

Hey Jane!

Starting a Local SWS Chapter & Activity Ideas

Welcome to Column 33 of *Hey Jane!* This is a project of the SWS Career Development Committee. Questions are generated by the committee and SWS members.

This response for this issue was written by Michele Scott.

The *Hey Jane!* series editor is Christin Munsch.

I had such a wonderful time at the Winter meeting—I want to keep that energy going! I’ve heard some people mention local chapters of SWS. How do I go about starting one where I am from? And what are some ideas for local SWS chapter activities?

Glad to hear you enjoyed the meeting! First, let me direct you to www.socwomen.org/start-a-chapter-2/ on the SWS website which has a full list of specific instructions, helpful tips, and fun ideas for getting as much as possible out of a chapter. It also has contact information for the various offices you’ll need to be in touch with as you proceed. I am currently in process of starting a chapter in North Carolina, and have spoken to others who have started chapters, so I can add to the conversation and tell you about my experience.

Most chapters begin by holding a general meeting to gauge interest. This meeting can also be used to elect officers, establish dues (if any), and to brainstorm future meetings and activities. You’ll also need to contact the Executive Office (swshelp@ku.edu) once you establish your chapter, send at least one representative to the Winter Meetings, send an annual report to *Network News*, and hold at least one meeting each year as a chapter.

Going forward, local chapters of SWS can be used for professional development, networking, support, and outreach like volunteering in the community. They sometimes include non-academic members of the community as well, so think about who you could reach out to in your area to spread the word! Ultimately, the needs of your specific location will dictate how you use your chapter, how often you meet, and what you do with that time.

The start-a-chapter website mentioned above has a list of potential chapter activities; however, I’ve included a few more here, many of which local SWS chapters have found useful and fun:

- Organize a feminist book club or reading group. The readings can be academic... or not!
- Find someone with a fancy camera to take professional headshots.
- Volunteer. I know of one local chapter that put together baskets filled with goodies for women in a local shelter to be given out on Mother’s Day. Another local chapter held a “panty drive” to collect new, packaged underwear, PJs, and socks for domestic violence shelters.

- Have members present mock versions of their conference presentations or job talks. Be sure to leave time for constructive feedback.
- Organize writing groups that meet once or on a regular bases. Mild social pressure can do wonders for finishing a dissertation or manuscript!
- Organize a letter writing party. Select a legislative issue (or ask members to select legislative issues) of interest to feminist sociologists (e.g., paid family and medical leave, spousal support, equal pay for equal work, affirmative consent, accessible bathrooms, reproductive rights, comprehensive sexual health education) and write letters to Senators and Representatives in your area.
- Ask someone from a women's rights organization in your area to come speak to you about what they do and how your local chapter can be of service.

Local chapters can be a fantastic tool for professionalization and they provide opportunities to connect with feminist causes in your area. If you're still stuck on ideas, *Network News* has reports from all the local chapters. Seeing what other chapters have done is sure to spark some ideas!

Good luck with your new chapter! It is always exciting to see SWS grow!