars hold, and the audiences that scholars serve to educate.

The proposed Women of Color Section is not just a space, but a platform for empowerment. It invites women scholars to make their full identities visible. This transformative place honors the full range of the embodied experiences of women of color in the academy. In doing so, women of color scholars in the Communication field will be able to network across disciplines, engage in discourse regarding best practices to excel and survive in academia, and learn to embrace and appreciate ourselves and one another for both our similarities and differences, emphasizing the totality of our experiences as we move through and work in higher education institutions.

Strategic Priorities Relevant to the Proposal

Goal 1: Create Conditions to Support and Empower Members

Objective 1.2 Enhance member access, engagement, and sense of ownership in the association.

Goal 3: Embrace and Enact Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

Objectives 3.1: Provide the tools for members to value and promote inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access within all disciplinary spaces and societal practices.

Objective 3.2: Create and improve structures, programs, practices, and policies within NCA that ensures all members can engage in the association and thrive in their professional pursuits.

Objective 3.3: Promote and advocate for inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in the field of Communication and within NCA.

Financial Implications

The proposed section will be given a budget from a pool of funds approved by the Legislative Assembly, distributed amongst each group depending on size. The minimum amount for a new section is \$500. Funds will be used to fund the initiatives of empowerment programs tailored to the unique challenges faced by women of color in academia. These programs may include leadership training, mentorship initiatives, skill-building workshops, and networking opportunities to enhance professional and personal growth. Additionally, funds will be allocated to educational initiatives to increase access to quality education and training opportunities for women of color. For example, this will involve travel stipends (grants) and service awards. This section plans to award a stipend to an outstanding woman of color student for excellence in service to their respective department and college. In addition, we plan to award an outstanding woman of color faculty members for their excellent service and mentorship in their respective departments and colleges.

Recommendation:

To endorse the Woman of Color Section.

Motion

To endorse the Woman of Color Section and forward to the Legislative Assembly for final approval at the November meeting.

Background/History

Women of color faculty and students face the burden of concrete ceilings. Given their intersectional identities, women of color academics consistently must endure and navigate spaces that exclude and limit their access to resources and support, whether those be pedagogical, financial, or mentorship. Such concrete ceilings in academia are prime reasons why women of color have been historically and culturally underrepresented in the academy, particularly in academic spaces like the National Communication Association. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW), "Only 5.2% of tenured faculty are Black women, and 6.6% are Latinx women at Bachelor's-granting institutions, and at the doctoral-granting institutions the rates are 4% and 4.6% respectively." These statistics expose a gap in educational and professional growth, which stems from the lack of educational resources and tools available to this population. This clearly indicates how equity continues to be a major concern for women of color in academia. Therefore, the statistics are not only alarming but necessitate space(s) for WOC within academic spaces, such as the largest communication association in the nation (NCA). Instituting this section will enable women of color in the communication field to build community across disciplines, increase resources for mentorship and professional opportunities, and encourage transparent discourse about how to navigate academic spaces as women of color, chipping away at these concrete ceilings.

The cause of the problems that women of color face can be attributed to the lack of space in academia and other academic institutions and organizations. While NCA has attempted to create other spaces of care; this is evidenced across the 49 Divisions and 7 caucuses that NCA currently sponsors. It's still not enough and we believe that NCA can do more to support women of color faculty and students. The formation of a Women of Color Section under NCA will provide a radical space of care for women of color who have long been excluded from academia and other academic spaces and organizations because of concrete ceilings. Such radical spaces of care will be able to lay the foundation for building healthier and community-oriented spaces that serve women of color faculty and students. In this proposal, we detail the necessity of the Women of Color Section by offering a summary and articulating our plan of programming, which includes mentorship, workshops, and financial implications. It is our belief that if NCA supports the creation of this Women of Color Section, we can finally begin to serve women of color academics with greater regard.

Exhibits/Supporting Materials

The proposed section will create opportunities for mentorship to both women of color faculty and students in academia. For decades, scholars have identified mentorship as an integral aspect that improves "socialization, orientation, and career progress." (Gibson, 2006, p. 64). And yet, these mentorship opportunities are often not readily available for minoritized women in higher education. In 2000, Johnetta Cole asserted that "The demands on women or minority faculty to mentor are intense. Most do this essential work generously; then find it ignored by those who evaluate them for promotion or tenure" ("Social Change Requires," p. 2). Two decades later, we still find ourselves at this academic impasse: a lack of spaces that provide opportunities to build those relationships for women of color. However, with the Women of Color Section, NCA can create an official space whereby minority faculty and students can seek and provide support and mentorship to one another. It is with this that the Women of Color Section can do the following: First, the NCA section will allow the historical work and efforts of minoritized faculty and students to finally be recognized, as members can identify their mentorship in an official capacity for annual reviews, tenure, and promotion, while students can identify their mentorship as a service to their discipline. Second, the section can provide traditional and alternative mentorship forms based on members' needs. For instance, some members might prefer the traditional hierarchical, one-on-one relationship, whereas others might want to take a more communal approach with mentorship across rank, age, race, ethnicity, etc. Either way, this section capacitates these opportunities for women of color in academia to explore and find community, support, and mentorship in an academic space that has not always privileged mentorship for women of color. We know that through the mentorship offered in this Women of Color Section at NCA, women of color faculty and students can turn to this group of women for recommendation letters, to discuss milestone progress, to share personal experiences, to collaborate on research, and to support each other along each of our own

academic and personal journeys.

Workshops

Given the lack of resources afforded to women of color faculty and students, the proposed Women of Color section at NCA will hold workshops to operate as a kind of space where women of color academics can receive resources and support. For example, this section plans to hold workshops on best practices for preparing job materials, navigating the job market, creating tenure dossiers, applying for scholarships/fellowships/grants, and offering pedagogical strategies/materials for the classroom. These skill-building practices via our section's workshops will be a pivotal step in mitigating the inequitable resources that women of color routinely must seek out individually, often increasing their burden of labor. With this, we believe NCA can help us create this communal space for support, resources, and networking by creating the Women of Color section, disrupting academia's longstanding practices of excluding and hindering women of color scholars from receiving this kind of professional support.