

## **A Brief History of the Society of Professors of Education**

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The Society of Professors of Education (SPE) was originally called the Society of College Teachers of Education (SCTE), and later (after 1909), the National Society of College Teachers of Education (NSCTE). Although records of the Society's earliest years have been reported lost, SPE traces its beginning to a meeting of the 1902 Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association in Chicago. The NSCTE's first organizational meeting was probably announced as a "special meeting" to be held on the morning of February 28, 1902, at the Auditorium Hotel in Chicago. The meeting took place after the adjournment of the annual conference of The National Society for the Scientific Study of Education, formerly the National Herbart Society, which met each year in conjunction with the Department of Superintendence (McMurry, 1902; Holmes, 1903). John Dewey (1859-1952) of the University of Chicago, Paul Henry Hanus (1855-1941) of Harvard, and Walter B. Jacobs (1861-1932) of Brown University were founding members of the Society (Hanus, 1937, pp. 229-230), as were James Earl Russell (1864-1945) and Frank McMurry (1862-1936) of Teachers College, Columbia University, Charles DeGarmo (1849-1934) of Cornell University, and Michael Vincent O'Shea (1866-1932) of the University of Wisconsin.

The Society was established before disciplinary specialization became the norm in North American universities. Its members have included U.S. and territorial commissioners of education, university and normal school presidents, deans of colleges of education, department chairs, normal school teachers and professors of education, history, philosophy, pedagogy, "the science and art of education," "the theory and practice of education," and so on. The Society was, and remains an interdisciplinary association, providing an intellectual home for people with expertise in history, philosophy, psychology, educational administration, teacher preparation, and elementary, secondary and higher education. William Kilpatrick, George S. Counts and Elwood P. Cubberley and Harold O. Rugg were NSCTE members. Psychologists Charles H. Judd, Edward L. Thorndike and Lewis Terman were also members of NSCTE. Philosophers W. C. Bagley, Henry Suzzallo, George Herbert Mead, and James Hayden Tufts were members, as were historians Paul Monroe and Issac L. Kandel. From the beginning, NSCTE members were geographically dispersed. Some members lived in large cities (Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Minneapolis, Washington, DC). Members also lived in Ann Arbor, Austin, Baton Rouge, Berkeley, Boulder, Cambridge, Charlottesville, Columbus, Denver, Des Moines, Eugene, Iowa City, Ithaca, Grand Forks, Morgantown, New Orleans, Norman, Portland, Purdue, Providence, St. Louis, and Urbana (NSCTE 1911).

The difficulties encountered by professors of education as they tried to gain a foothold in academe early in the 20th century were substantial (Hanus, 1934; Lagemann, 2000; Powell, 1980). The initial purpose of the Society was to "improve the work of the departments of education in colleges and universities of the country" by providing a forum for examining and evaluating the organization and content of courses in education. The Society also provided opportunities to examine the relationships between departments of education and other academic departments ("to the end that this relationship may be most harmonious and helpful") and to "discuss current educational theory so far as it is germane to the work of the members of the association" (NSCTE, 1911). In 1916, NSCTE President Charles Judd appointed a committee to re-draft the Society's constitution. The revised constitution, adopted in 1925, stated that the purpose of the NSCTE was to "promote and improve the teaching of education in the colleges and universities of the country." It also identified three general "fields for its operation": 1) problems of the administration of departments of education, 2) problems of the teaching and organization of courses in education, and 3) problems of research in the general field of education. As scientific management, behaviorism and quantitative research came to dominate the field of education, the Society deemphasized "theory" in its constitution, if not in its publications.

The Society's Constitution was revised again in 1948 and in 1969. The 1948 Constitution added two additional foci to those listed above: 4) problems of the general education of teachers, and 5) problems of specialization in teaching fields" (NSCTE, 1950, p. 8). At that time, the Executive Committee had set up a number of committees of members who worked together for three or four years to prepare papers and reports on specific areas of interest. Many of the Society's yearbooks and other publications have been the products of work conducted by committees formed to examine specific topics. In 1947, committees were established in 9 areas, including higher education, social foundations, historical foundations, curriculum construction and supervisory procedures, organization and administration, educational psychology, special methods and integration of theory and practice, general education, and education of adult educational personnel.

In 1969, the Society changed its name to the Society of Professors of Education, and reframed its mission: "to serve the education professoriate

through consideration of its tasks and problems" (SPE, 1998). The revised Constitution stated that the society shall emphasize the following:

1. Promotion of an increasingly comprehensive understanding of the relationship between education and the social complexities in which professors (and students) function;
2. Recognition and appropriate utilization of the inherent power and responsibility of the Society in voicing its interest in and concern for the realization of desirable educational ends;
3. Concern for fostering inquiry into the history, current status, and future alternatives of the education professoriate. (SPE Constitution and Bylaws, 1969)

Regarding membership, the SPE Constitution broadened the association's potential membership base. In 1925, membership was "confined to teachers and administrators in recognized colleges and universities who are engaged in teaching and research in education" (NSCTE, 1925). In contrast, the 1969 SPE Constitution (which still guides the Society's activities today) employed a language of inclusion: "Membership *shall be open to* all persons involved in the education of teachers and to those in related fields who are interested in furthering the objectives of the Society" (SPE, 1969, *emphasis added*).

Membership in the Society grew slowly and peaked in the 1940s. In 1911, there were 115 members. In 1913 there were 131 members. The following year, 20 new members were added to the membership list. In 1916 there were 249 members; 207 in 1923. By 1940, there were 551 NSCTE members. This dropped to about 350 in 1950, and then rose to 427 in 1967.<sup>1</sup> [For purposes of comparison, in mid-1902 the National Society for the Scientific Study of Education had 114 members. At the end of 1918, the National Society for the Study of Education, which had dropped the word "Scientific" from its name in 1911, listed 1050 members (Whipple, 1920).]

In 1902, annual membership dues cost \$2.00 (roughly \$44.84 in 2005 dollars). Dues remained \$2.00 until 1949, when they were raised to \$3.50. In 1993, regular membership was \$20 for regular members, \$5 for graduate students and emeriti. In 1995, the cost of annual dues for regular members was \$35. Graduate students and emeriti members paid \$15. In 2005, regular members paid \$40 and graduate students and emeriti paid \$25. SPE is also a Special Interest Group (SIG) within the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

The Society of College Teachers of Education produced and distributed a number of publications over the years. In 1907, reprints of Sutton and Holton's "The Department of Education and Other Departments in Colleges" (first published in the *Journal of Experimental Pedagogy*) were sent to members. The following year, the Society purchased and distributed *The History of Education as a Professional Subject* (Burnham and Suzzallo, 1908), first published by Teachers College, Columbia University. Early NSCTE publications included an array of topics and titles: *Observation and Practice Teaching in University Departments of Education* (1909); *The Aim, Scope and Methods of a University Course in Public Administration* (1910); *Research within the Field of Education, Its Organization and Encouragement* (1911); *Reports of Investigations by Members of the Society of College Teachers of Education* (1913) and *Practice Teaching for Teachers in Secondary Schools* (1917). Other NSCTE monographs included *The Direct Contribution of Educational Psychology to Teacher Training* (Pechstein, et al, 1932); *The Educational Frontier* (Kilpatrick et al, 1933); *The Emerging Task of the Foundations of Education: The Study of Man, Culture and Education* (Rugg, et al, 1950), and numerous yearbooks and proceedings published as *Studies in Education* and *School Review Monographs*. From 1911 to 1916, NSCTE conference programs, minutes, membership lists and proceedings were published, apparently with some difficulty, in the widely read *School Review*.

Monographs and occasional papers published by the Society of Professors of Education include *The Professor of Education: An Assessment of Conditions* (Bagley et al, 1975). *The Dean of Education and the Looking-Glass Self* (Wisniewski, 1979); *Civic Learning in Teacher Education* (Butts et al, 1983); *The Black Education Professoriate* (Bagley et al, 1984); *An Invitation to Wisdom and Schooling* (Bagley, 1985), and *Accountability and Assessment in Higher Education* (Johanningmeier, 1989). The Society currently publishes two journals - *Professing Education* (John M. Novak and Kenneth A. McClelland, editors) and *The Sophist's Bane* (Donna Adair Breault and Rick A. Breault, editors).

The Society of Professors of Education has established several awards to acknowledge the work of distinguished scholars and institutions. These include the Charles DeGarmo Lecture, the Mary Ann Raywid Award and Lecture, and the Richard Wisniewski Award for Teacher Education. SPE has published the DeGarmo Lecture since the award was established in 1975. The 2005 Mary Ann Raywid Award Lecture was published in *The Sophist's Bane*. A list of SPE award recipients and lecture titles is available on the Society of Professors of Education website. Efforts are underway to establish an online archive for NSCTE membership lists, minutes, conference programs and other documents that shed light on the Society's activities in the

early 20th century.

### **EndNotes**

I have gathered membership information from the following sources: NSCTE (1911), Alexander (1912), Alexander (1913), Alexander (1914), Wilson (1916), SCTE (1923), NSCTE (1950, p. 9) and VanTil (1983, p. 366).

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