

# What is the Value of a National Organization for Women in Science?

Written by Dr. Margaret Stone, a past National President and recipient of the Meritorious Service Award of SDE/GWIS. (This is revised from the Statement of Belief written in 1963 when Alpha Chapter was reactivated.)

## **1. WHY SHOULD WOMEN HAVE A SEPARATE ORGANIZATION?**

Historically Sigma Delta Epsilon was founded because women graduate students at Cornell noticed that the men in Gamma Alpha enjoyed their scientific fraternity very much. The members had a good deal in common and could happily share room and board. The women needed this even more. They needed the social contact and they also needed a place to live. It was hard to find a place for single girls to stay near campus. So during the early years of SDE they actually had a house where they lived together. The organization filled a real need of the time.

## **2. WHY DID IT CONTINUE TO GROW?**

Sigma Delta Epsilon continued to fill a need even as more housing became available. The social contacts and friendships continue to be important to members even now. This is true because of the very size of a university campus and the proliferation of scientific fields of research. There may be little communication between scientists in the same general field. It is a different kind of isolation but as formidable as in 1921.

## **3. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT NOW?**

Large scientific organizations give very little opportunity for women to gain the experience and self-confidence they need for leadership in their field. For promotions, for being effective on faculty committees, or for posts in administration, it is essential to have learned how to work with people, how to run a meeting, and how to make decisions. SDE/GWIS gives ample opportunity for members to develop leadership qualities.

## **4. WITH AFFIRMATIVE ACTION - WHO NEEDS SDE/GWIS?**

Affirmative Action does NOT guarantee more high-level positions for women. In fact, a wide search for candidates may even decrease their chances because of the greater numbers of available men candidates. Advancement still depends on superior scholarship, dedication to research, and a willingness to assume intelligent leadership. We need each other more than ever.

There is a need for women achiever models to inspire women students to achieve. The inspiration and influence of an older woman in science has long been recognized. Now we have a name for them: role models.

## **5. NATIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK**

Women have had the disadvantage of not being part of an Old Boys Network. Our answer is to develop our present informal contacts into a national information network to alert other members of positions which are open or opportunities they might otherwise miss.

## **6. FINANCIAL AID**

Money is still a serious problem for many women in science. SDE/GWIS has given grants-in-aid and fellowships to women in science who have shown outstanding ability and promise in research. With more members we can increase the amount of financial aid we can give.