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GENDER, INDEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL COALITION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS

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Abstract

Independent scholars and scholarship have in the last quarter century become increasingly recognized as worthy subjects of scholarship in themselves, yet this recent attention has included relatively little attention to the often-gendered nature of independent scholarship. Yet this gendered approach to the study of independent scholars and their scholarship is essential to understanding the origins of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars and its regional predecessors. The National Coalition of Scholars, founded in 1986 is a growing, and in recent years, rebuilding scholarly organization that has changed in response to the changing needs and demographics of its membership. In telling the story of NCIS, however, what has remained relatively constant has been its predominantly female leadership and membership, yet the gendered aspects of this organization and its predecessors has remained largely unaddressed in its histories. The purpose of this scholarly history of NCIS, therefore, is to go beyond the "official history" to examine the roles of gender and the place of women in the academy in the mid to late twentieth century.

This essay, which grows out of my work as NCIS historian/archivist, will be a study of the key scholars who had long dealt with the lack of tenure-stream employment, and banded together to organize learned societies dedicated to mutual support. It will then focus on the origins of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (which belatedly celebrated its 25th anniversary with a conference hosted by Yale University in the summer of 2015) from the coalescence of a several regional, university community-centered independent scholar societies. Making use of NCIS's archives, official histories and literature, available secondary studies on women and the academy, and when possible oral histories, this paper will bring gender more firmly into the growing scholarship on the nexus between independent scholarship and the adjunctification of the academy, and place the history of NCIS and its predecessors in the context of this larger history.

Keywords: *Gender, independent scholar, academia, adjunct faculty*

INTRODUCTION

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars, a uniquely multidisciplinary learned society was founded in 1989 to serve the needs of scholars working outside the traditional academic structure, which functionally has meant working outside of the tenure stream. NCIS belatedly celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a conference hosted by Yale University in the summer of 2015; the conference, themed "Traditions and Transitions," was the first to be mounted by the organization after a hiatus of several years. By many accounts, including the author's, the conference was not only a success, but in many ways a time of both celebration and reflection. Amid the varied sessions, many of which focused on the subtheme of Independent Scholars and the digital landscape, there were many occasions for informal



conversation among the attendees, who included some of the organization's founders¹. The direction of some of these conversations uncovered the need to tell the story of NCIS in a way that went beyond the "official history," and furthermore placed it in the context of gender and the place of women in the academy in the mid- to late twentieth century.

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars is a growing and, in recent years, rebuilding organization, and has over the years evolved in response to the changing needs and demographics of its membership. What has remained relatively constant, however, has been its predominantly female leadership and membership, yet the gendered aspects of this organization and its predecessors have remained largely unaddressed in its histories. As public recognition of the legitimacy of independent scholars (self-identified or not) has increased, independent scholarship itself has become recognized as a legitimate area of study.² Yet this recent scholarship has included relatively little attention to the often-gendered nature of independent scholarship, notwithstanding recent paeans of praise to those scholars such as the late Elisabeth Eisenstein who mostly worked on the margins of or outside the academy.³ But this gendered approach to the study of independent scholars and their scholarship is essential to understanding the origins of NCIS and its regional predecessors. Yes, you read this right. Despite the current affiliate status (recently changed to "Partner" status) of regional organizations such as the Princeton Research Forum with NCIS, most of these groups not only preceded NCIS, but were instrumental in its founding. It is furthermore no accident that nearly all of these regional organizations were founded in major research university communities.⁴

This had only partially to do with proximity to scholarly resources for which NCIS and other organizations would be struggling for equitable access, or to an automatic intellectual community. Rather, university communities were home to what was in some ways the natural constituency for an organization of marginally affiliated or unaffiliated scholars—professors' wives. By the 1970s, the traditional "faculty wife" whose role was assumed to be taking care of the domestic side of life and assume the social and secretarial duties that advanced her husband's career had been largely displaced by the unequal half of an academic couple who had met in graduate school and both achieved advanced degrees, but whose subsequent lives had largely been shaped around the husband's career path, with the wife limited by anti-nepotism policies and other factors to at best adjunct faculty status.⁵ While in many ways this early corps of adjunct faculty enjoyed a better situation in a number of ways than the growing numbers of adjuncts in recent times whose economic situation has been far more precarious, their secondary status as practicing scholars was at the time the more visible disadvantage.

It was for this reason that the independent scholar societies founded in these university communities provided a vital source of scholarly and professional support for these scholars, creating networks of similarly-situated colleagues, as well as regular opportunities to share and present research. These early societies varied in form, focus, and membership, with differences ranging from whether they included tenure-stream faculty to whether their work, membership, and activities reflected an essentially feminist outlook. Geography and radius of membership would also play a role in these organizations, forms and focuses.⁶ On the face of things, these societies that emerged, primarily in the 1970s, were the result of a feminism that raised consciousness even when it was too late to create substantive change for many older female scholars. In practice, however, their role in developing both the identity of independent scholars and the contemporary independent scholar movement received competition from a more voluntary, less academically-focused, and initially male model of independent scholarship that both predated and paralleled the decline of the academy, and in recent times has benefitted from the growing acceptance of independent scholars and scholarship as well as the rise of digital scholarship. Yet the regional origins of NCIS have gone largely unremembered as some of the earlier societies have gone into decline or folded altogether, and those remaining have only recently been redefined as "partners" rather

¹ Joan Cunningham, "Conference Summary: National Coalition of Independent Scholars, June 18-21, 2015."

² Susan Breitzer, "From the Margins to the Center: Independent Historians and the Reshaping of History," conference paper, American Historical Association, Chicago. January 5-8, 2012.

³ Margalit Fox, Elisabeth Eisenstein, Trailblazing Historian of Moveable Type, Dies at 92," *New York Times* February 24, 2016.

⁴ "NCIS Mission & History," <https://www.ncis.org/mission-history> (Accessed September 23, 2018).

⁵ Breitzer, "Naming the Problem: Changing the Conversation about the Humanities Jobs Crisis," unpublished paper.

⁶ Ronald Gross, *The Independent Scholar's Handbook*. (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1992) 262-63.



than “affiliates,” to reflect that these apparent offshoots of NCIS were and remain more than that, as in their heyday, these local scholarly forums would prove to have a national impact.⁷

This impact began with their roles as intellectual forums and support networks for history and historians of women and other feminist scholarship and scholars. One of the earliest to make an impact was the Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession (later the Coordinating Council for Women in History), founded in December 1969, during the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, with the initial purpose of “the encouragement and recruitment of women into the profession, the monitoring of discrimination against women, and the development of Women’s History as a branch of historical study.” With the growing awareness of a dearth of academic jobs even then, the CCWHP also became the first to go where the American Historical Association and similar learned societies were unwilling to go—encouraging independent scholarship—partially as a component of the organization’s primary purposes of carving out a place for women in both history and the history profession.⁸ It is for this reason, along with the gender makeup of NCIS and its founders, that the gendered nature of NCIS’s establishment needs to be emphasized.

This begins with the founders of the national organization who, with few exceptions, were primarily Founding Mothers. Literature scholar Barbara Currier Bell, who first brought up the subject of NCIS’s gendered history to me at the most recent national conference, was among the principal founders of NCIS as well as the first President of the recently disbanded Yale-based Center for Independent Study.⁹ Another was Margaret Eisenstein DeLacy, a historian whose specialties included Contagionism and who led the Northwest Independent Scholars Association, and chaired the Study Committee on a National Association of Independent Scholars.¹⁰ DeLacy is, additionally, the daughter of Elizabeth Eisenstein, the pioneering European historian of the printing press who spent most of her career as an independent scholar and contingent faculty member before finally being appointed the Alice Palmer Freeman Professor of History at the University of Michigan. Other “founding mothers” of note included Paula Gilette and Francesca Miller the latter being an adjunct faculty member and pioneering scholar of Latin American women’s history, whose monograph, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, was one of the first studies of its kind.¹¹ While these women fitted the pattern of the kind of independent scholars who sought respectability and equality, the minority of “founding fathers,” notably Ronald Gross, the author of *The Independent Scholars’ Handbook*, which emphasized the more “voluntary” model of independent scholarship, and James Bennett, one of the early scholars of independent scholarship, promoted a distinctly different model for would-be independent scholars. Their model tended to emphasize the self-made individualist approach to scholarship that cared less about the approval of the academy, perhaps reflecting a comparative *lack* of struggle for legitimacy among male scholars (affiliated or not), compared to their female counterparts (and his rare examples that acknowledged the struggle for legitimacy, such as Emily Taitz, co-author *Written Out of History*, one of the earliest pieces of scholarship on women in Jewish history). Reconciling these gendered modes of independent scholarship would therefore feature in the founding of regional organizations and, in turn, the founding of NCIS.¹²

Regional independent scholar organization began with the establishment of the now-defunct Institute for Research in History (IRH) in New York City in the mid-seventies, which created the basic form of the regional independent scholar society. These emphasized research and scholarly professional activities, though notably also included “projects designed for non-scholarly audiences,” especially in the then emerging field of women’s studies.¹³ The IRH’s founding

⁷ “NCIS Partners,” <https://www.ncis.org/ncis-partners> (Accessed 11 October 2018).

⁸ Marjorie Lightman, “The Emergence of an Independent Scholarly Sector: History as a Case Study,” *Outside Academe: New Ways of Working in the Humanities. A Report on the Conference “Independent Research Institutions and Scholarly Life in the 1980s”*: 10-21; and Hilda Smith, “CCWHP—The First Decade,” in *A History of the Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession—Conference Group on Women’s History*, (n.p: CCWHP-CGWH, 1994) 7-20.

⁹ “CIS Celebrates its 12th Year,” *September 1989 Newsletter*, Center for Independent Study. Center for Independent Study Archives, Box I. National Coalition of Independent Scholars.

¹⁰ “Margaret Delacy,” <https://www.ncis.org/members/Margaret-delacy> (Accessed September 23, 2018).

¹¹ K. Lynn Stoner, Review, Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*. *The American Historical Review*, Vol.98, no.2 (April 1993): 12.

¹² Gross, 3-42, 224-7. 261-67; and Ronald Gross, “Scholarship Beyond the Academy,” *Academe*, Vol.71, No.1 (January-February 1985) 32-6.

¹³ Lightman, “The Emergence of an Independent Scholarly Sector,” 22-3.



was followed by the establishment of a handful of similar organizations throughout the United States, the majority in university communities, and most (though not all), on the East or West Coast. One of the most important of these was the Institute for Historical Study in San Francisco, which sought to bridge the divide between independent and university-affiliated scholars, by emphasizing scholarship and professionalism among its members, with an emphasis on multiple research groups and regular local scholarly events.¹⁴ The oldest continuous organization that maintains a similar emphasis and offers grants and other research support to its members is the Princeton Research Forum, founded in 1980, whose “founding mothers” from the beginning sought to make it a multidisciplinary organization.¹⁵ The Princeton Research Forum and San Francisco’s Institute for Historical Study inspired the formation of the San Diego Independent Scholars Group (SDISG) in 1982 by Joy Frieman, a former George Washington University professor, who, with Mary Stroll, sought to create a forum for scholars and those interested in serious research to gather outside the academy. The SDISG, which shifted in form and membership requirements over the years, eventually creating a Works in Progress subgroup, would go on to play a key role in the founding of NCIS.¹⁶ By contrast, the Yale-based Center for Independent Study (CIS), founded in 1977 by a group of professors’ wives with advanced degrees who were nevertheless barred from being hired by anti-nepotism rules, was eventually unable to sustain itself on an aging membership, and folded in 2017. As Teri Dykeman, the organization’s last President, wrote in its closing newsletter, “CIS was created for a different time; members are aging: attracting new members is an ongoing challenge.”¹⁷

Amid the emergence of these societies, founded predominantly by female scholars as sources of intellectual support, Ronald Gross, a traditional academic who was reported to have been happiest when he wrote for the general public rather than the academy, published his *Independent Scholars Handbook* in 1982, only partially a guidebook and “how-to” manual. It also doubled as a call to arms for all active and aspiring independent scholars, with encouragement to follow one’s scholarly passions, whatever they may be and wherever they might lead. Gross’s book in many ways introduced and promoted what became the increasingly common practice of independent scholars to look beyond the “low-hanging fruit” of popular and/or fashionable topics in their fields (presumably because there would be no concern for what would help with academic employment and/or tenure). More controversially, Gross promoted something close to an “anyone can do it” approach to scholarship, that was entrepreneurial in its essence, and gave comparatively little weight to the degrees and credentials that most considered necessary in order to be taken seriously as an independent scholar among an academically-affiliated majority. The book’s individualist/entrepreneurial emphasis notwithstanding, Gross did allow for the necessity of at least some informal organization and collaboration, and included a history of some of the early independent scholar organizations that ranged from informal discussion groups to serious attempts to create substitutes for university departments. In its essence, though, the approach to independent scholarship promoted in the *Independent Scholars’ Handbook* for the most part de-emphasized either the role of gender, or gender-specific conditions under which one might choose the path of independent scholarship. The few exceptions for individual cases include that of Taitz, a longtime independent scholar in Jewish women’s history who for a time taught at Adelphi University, and her periodic collaborator Sondra Henry, a lawyer and independent historian whose other work with Taitz includes the *JPS Guide to Jewish Women*.¹⁸ It was against this essentially entrepreneurial approach and lack of attention to the conditions of the female majority of independent scholars that the regional independent scholar organizations—and eventually NCIS --pushed (though not without some pushback in return), beginning with the institution of membership requirements, with its emphasis on degrees (and allowable equivalents) and records of publication, which has more recently included discussion of the admissibility of nontraditional forms of publication/knowledge dissemination, such as blogs.¹⁹

¹⁴ The Evolution of SDIS,” <http://www.sdscholars.org/history> (accessed September 16, 2018)

¹⁵ Gross, 266-7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Teri Dykeman, “CIS: The Last Official Gathering: President’s Report from the Spring Luncheon, 15 May 2016,” and Ruth Hein Schmidt, “CIS: The Origin Story,” *News from CIS*, Center for Independent Study, Spring 2017, 1.3.

¹⁸ Jewish Women’s Archive, “Emily Taitz,” <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/authors/taitz-emily> (Accessed 26 November 2018); Jewish Publication Society, “Sondra Henry,” <https://jps.org/authors/sondra-henry> (Accessed 26 November 2018); and Gross, 15-19.

¹⁹ “Membership Levels & Qualifications,” <https://nics.org/membership-levels-qualifications> (Accessed 15 October 2018) “Quarterly Board Report, January-March 2017,” National Coalition of Independent Scholars, Board of Directors Records.



THE FOUNDING OF NCIS

This growing awareness of the necessity of a more professional approach as well as the limits of local organization was behind the convening of the first national conference of Independent Scholars in the United States in 1986, which led to the founding of NCIS. The idea to found a nationwide society of independent scholars was first raised in a panel discussion that focused on the struggles individual independent scholars experienced when dealing with institutions ranging from archives and libraries to, notably, professional and scholarly organizations, all of which assumed institutional affiliation as the norm and, to varying degrees, awarded access to their services accordingly. During this history-changing panel, participants also acknowledged that, firstly, Independent scholars did not always live within easy reach of regional groups, and secondly, ironically, without a national organization, it would be much harder for individuals to find and connect with local groups. Not long after the conference, a formal committee convened to investigate the possibilities of a national organization, with the resulting decision to form one. The first conference of what would become NCIS was held later that year, and by 1988, the new organization's first board had been elected. By 1989, the National Coalition of Independent Scholars was established and registered as a nonprofit organization.²⁰ Since that time, NCIS has functioned with a twofold purpose: as a support network for scholars without a traditional academic affiliation, and as an advocacy organization for said scholars. NCIS was founded specifically to reach and provide services to scholars who did not have access to the regional organizations, but did not seek to replace them. Even with the recognition of the ways that a national organization could not replicate the face-to-face collegiality of a local organization NCIS's founders were, from the beginning aware of and cultivated the possibility for NCIS to be much more, focusing on the advocacy power of a national organization to gain more equitable access to resources and recognition for its members. And in the last few years, this potential is being increasingly fulfilled in ways that I will describe a little further on in this essay.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR LANDSCAPE

But to make this more than a list of NCIS's recent accomplishments, it is necessary to look at the further changes in the kind of independent scholar population NCIS was intended to serve, and how the changes in the academy have created a new and larger class of unaffiliated or marginally affiliated scholars. These are likely to shape their careers using both traditional measures of scholarly accomplishment and the individualist, entrepreneurial ethos, and see relatively little contradiction between the two. To begin with, the "golden age" of the American Academy was almost never particularly golden for female scholars, who were usually either expected to forego marriage and family, or if married to other scholars, accept secondary employment or none at all. Furthermore, this period was actually something of an aberration in the history of the American academy that reflected a massive postwar expansion in higher education. It would become the origin of the much-discussed "Ph.D. glut" that followed, based on what proved to be faulty assumptions about the ongoing needs of and trends in the academy, as well as administrative responses to them. Cycles of rising and declining student populations in the 1970s and 1980s ended up masking the real causes of the decline in tenure-stream faculty employment, including the conscious decision of administrations to shift to greater use of part-time faculty for multiple reasons.²¹ But the most significant effect of these trends for NCIS was not so much the growing number of scholars who did not necessarily choose the 'independent track' due to lack of affiliation, but the shift over the last thirty years from a majority full-time to a majority part-time faculty who lacked support for research, as knowledge creation became an increasingly deemphasized component of many universities' missions.

The gendered aspect of this shift has been reflected in not only the existing female majority of part time faculty at American colleges and universities, but by the fact that these changes took place just as doors previously closed to female scholars were beginning to seriously open. The trend was further accelerated by attacks on higher education, and on the humanities in particular. The deterioration of the university and its faculty working conditions has shifted the meaning of what it means to be an independent scholar, and has also reflected the employment situation of a growing number of members of NCIS. The practice of scholarship that is not supported by an institution of higher education is in many ways central to the identity of the independent scholar. In practice, however, the assumption of independent equaling unaffiliated, while never absolute, has recently become increasingly malleable. In recent years, as

²⁰ "NCIS Mission and History," and *Ibid*, 261-2.

²¹ Breitzer, "Naming the Problem."



NCIS has regrouped and regrown, it has done so against the backdrop of a growing number of scholars whose contingent faculty appointments provide them with the once more desirable “fig leaf” affiliation, but not necessarily the same scholarship-supporting benefits, ranging from research and conference travel funds to sometimes equitable library access, essentially creating a new group of independent scholars who are in, but not of their universities.²² As a result, in the last few years, NCIS has made a concerted effort to redefine membership criteria to reflect the new reality of this “semi-independent” majority of scholars in the academy, and devote at least some the organization’s focuses to addressing adjunct issues. The 25th Anniversary Conference of NCIS of 2015 featured an Adjunct Issues Forum that in turn showcased some of the latest scholarship on the new adjunct activism, as well as a discussion of why the growing (and still very gendered) adjunct situation should be a priority for NCIS. This forum, which featured panelists (including the author) who both worked outside the tenure stream and have had past or present affiliations with the labor movement has become one call to action that has borne fruit, in the form of growing collaboration between NCIS and the Labor and Working-Class History Association, a process that has involved the recognition of contingent faculty and independent scholars as overlapping, but not necessarily identical categories.²³

Although the situation of adjuncts continues to vary when it comes to scholarly support, which is one issue of many that has sometimes been addressed by other means, including by unionization, NCIS has in recent years advocated for equal, or at least prioritized, more equitable access to research resources and grants. In the case of the former, databases of “Indy-friendly” university libraries and major public libraries have become one of the simpler but more valued member benefits. But when it has come to electronic resources, at least the kind that are likely to have scholarly legitimacy, the situation has been more complicated. In recent years, the NCIS board has devoted significant time and effort to finding a (legal) way around the institutional lock on so many digital resources that have severely limited access for unaffiliated scholars, with a major victory achieved in the JSTOR deal creating an individual JPASS arrangement for NCIS members that is less expensive than that available to just any individual, or comparable to other scholarly societies, including the American Historical Association, whose JPASS had served as a model. The latter benefit, grant support and assistance has been particularly pertinent in light of the reality that firstly, there are independent scholars in the STEM fields and social sciences as well as the humanities, and that secondly, scholars from all disciplines who can benefit from grant support have too often been excluded from many grants for lack of a sponsoring institution. Therefore, one of the other singularly valuable member benefits of NCIS has been its evolved role as a grant administrator for large outside grants, that supplements its own small grants program. All of these developments have continued to foster and encourage a climate of professionalism for NCIS members, regardless of how they came to independent scholarship.²⁴

NCIS has in recent years continued to evolve in scope and priorities and, since 2015, has increased its international reach, with growing numbers of members from outside the United States. However, one thing that has remained constant has been the emphasis on this organization functioning (and being seen) as a “real” learned society, comparable to disciplinary-based societies of similar sizes. One way has been through the evolution of NCIS’s print and/or digital publications. Since 2015, *The Independent Scholar* (for a time, *The Independent Scholar Quarterly*) has been transformed from a newsletter with book reviews, to a peer-reviewed journal whose inaugural issue featured a selection of revised papers from the 2015 conference, while the informative role of the newsletter has been supplanted by NCIS’s social media presence.²⁵ NCIS’s functions as a learned society are also becoming reestablished with the recent revival of the conference. NCIS as an organization not only began with a conference, but for years held an annual conference in rotation locations, whose functions included an annual opportunity for a meeting of the NCIS Board of Directors. Between the late 1980s and 2008, the frequency of conferences dwindled to biennially, and then after 2008, none until the 2015 Conference. There are many reasons from this hiatus, ranging from the general economic recession

²² Yvonne Grosseil, “A Future for Adjuncts: From Plight to Fight,” *The Independent Scholar*, Vol I 1 (December 2015), 47.49; and Shelby Shapiro, “Quarterly Board Report July-December 2015, National Coalition of Independent Scholar Board of Directors.

²³ Cunningham, “Conference Summary, p.10; LAWCHA Ad Hoc Committee Report on Independent Scholars, “Report and Motions,” April 2018.

²⁴ “Member Benefit Spotlight: JPASS.” <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2014/member-benefit-spotlight-jpass/> (14 May 2014; Accessed 15 October 2018) “NCIS Mission & History,” and “Research Resources,” <https://www.ncis.org/members-only/research-resources> (Accessed 15 October 2018).

²⁵ “Quarterly Board Report, July-December 2015,” and “Quarterly Board Report, January-March 2017,” National Coalition of Independent Scholars, Board of Directors Records.



with its profound impact on the job market within and beyond academia, to a period of profound decline in membership, which had its own effects on NCIS programming including conferences, given that member dues are the organization's main source of income.²⁶ The 2015 conference at Yale signaled the post-recession upturn in membership, and brought together scholars from the US, Canada, Europe, Asia and the Middle East for a variety of scholarly sessions and workshops that included the Adjunct Issues Forum dedicated to acknowledging NCIS's changing membership; increasingly, this includes scholars who, as contingent faculty, are likely to be both technically affiliated and functionally independent. Although the conference was declared a success, and visibly signaled a renaissance for NCIS, the question of whether to continue holding physical conferences was initially uncertain, given the time and costs involved. The Board discussed teleconferences as a possible time- and cost-effective alternative, but ultimately concluded that the value of face-to-face scholarly interchange cannot be underestimated, especially in light of the recent decline and in some cases demise of regional scholarly organizations. In many ways, this answered the question posed by one of the last members of the Center for Independent Study as to whether independent scholar organizations themselves were necessary in the increasingly internet-connected age.²⁷ The question has been settled, at least for the immediate future, in favor of in-person conferences, with the announcement of a forthcoming conference celebrating the thirtieth birthday of NCIS, hosted by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and scheduled for June 2019 on the theme "[Making Connections. Meeting Challenges.](#)"²⁸

As genuinely enjoyable and educational as the NCIS conference was, the diverse program whose academic sessions alone ranged in topic from a history of the marginal social status of fishermen in Puritan New England to an anthropological study defending female circumcision, by itself underscores the challenge of NCIS as a unique learned society—one that meets the needs of independent scholars in all fields as an organization that by numbers is historian-dominated. NCIS's other challenge is more typical to discipline-specific learned societies of being a national and even international organization with a widely dispersed membership. The latter challenge comes down to acknowledging the reality that, while virtual communication and social media can help break the isolation of scholars who do not belong to traditional academic departments, a virtual-based organization cannot stand in for a department when it comes to regular colleague interaction. For all of the truth there may be to the stereotype of the scholar as introvert who prefers to work alone, collaboration even in the humanities is a feature of many "independent" scholarly works, especially those that follow in the area of public and digital history. As just one example of such collaboration, I can cite Barbara Williams Ellertson and Janet Seiz's Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art Project (BASIRA), a digital database of the changing images of books in Renaissance-era paintings.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Practically speaking, therefore, the future of NCIS depends in part on its ability to be welcoming of independent scholars whose diversity ranges from independent research scientists to scholar/practitioners in the performing arts, while still maintaining the standards that give NCIS its legitimacy as a learned society. This disciplinary diversity, in turn is one issue that has shaped the dilemma of recent years of hosting NCIS conferences versus supporting members' participation in disciplinary conferences (which raises the question of how it can be both/and, rather than either/or). The Adjunct Issues Forum of the 2015 Conference now represents just the first shot across the bow when it comes to the challenge of incorporating adjunct/contingent faculty concerns into NCIS's mission, including scholarly and activist collaboration with the Labor and Working Class History Association, that seeks to address the common issues contingent faculty and independent scholars face, even while recognizing differences between the two groups.³⁰ Building bridges between independent scholars and contingent faculty, will in any case, remain important, given the continued growth of the contingent faculty population.

NCIS's additional challenge, ironically as a female-majority and predominantly woman-led organization, is addressing and acknowledging the role of gender in independent scholarly paths that manages to still allow male NCIS members

²⁶ "Mission and History," and Cunningham, "Conference Summary."

²⁷ "Independent Scholarship in the Digital Age," *News from CIS*, Center for Independent Study, Spring 2017, 2.

²⁸ Isabelle Fleming, "Quarterly Board Report: January-March 2018," NCIS Board of Directors Records.

²⁹ <https://basiraproject.wordpress.com/>; and Barbara Williams Ellertson and Janet Seiz, "The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art," *The Independent Scholar* Vol. (December 2015), 22-34.

³⁰ LAWCHA, "Report and Motions."



a "seat at the table."³¹ For the historical reasons cited above, NCIS has traditionally had a 70:30 gender balance in favor of women, although this is now changing. The last two years have witnessed a shift from 71% female and 29% male in 2016 to 62% female and 38% male in December 2018, with a round 60:40 split in May 2018. Even more importantly, NCIS' recently confirmed commitment to diversity also includes making the organization founded by older white female scholars hospitable to younger colleagues who increasingly include scholars of color. This combination of challenges is additionally pertinent to the changing realities of the academy both in the U.S. and beyond, as contingent faculty in the U.S., Europe and Asia, whose numbers are increasing in NCIS ranks, are not only predominantly female but increasingly likely to be women of color. Also, even though the official barriers to hiring family members that have disproportionately affected women have fallen since the days of the founding of the first regional independent scholar societies, women still face significant obstacles and discrimination when it comes to pursuing academic careers. Even if the barriers are now less structural and more informal, they are no less real. As a result, the choice to pursue a career of independent scholarship is still likely to fall along a spectrum that ranges from genuine choice to choices necessitated by a variety of family, personal, and structural circumstances. Therefore, the recognition of the gendered nature of independent scholarship, along with that of new realities regarding devolution of the academy, will be vital to helping ensure that NCIS remains a viable and useful professional organization into the future.

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³¹ NCIS, "aaGender Stats," October 2018, National Coalition of Independent Scholars.