

Archived Information

Women's Colleges in the United States: History, Issues, and Challenges

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Executive Summary

Definition of a Women's College

Women's colleges are colleges that identify themselves as having an institutional mission primarily related to promoting and expanding educational opportunities for women. Most institutions of higher education currently have majority female enrollments; women's colleges have predominantly female enrollments.

How Women's Colleges Began

The development of private secondary schools for young women ("seminaries") during the early 1800's was the beginning of an interest in furthering educational opportunities for women. Women's colleges were founded during the mid- and late-19th century in response to a need for advanced education for women at a time when they were not admitted to most institutions of higher education. Societal trends such as an increase in labor-saving devices in the home, a shortage of teachers due to the growth of common schools, a proliferation of reading materials for women, and more philanthropic and some limited employment opportunities for women due to the Civil War led to an increased demand for higher education for women.

Independent nonprofit women's colleges, which included the "Seven Sisters" and other similar institutions, were founded to provide educational opportunities to women equal to those available to men and were geared toward women who wanted to study the liberal arts. These were largely located in the Northeast. Southern women's colleges were small schools, mostly affiliated with various Protestant churches. As educational opportunities in the South during the 1800s were limited to whites only, some higher education institutions for blacks sprang up during the post-Civil War period, including women's colleges founded especially to serve black women. Two of these, Bennett College and Spelman College, are the only black women's colleges today. As the Catholic population in the United States grew due to increases in immigration, the Catholic Church found a need for women's colleges to educate the daughters of Catholic families; and there was also a need for higher education for nuns. There were some movements in various states to provide public institutions of higher education open to all women in the state. Three of these institutions, Douglass College a part of Rutgers University in New Jersey, Texas Woman's University, and the Mississippi University for Women, remain today.

Women's Colleges Changed as More Colleges Became Coeducational

The decades after World War II saw an explosion in the numbers of students entering higher education institutions due to returning veterans and later the "baby boom." Numbers of public higher education institutions increased to meet the new level of demand. During the 1960s and 1970s, due to social and legislative changes, several institutions of higher education that had been previously all-male opened their doors to women. Many women's colleges either became

coeducational themselves, merged with all-male or coeducational institutions, or closed due to declining enrollment and financial problems related to the increased competition in higher education. As a result, the number of women's colleges shrank from over 200 in 1960 to 83 in 1993.

Some women's colleges, however, reaffirmed their mission, believing that it was important to continue to offer an all-female educational environment for women. These colleges enhanced their connections with other institutions, and added new programs designed to appeal to students beyond the traditional college age. A few women's colleges were able to weather the changes of the past few decades due to generous endowments providing financial security and loyal alumnae who strongly supported their institution's decisions to remain all-female.

The Legality of Publicly Supported Single-Sex Colleges

In 1982, the Mississippi University for Women was sued by a man seeking admission to the nursing program, and the university was ordered by the United States Supreme Court to admit men. The Court found that the university's policy of excluding males from admission to the School of Nursing not only violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, but also was not beneficial to women because this policy furthered the image of nursing as "women's work." Public women's colleges today allow men to enroll, but retain a specific mission to serve the higher educational needs of women. In 1996, the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), after a long legal battle, chose to become a coeducational public institution rather than a private institution. The Citadel, of South Carolina, also decided to become a coeducational institution, thus ending the history of all-male public institutions and all-male military institutions in the United States.

What Women's Colleges Look Like in the 1990s

Women's colleges today are largely private 4-year institutions. They are more likely to be independent nonprofit institutions or affiliated with the Catholic Church, to be located in the Northeastern U.S., and to have smaller enrollments than most institutions of higher education. Analysis of data provided to the U.S. Department of Education by women's colleges reveals that enrollment at women's colleges in Fall 1993 did have notable representation of part-time students, members of racial and ethnic minorities, and older undergraduate women students.

In 1992-93, women's colleges conferred 25,000 degrees, a little over one percent of all degrees conferred that year. Almost 17,000 of the 25,000 degrees were Bachelor's degrees.

Special Circumstances Continue to Make Women's Colleges Attractive to Female Students

Traditionally male-dominated fields include mathematics, computer sciences, and physical sciences. There is evidence that when private 4-year women's colleges were compared with all private 4-year institutions by Carnegie classification, they conferred upon women equal or larger proportions of bachelor's degrees in traditionally male-dominated fields than the norm for private 4-year colleges within their Carnegie classification. However, there is more dramatic evidence that women are represented in greater numbers in the professional staffs and faculty of women's colleges than at similar institutions of higher education. For Fall 1993, women were over 70 percent of all executive, administrative, and managerial positions at women's colleges, and were over half of all full-time and part-time faculty, these were much higher percentages than the norm for private 4-year colleges within each Carnegie classification. Also, as full-time faculty at women's colleges, women received higher average salaries than women at similar institutions of higher education.

The Institutional Effects of Women's Colleges

Some research on women's colleges includes findings that these colleges encourage leadership skills in women, provide women with more female role models, and that they encourage women to focus on traditionally male-dominated fields of study. However, other research finds that factors such as the level of selectivity of the college may play a part in the institution's positive effects on students.

A review of the research on women's colleges reveals that this research focuses primarily on studying the effects of attending a single-sex institution on the educational outcomes and career aspirations of young women. Much of this research seeks to ascertain differences between women who chose women's colleges and those who attend coeducational institutions.

Chapter 1:

Women's Colleges in the United States,

A Historical Context

Introduction

Women's colleges in the United States today are part of a wide range of higher education options available to women. The colleges emerged at a time when men's access to higher knowledge was expanding, but women's access was very limited. The founders of the women's colleges were believers in women's intellectual abilities and advocates for their participation in society, and in some cases they also emphasized the necessity of training women in practical trades so that they might have vocations. By studying the history of women's colleges, we can gain a more thorough understanding of their role in American higher education today.

Founding, Philosophy, and Origins: The Demand for Girls' Seminaries and Women's Colleges

Early History

Before the Civil War, only three private colleges admitted women. All were in Ohio: Antioch, Oberlin, and Hillsdale (now in Hillsdale, Michigan). In addition, only two public universities, the University of Iowa and the University of Deseret (which later was renamed the University of Utah), admitted women. However, the Civil War brought with it a general decline in (male) student enrollments, making some postsecondary institutions more agreeable to admitting women. By 1870 eight state universities accepted women. [Joyce Antler, "Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women," in *The Undergraduate Woman: Issues in Educational Equity*. Pamela J. Perun (ed). Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Co., 1982, p. 16.]

The precursors to women's colleges were private girls' "academies" or "seminaries," secondary schools that were increasingly popular from the 1820s on. (One author notes that even before the American Revolution, boys had access to grammar schools, academies, and seminaries.) [Elaine Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975, p. 9.] Seminaries offered girls more liberal education than they had received before, and girls in all regions of the country took advantage of the studies offered there. As one observer stated: "Because a girl might as maid or widow have to earn her living, because marriage was less certain than it had been with the present surplus of females in the population, because training as a teacher helped a woman bring up her children—all these reasons paved the way for the seminaries." [Louise Schutz Boas, *Women's Education Begins*. Norton, Massachusetts: Wheaton College Press, 1935, p.89.] These early secondary schools for girls included institutions such as the Adams Female Academy in Londonderry, New Hampshire; the academy founded by Emma Willard in Troy, New York; the Salem Female Academy of Winston-Salem, North Carolina; the Judson Female Institute at Marion, Alabama (led by Milo P. Jewett, later a leader at Vassar College); and Wheaton Female Seminary in Norton, Massachusetts (later Wheaton College).

As the seminary movement grew, some problems and questions became evident. One group of critics, including Emma Willard, argued that the seminaries should be reformed by strengthening teaching of the core academic subjects. A second group argued that seminaries were insufficient and suggested that a more durable institution—a women's college—be founded. Catherine E. Beecher, who had worked to establish seminaries for women, was leader of the group arguing that seminaries were inadequate as the sole educational institutions for

women. In 1851, she published *True Remedy for the Wrongs of Women*, in which she pointed out that men had secured educational advantages through establishment of a college system with permanent endowments and more autonomous faculties. [Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* . Volume 4, Book 2. New York: The Science Press, 1929, p. 143.]

According to Beecher, seminaries could not offer sufficient, permanent endowments, buildings, and libraries. She thought it was of the utmost importance that women's colleges have "a corporation whose duty it is to perpetuate the institution on a given plan." [Catharine Beecher from *True Remedy* , cited in Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* .] This board of trustees would control the faculty, rather than one or two principals, as was the case in seminaries. The advantage of a board of trustees, Beecher wrote, would be "to secure the highest class of teachers, by insuring them a liberal and permanent support...it also secures protection from those vacillations of public favor which are constantly destroying all institutions not thus sustained." [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, pp. 143-44.] While seminaries offered women rigorous programs of study, Beecher knew that colleges for women—like those for men—would offer a higher level of instruction, because as a regular course of study was developed, faculty would benefit from division of teaching time, thus gaining time to further their scholarly activities. [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* , p. 144.]

A powerful proponent of women's higher education during the first part of the 19th century was Mary Lyon, the founder of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Educated at a female academy in Byfield, Massachusetts, Lyon was befriended there by a teacher several years her elder, Zilpah Grant. Together, the two proceeded to found Ipswich Female Seminary in Massachusetts, where standards of personal conduct and discipline were emphasized, along with a rigorous curriculum. The seminary was distinguished by teachers' emphasis not only on comprehension, but on questioning and analysis; historian Helen Horowitz writes that students there were encouraged to examine texts with a critical eye and question the authors' views. [Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, p. 17.]

However, Mary Lyon eventually saw the limitations of the seminary, particularly its limited finance. Without a stable endowment, she was unable to draw her "favorite students, the daughters of poor New England farmers," to the seminary. [Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater* , p. 17.] In 1836, with the assistance of several prosperous church deacons, she founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (today, Mount Holyoke College). Mount Holyoke's significance is that it became a model for a multitude of other women's colleges throughout the country, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Several distinct societal trends in the early-to-mid 19th century contributed to a rise in demand for the education of women, including higher education. First, it was assumed that women and men had separate spheres—and that a woman's place was in the home. A major part of the woman's sphere was child-rearing, which included imparting civic virtue and knowledge. Part of the argument for women's education was based on the increasing realization that the republic needed an educated citizenry and that this in turn required the nurturing of the young by more educated mothers. [Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* . New York: New York University Press, 1994, p. 16.]

In addition, the women's rights movement, which had gained momentum in the wake of the anti-slavery movement, was a major influence in the founding of women's colleges, especially in the Northeast. In opposition to the prevalent notion of separate spheres for men and women, an increasing number of reformers asserted that women were endowed with capacities equal to those of men. As women leaders called attention to their status as second-class citizens, they naturally looked to education as a means of attaining the political and legal goals of equality. [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 17] The colleges and universities for young men were the obvious standard for comparison. The reformers interested in educational equality asked why there could not be similar institutions for women.

Social historians also attribute the demand for higher education for women in the mid-to-late 19th century to four other societal trends of the time. First, the growth of the common public school system inculcated in girls a desire for further learning—particularly girls who had not been able to attend the more expensive seminaries. With the growth of this system of common schools there was a simultaneously increasing demand for teachers. As employment opportunities in elementary and secondary schools grew, higher education for women became more acceptable, and the public acknowledged its necessity. [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 16.] Women were increasingly regarded as better teachers than men; the President of Brown University wrote in 1854 that "women have a much greater natural adaptation to the work of instruction than men." College-educated men were not meeting these needs, because teaching constituted a relatively low-status occupation. Women were cheaper to hire as public school teachers, too; one historian writes that throughout the 1800s, "the salaries of the men teachers were quite commonly from two to four times those paid to women." [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle* , p. 61.]

Second, over this period there was also a proliferation of literature for women, promoting women's literary interests and tendencies to read widely. Moreover, the gas light and improved oil lamps were making it possible to use the evening hours for reading. [Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* . New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959, p. 16.]

Third, women's higher education was made possible by an increase in their leisure time, as the industrial revolution brought with it more domestic labor-saving devices: "Spinning and weaving were no longer household tasks. And the invention of such labor-saving devices as the cook stove, the sewing machine, and even the match, were freeing women from much household drudgery." [Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* , p. 16.]

Finally, there was also the growth of employment opportunities in some areas brought about by exposure to the outside world during the Civil War. [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 17] The 1870 census revealed at least one woman in each of 338 classified occupations, though 93 percent of all women workers fell into the following seven categories: domestic service, agricultural laborers, seamstresses, milliners, teachers, textile mill workers, and laundresses. [Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* , p. 17.] So while women were working, the range of fields in which they were employed was not broad. Still, the growth of women in the workforce contributed to social awareness that education might better prepare them to work. During the Civil War women had become more active in philanthropic causes: they made bandages, helped care for the wounded, and knit garments. Indeed, women were at the forefront of the abolitionist movement. [Boas, *Woman's Education Begins* , p. 217.]

It is difficult to judge which was the first women's college. Georgia Female College (today Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia) was the first school chartered in the United States in 1836, to confer on girls "all such honors degrees and licenses as are usually conferred in colleges and universities." Wesleyan College is the oldest women's college that has neither closed nor become coeducational. Scholars observe, however, that Mary Sharp College in Winchester, Tennessee in 1851, was the first U.S. women's college to require both Latin and Greek in a four-year course, and give an A.B. degree comparable to those awarded by men's colleges. [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* , p. 184.] Mary Sharp College closed in 1896. Elmira College in Elmira, New York, founded in 1855, "is the oldest existing women's college in the United States which succeeded in attaining standards in a fair degree comparable with men's colleges at the very beginning of her career." (Elmira College became coeducational in 1969.) Ten years later, in 1865, Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, New York) was the first to have an adequate endowment and, like Elmira, attain standards comparable to those of the men's colleges. [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* , p. 187.]

The founders of women's colleges had various goals in mind: one was teacher training and hence the development of public education; another was religious and health education; and yet another, as with Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts) and Vassar, was providing a woman "the best methods to perfect her intellect." Sophia Smith's will, providing for Smith College in 1875, stated that it is "with the design to furnish my sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our Colleges for young men." [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* , p. 149.]

The education of the first president of Bryn Mawr, M. Carey Thomas, provides an example of the academic barriers women faced in the late 19th century. After graduation from Cornell University, Thomas was denied access to graduate study at any American university; the most she could acquire was non-degree study at Johns Hopkins. Finally, she received a doctorate in literature from the University of Zurich, *summa cum laude*. It became evident to her that resources were needed for women to receive an education equal to that of men, and she sought to ensure that Bryn Mawr—opening in 1885—had rigorous academic standards. [Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.]

Perhaps typical of the founders' expectations for women was Wheaton College, which historian Louise Boas wrote:

... was to be neither a charitable institution nor a fashionable school. It was to train some of its pupils to be teachers but its training would be mainly for those who would become wives and mothers. For them education was of the greatest importance that they might live their own lives intelligently; and intelligently guide the lives of those who would be entrusted to their care. [Boas, *Women's Education Begins* , p. 48.]

This description illustrates the scope of the ambitions that the founders had for young women graduates in the late 19th century. Only in the later 20th century have women's colleges emphasized the expectations that women could enter any sphere, including those traditionally reserved for men.

Opposition to Women's Colleges

When reformers and philanthropists first attempted to press beyond secondary-level female seminaries to found colleges for women, their goals were often derided. Public opinion did not

consider women's colleges either a wise investment or worthwhile educational endeavor. Opponents argued that they could not prepare women for professions, or provide them a high-quality of education on a par with men's. One example was Charles W. Eliot, the President of Harvard College, who was against the formation of the colleges, arguing that women were not as intelligent as men. In 1899, Eliot, a leading educational reformer of the day, delivered a speech at the inaugural of the new president of Wellesley, in which he declared his views about colleges for women:

Women's colleges should concentrate on an education that will not injure women's bodily powers and functions. It remains to demonstrate what are the most appropriate, pleasing, and profitable studies for women, both from the point of view of the individual and the point of view of society; and this demonstration must be entirely freed from the influence of comparisons with the intellectual capacities and tastes of men. It would be a wonder, indeed, if the intellectual capacities of women were not at least as unlike those of men as their bodily capacities are. [Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, " The "Hateful" Wellesley Inaugural Address, " Wellesley . Winter 1995, p. 31.]

As Eliot's speech reveals his conviction that women were different from men intellectually; and his strong implication was that women were not capable of doing the rigorous academic work that colleges required. M. Carey Thomas, however, responded to Eliot's ideas in an article published in 1901, in which she advocated a common curriculum for men and women in higher education. As long as men and women were to associate together in professional life, should women's preparation for the professions differ from men's? Thomas offered this illustration of a challenge that must be surmounted the same way, regardless of sex:

Given two bridge-builders, a man and a woman, given a certain bridge to be built, and given as always the unchangeable laws of mechanics in accordance with which this special bridge and all other bridges must be built, it is simply inconceivable that the preliminary instruction be given to the two bridge-builders should differ in quantity, quality or method of presentation because while the bridge is building one will wear knickerbockers and the other a rainy-day skirt. You may say you do not think God intended a woman to be a bridge-builder. You have, of course, a right to this prejudice; but...you will probably not be able to impose it on women who wish to build bridges. [Thomas, M. Carey, " Should Higher Education for Women Differ? " Reprinted in *The American Reader: Words that Moved a Nation* , ed. Diane S. Ravitch. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990, p. 208.]

Eliot, said Thomas, might as well have told women educators to invent "new symphonies and operas, a new Beethoven and Wagner, new statues and pictures...It would be easier to do all this than to create for women...a new intellectual heavens and earth." [M. Carey Thomas cited in *The American Reader* , ed. Diane S. Ravitch, p. 208.]

A second argument was that women would not be able to endure the strain of higher learning. As one historian noted: "Women were thought to be frail...overstudy would surely give them brain fever! And should they manage to survive college, their children would be sickly, if they were able to have children at all." [Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* , p. 28.] One retired Harvard Medical School Professor, Dr. Edward Clarke, published a treatise in 1873 entitled *Sex in Education*. After observing several students at women's colleges, he wrote that if women used their "limited energy" on studying, they would endanger their "female apparatus." [Clarke cited in Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 56.] He believed that a young woman could not undertake college studies and "retain uninjured health and a future secure from neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, and

other derangements of the nervous system." Clarke's arguments seemed not only to offer scientific validity to the prejudices of the day, but also to affirm that women ought to preserve their childbearing capacities for the good of society. [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* , p. 56.]

Finally, some argued that college education for women would reduce the number of marriages and the size of families. [Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* , p. 30.] Once again, opponents of women's higher education claimed that the reduction in the size of families would be deleterious to society. According to one historian in the latter half of the 19th century: "Most of the opposition was less concerned with whether education was good for women than whether educated women were acceptable to men." [Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* , p. 31.]

In spite of the opposition of vocal critics, there was growing societal support for the institutions in other spheres. Matthew Vassar, the founder of Vassar College, noted that "[his] project had received the warmest commendations of many prominent literary men and practical educators as well as the universal approval of the public press." [Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, p. 148.]

Expansion: 1920-1950

Between 1920 and 1950, women's colleges diversified and expanded. Several four-year colleges, considered innovative for their time, were founded, including Bennington College in Vermont, Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and Scripps College in California. These schools were influenced by the Progressive education movement, which emphasized student-centered learning. Patricia Palmieri, a historian focusing on women in American higher education, observed that the movement "put great priority on creativity and independence in the classroom. Art and music were considered as intellectually important as the humanities, social sciences, and the physical and biological sciences." [Patricia Palmieri, " Women's Colleges " , in *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* . Mariam K. Chamberlain (ed). New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988, p. 113.] During this period, two-year women's junior colleges with vocational missions were founded. The twenties and thirties also saw the founding of new Catholic women's colleges. By World War II there was a wide variety of women's colleges, including four-year colleges and universities, professional and normal schools, teachers' colleges, and two-year institutions. [According to the *Education Directory* , put out by the United States Office of Education from the late 1800s to the early 1960s, there were an estimated 270 women's colleges in 1935, 276 in 1945, 248 in 1955, and 252 in 1960. However, comparisons of education statistics from the early to mid-1900s can be misleading due to different collection methods, problems in estimating for nonresponse, and the lack of resources available to collect this information compared to today. For more information on data collection problems throughout the history of collection of data on education, see *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.]

Three main types of American women's colleges have evolved since the late 1800s: independent private colleges, including the "Seven Sisters"; Catholic colleges; and public colleges.

Private Women's Colleges

The Seven Sisters. The "Seven Sisters" was the name given to Barnard, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and Radcliffe, because of their parallel to the Ivy League men's colleges. The founding of the Seven Sisters, spanning a period of 24 years, had special significance for women's higher education. While about 50 women's colleges had been founded between approximately 1836 and 1875, most were unable to develop financial or organizational resources, or academic programs of high quality. As one historian has observed: "Generally, these colleges offered courses of study above the standard of those given at female seminaries but below those of colleges for men." [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 16] Vassar's opening in 1865, however, signified a new era because of its unprecedented high admissions standards and academic programs that "compared favorably with men's colleges." Smith, founded in 1875, offered a course of study even more closely paralleling that of men's colleges, and Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, and Mount Holyoke met similar standards. [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 16]

Another notable feature of the Seven Sisters was their ability to recruit and maintain a high percentage of women faculty. Talented women academics, excluded from jobs at men's colleges or coeducational institutions, made colleges such as Smith, Wellesley, and Mount Holyoke their professional homes. [Lynn Gordon, " From Seminary to University " , Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 28.] Every president of Wellesley has been a woman. Faculty women at Wellesley have always enjoyed academic and administrative powers. One early professor, Vida Dutton Scudder, wrote of the satisfaction of these early female professors experienced in gaining access to a faculty:

Yes! It is delightful...for a woman...to belong to a college faculty...Best of all, there is the sense of intellectual fellowship...What pleasure not only to follow a private line of study or research...but to listen to others when they come back from their summers or sabbaticals...The life of the faculty among its own members is fascinating in variety and stimulus. Probably it is especially fascinating to women, to whom this sort of group activity is comparatively new. [Vida Dutton Scudder, excerpted from " A Pedagogic Sunset, " in Patricia Palmieri, In Adamless Eden: The Community of Faculty Women at Wellesley . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.]

Two of the Seven Sisters—Barnard and Radcliffe Colleges—were founded as coordinate colleges allied with Columbia and Harvard, respectively. Barnard College (named for Columbia's tenth President, A.P. Frederick Barnard), was organized and a provisional charter was granted to 22 initial faculty members in 1889. Barnard's staff included regular Columbia professors and others approved by Columbia's president. In 1890, Barnard was included in the educational system of Columbia but retained its own trustees, faculty, dean, and endowment. [Barnard College 1994-95 Catalogue , p. 10.]

Radcliffe College emerged in 1893 from an annex to Harvard College called the "Society for the Instruction of Collegiate Women," in existence since 1878 at the request of a handful of prominent Cambridge families who sought educational opportunities for their daughters. Initially, a handful of Harvard professors agreed to separately teach women the same course of study given to Harvard students. In the 1890s, Radcliffe developed its own residential life and "a strong institution separate from, yet drawing on, Harvard." [Horowitz, Alma Mater , p. 104.] This relationship—adjacent yet separate—continued until the 1970s, when the two colleges merged and women were officially granted Harvard degrees. (Radcliffe retains its own administration and special programs for women, however.)

Historian Helen L. Horowitz notes that the Seven Sisters did not develop in "an ad-hoc, pragmatic way. In each case, founders shaped their creations with a critical level of conscious intention and design." In turn, the Seven Sisters became the models for other independent women's colleges. "Daughter seminaries" of Mount Holyoke became Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts; Elmira College in Elmira, New York; Mills College in Oakland, California, and Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois. Sarah Lawrence College (Bronxville, New York), Bennington College (Bennington, Vermont), and Scripps College (Claremont, California) shared the same philosophies of the Seven Sisters, and like them, had benefactors who affirmed the need for a broader education for women. The Progressive-era founders of these colleges borrowed ideas from the preceding founders of the Seven Sisters. [Horowitz, *Alma Mater* , pp. 328-350.]

Southern Women's Colleges. In order to understand how private women's colleges developed in the South after 1875, it is necessary to consider the multitude of seminaries that preceded them, founded during the pre-Civil War period. The development of these institutions was clearly influenced by several societal factors: a belief in separate spheres for men and women; the influence of religious evangelism; and a need for white women to learn the classics for the sake of status. [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, p. 29.]

The tradition of separate social spheres for men and women during the 1800s was, as noted earlier, prevalent throughout America, but it was particularly strong in the South, where it became the operating force behind the development of separate colleges for women.

The Second Great Awakening of religious evangelism so prevalent in the North in the 1790s spread to the South in the early 1800s. Evangelical Protestantism not only attracted women as churchgoers, forming predominantly female congregations, but contributed to an ideal for women of piety and femininity. [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle* , p. 29.] Founders of Southern women's colleges were members of prevailing Protestant denominations, such as Methodist (Wesleyan), and Baptist (Georgia Baptist Female Seminary). However, other denominations also founded colleges. The Moravians, for example, founded Salem College in North Carolina, and the Presbyterians founded Agnes Scott College in Georgia.

This Protestant influence intersected with the need for education to bolster and confirm social status. Christie Farnham, a historian who has researched the pre-Civil War Southern female seminaries, wrote that these schools were more about "gentility than utility." Nevertheless, the belief that a liberal arts education was a *sine qua non* for gentility for both sexes was strong in the South. Increasingly, families wanted college education for their daughters to improve their status for marriage. [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle* , p. 69.] A college education signified a woman's upper-class status. There was demand for young women to know Greek and Latin to read the Bible and better understand Western civilization. [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle* , p. 31.]

In response to this demand, the number of female seminaries grew. In contrast to the previous emphasis on educating upper-class young women, the late 19th-century Southern women's colleges were more accessible to the middle class. According to historian Patricia Palmieri, "It is difficult to say for sure what was a seminary and what was a genuine college...what is clear is that by the late 1800's, white, middle-class women had opportunities to attend seminaries and receive more than a decorous education." [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges " , p. 111.]

The southern colleges were different in tone from those in the North. In the South, there was little question of women entering any occupation at all, teaching or otherwise. In the North, women's colleges were an implicit threat to sex segregation in the workplace. Yet in the South,

at the earliest colleges for women, whether liberal arts or religious, it was understood that graduates would not enter the work force. [Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle* , p. 31.]

Southern private colleges for women often lacked "the students, the faculties and the facilities of their northern counterparts," writes Amy Thompson McCandless, a specialist on women's education in the South. In fact, as late as 1903, only Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia and Goucher College (then called the Woman's College of Baltimore) offered four years of college work. [Amy Thompson McCandless, " Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women, " *North Carolina Historical Review* . Vol. LXX, No. 3, July 1993, p. 317.] But by 1920, several other independent women's colleges had been founded—Sweet Briar College in Virginia, Hood College in Maryland, and Agnes Scott College in Georgia.

Only one southern institution for women at the turn of the century possessed a large endowment—the H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College for Women in New Orleans. While Newcomb was founded in 1886 as a coordinate college of Tulane University following the pattern of Radcliffe and Harvard, its administrators separated the colleges as much as possible in order to maintain both a "distinct woman's culture" and Newcomb's generous endowment. [McCandless, " Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women, " p. 314.] Following the intent of the founder, Josephine Louise Newcomb, that the college curriculum offer both practical and liberal arts courses, students there could enroll in "classical, literary, scientific, and industrial subjects." [McCandless, " Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women, " p. 314.]

Elizabeth Avery Colton, a professor at Meredith College, took an active role in raising awareness about the quality of women's colleges in the South. Administrators, aware of the fact that many of the women's colleges were having difficulty maintaining academic standards and facilities, organized the Southern Association of College Women (SACW) in 1903 in order to address these institutional problems. One of the Association's first goals was to "determine the type and quality of education available at southern colleges for women." [McCandless, "Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women," p. 320.] Between 1910 and 1917, Colton herself investigated 142 institutions of higher education for women in the South. She found that these "colleges" were taking on non-academic goals; she said that they were overburdened in trying to be "preparatory schools, finishing schools, and colleges." Colton's objectives in publishing her report were to encourage women's colleges to improve their standards. [Colton cited in McCandless, " Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women, " p. 321.]

The efforts of Colton and other reformers brought about improvements in Southern women's higher education between 1890 and 1920. In part, these improvements were due to the advances in elementary and secondary education in the region. [McCandless, " Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women, " p. 322] Even as women's colleges in the South developed after 1920, the traditional image of southern womanhood and the accompanying stereotypes of race, class, and gender continued to be pervasive, affecting both black and white women's academic and professional choices. [McCandless, "Progressivism and the Higher Education of Southern Women," p. 323]

Southern Black Women's Colleges. While the majority of educational opportunities in the South were for whites, after the Civil War, education was viewed as the key to the emancipation of southern blacks and the status of blacks in the North. [The information in the section on black women's colleges is largely drawn from Palmieri, " Women's Colleges " .]

Intrinsic to the higher education of black women in its early years was the idea that it would provide these women with economic and social opportunities. During the 19th century, black education was not rigidly divided along gender lines, and the majority of black women were educated in coeducational institutions. Congress passed a Second Morrill Act in 1890 which required states with dual systems of higher education (all-white and non-white) to provide land-grant institutions for both systems. The intent was to provide for the establishment of black land-grant colleges and universities in those states with dual systems of higher education. [U. S. Department of Education, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 1976-90* . Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, July 1992, p. 2.]

Southern women's colleges were attended almost exclusively by white women. However, a handful of black women's colleges appeared in the post-Civil War years that also made strong educational contributions. Two women's colleges (now co-educational), were founded in this period: Barber-Scotia in Concord, North Carolina in 1867, and Huston-Tillotson in Austin, Texas, founded in 1876.

Bennett College, founded in 1873 in Greensboro, North Carolina, was originally a co-ed institution. In 1926 Bennett was converted into a liberal arts college for black women. In Atlanta, Georgia in 1881, Sophie B. Packard and Harriet Giles, two "white women of abolitionist tradition," founded Spelman College. Among black educators at the turn of the century, there was a debate as to whether blacks should pursue vocational education or liberal arts education. Booker T. Washington encouraged the development of vocational skills for blacks that would give them marketable skills in industry, while W.E.B. DuBois maintained that blacks should continue to acquire liberal arts degrees. Following Washington's philosophy, during the 1920s, both Bennett and Spelman developed vocational programs for women in the form of a home economics curriculum in addition to their liberal arts programs.

Catholic Women's Colleges

In addition to the Seven Sisters, Southern and other independent women's colleges, Catholic women's colleges were also founded to respond to women's educational needs.

Catholic colleges for men emerged in the late 18th century (for example, Georgetown University, founded in 1789). However, by the turn of the 20th century, there were still relatively few colleges for Catholic women, while "increasing numbers of upper-and upper-middle class Catholic families could afford college for daughters as well as sons, and each year more young Catholic women enrolled in secular colleges and universities." During the early 1900s, leaders in the Church increasingly realized that young middle-class Catholic women needed access to Catholic higher education. [George C. Stewart, Jr., *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns* . Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1994, p. 328.]

There was also a need for the higher education of women within the Church. Nuns sought to obtain teaching certification, but it was difficult for them to pursue the requisite college degrees and certification outside the convent. "Mothers superior saw that having a community-owned college would be one answer to the ongoing problem and pursued founding a college where possible." [Stewart, *Marvels of Charity* , p. 380.]

The first four-year Catholic college for women in the United States was the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, which granted its first degrees in 1899. Four more were founded by 1905; 14 in the decade after 1905; 37 between 1915 and 1925; and 19 between 1925 and 1930. In 1955, there were 116 Catholic colleges for women. [Mary J. Oates (ed), *Higher Education for*

Catholic Women: An Historical Anthology . New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987, p. 121.] Catholic women's colleges achieved academic distinction, and continue to enjoy national reputations. Among them are Trinity College in Washington, D.C.; St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana; and the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota. [Stewart, Marvels of Charity , p. 380.] These colleges not only offered solid liberal arts curricula of Latin and Greek, modern language, philosophy, English, and history to undergraduates; over time, they offered graduate work as well.

Catholic higher education for women had several purposes. According to Patricia Palmieri, "Moral character was stressed, as well as intellectual development. Service was also expected." [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 113.] Curricula of Catholic women's colleges often stressed pragmatic skills and trades; Palmieri writes:

In 1931, Marygrove College, in Detroit, stated that one of its principles behind the liberal arts was the 'art of making a living.' Every graduate at Marygrove was to be provided with the means for self-support. The occupations which the college considered appropriate for women included college or high school teaching, social work, banking, secretarial work, journalism, library work, music, and being a successful wife and mother in an ideal Catholic home. [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 113.]

She further notes that because women who attended these early Catholic women's colleges were from working-class backgrounds, "these colleges promoted careers as a source of mobility for their clientele." [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 113.]

There were schools founded between 1918 and 1945 that had difficulty maintaining academic resources, particularly with regard to their faculties and financial status. One reason that these did not flourish and subsequently closed their doors is that these were years of transition for women in public arenas, including higher education, and much of the church leadership was still ambivalent about the higher education of young Catholic women. As historian George C. Stewart, Jr. wrote, "Many bishops clung tenaciously to 19th-century views and only acquiesced in women's colleges in order to offset the perceived evils of Catholic girls attending secular colleges." [Stewart, Marvels of Charity , p. 381.] As a consequence, Stewart observes, bishops "provided the colleges little financial support and reserved highly qualified priest-professors for seminaries and men's colleges." [Stewart, Marvels of Charity , p. 381.] Families did not universally support their daughters' higher education, either: "A large segment of lower-middle-class Catholics was not far removed from immigrant roots with no tradition for higher education, especially for women." [Stewart, Marvels of Charity , p. 382.] In addition, there were faculty who were inadequately educated. "It was not unusual to find among the faculty teachers who themselves had never had the opportunity to attend a college and it was, in fact, extraordinary to find faculty members who had attended any college other than the one in which they were teaching." [Oates, Higher Education for Catholic Women: An Historical Anthology , p. 183.]

In spite of some of these difficulties, there is evidence that the colleges did provide an adequate liberal arts education. As one historian observed: "Catholic colleges for women, however, with whatever weaknesses they may have perpetuated in faculty standards, probably came closer to approaching the primary aim of liberal education than did the early Catholic colleges for men. It would be difficult to maintain that they always accepted a clearly defined intellectual objective, but they were certainly not preparatory seminaries as most of the earlier colleges for men had been." [Oates, Higher Education for Catholic Women: An Historical Anthology , p. 196.] Catholic women's colleges today affirm their missions of providing a liberal arts education within their religious framework.

Public Institutions

Private colleges continue to make up the majority of women's colleges. However, public institutions are an important, if small part of the history of women's colleges.

State-supported higher education for women was at its height around the turn of the century. Following the founding of the Mississippi Industrial Institute and College (II&C) in 1884, other state legislatures followed Mississippi's lead, establishing Georgia State College for Women (1889), North Carolina College for Women (1891), Alabama College (1893), Texas State College for Women (1901), Florida State College for Women (1905), and Oklahoma College for Women (1908). [Bridget Smith Pieschel and Stephen Robert Pieschel, *Loyal Daughters: One Hundred Years at Mississippi University for Women*. Oxford, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1984, p. 8.]

Today, there are only three publicly funded women's colleges operating in the United States, under varying administrative arrangements: Mississippi State University for Women, Douglass College of Rutgers University, and Texas Woman's University.

Mississippi State University for Women was America's first public college for women, opening its doors in 1884 (its original name was the Industrial Institute and College). The campaign for a state-supported college for women was begun by Sallie Eola Reneau, a graduate of the Holly Springs Female Institute. She envisioned a women's institution that would be the academic equivalent of the University of Mississippi, which excluded women from the time of its opening in 1848 until 1882. Though the state legislature approved one of her proposals in 1856, it did not appropriate any funds. [Pieschel and Pieschel, *Loyal Daughters: One Hundred Years at Mississippi University for Women* , p. 4.] She distanced herself from the manifestos of the more radical feminists of her era, emphasizing instead the universal advantages of the college she sought to create. Addressing herself to the legislature, she stated: "...the indigent as well as the opulent may receive from this institution the imperishable riches of a well-cultivated mind." [Pieschel and Pieschel, *Loyal Daughters: One Hundred Years at Mississippi University for Women* , p. 4.]

Sallie Reneau did not live to see the realization of her plans; she died in 1878 and the legislature did not act until the early 1880s. Legislator John McCaleb Martin of Claiborne County drafted a bill to "create a state school which would provide women in Mississippi with three alternatives: arts and sciences education, industrial training, and teacher training. This bill would create a unique hybrid: part liberal arts college, part vocational school, and part "normal" or teacher training school." [Pieschel and Pieschel, *Loyal Daughters: One Hundred Years at Mississippi University for Women* , p. 5.] The measure was finally approved by a slim margin in the state legislature, and the school was established at Columbus.

A century later in 1982, the Supreme Court ordered the school to admit a male nursing student. At present, male students may attend, but the university affirms its primary mission as the education of women. In 1988, the board affirmed the mission of Mississippi University for Women as an institution of quality academic programs for all qualified students, with an emphasis on distinctive opportunities for women.

Douglass College was founded in 1918 as the New Jersey College for Women. The founder, Mabel Smith Douglass, "wanted to create a college which would expand the educational opportunities in higher learning beyond the realm of traditional careers for women." [Douglass College, historical materials.] Today, Douglass College has approximately 3,350 women students, and is an operational part of Rutgers University. Like Rutgers, Douglass continues to

be publicly funded. Women enrolled there, however, also take classes at the various colleges which compose Rutgers, so Douglass could be described as a residential entity that provides a variety of support services and programs specifically for women.

Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas was established by the Texas Legislature in 1901. Vocational training for the state's women was a central concern of the university's founders; in 1889, the State Grange and Patrons of Husbandry asked the legislature: "Do girls not need an industrial college, too, where they can receive a practical education which will prepare them for some vocation in life, in order that they may not work in the cotton fields from necessity." [Joyce Thompson, *Marking a Trail: A History of the Texas Woman's University*. Denton, Texas: Texas Woman's University Press, 1982, p. 1.] Initially called the College of Industrial Arts, the new university offered courses in music, home economics, and vocational subjects, which made it a trainer of teachers in those areas.

Today, Texas Woman's University has about 100 major fields of study, and special colleges of arts and sciences, education and human ecology, health sciences, nursing, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Ninety percent of its students are Texas residents. Though some men are enrolled in health sciences and graduate studies, and a few are undergraduates, the school affirms its primary mission for women.

Graduates 1879-1960

Early Graduates

The first women's college graduates entered a world that was in the midst of the Progressive Era, with its social activism and concern for social betterment. As one historian observed:

Because middle-class students were associated with teaching and reform, the separate women's colleges upheld the norms of social service for their students. Studies of the careers of the first graduates of the Seven Sisters demonstrate that this generation was instrumental in establishing the agenda of social reform for the Progressive movement in the United States. [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 110.]

Around the turn of the century, young, and mostly single college graduates founded "settlement houses" in big cities. Settlement houses were laboratories of social experimentation where these young progressives resided and sought to ameliorate deterioration and poverty in urban centers: crime, poor working conditions, and housing. Providing reading rooms, nurseries, and a variety of services to inner-city residents, settlement houses like Hull House in Chicago were a hallmark of turn-of-the-century Progressivism. [*The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (3rd edition). Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Co., 1985, pp. 598-603.]

Three women's college graduates of the Progressive Era who typified this increased participation in social causes were Jane Addams, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and Julia Lathrop. Jane Addams graduated from Rockford College in 1881 and opened the social settlement of Hull House in Chicago in 1889. She eventually became the President of the Woman's International League for Peace, and in 1931 won a Nobel Peace Prize. Sophonisba Breckinridge, a social worker and educator, received her B.S. from Wellesley College in 1881, and went on to earn both a law degree and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, where she later was a member of the faculty. She was a resident of Hull House in Chicago, and served as vice president of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association and served as president of various social workers' organizations. Julia Lathrop spent two years studying at Rockford

College before receiving her B.A. from Vassar College in 1880. She too was a resident of Hull House, and was involved in issues such as juvenile court laws and the care of the mentally disabled. She served as Chief of the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Labor. [The A.N. Marquis Company, *Who Was Who in America*. Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Company, 1966, Vol. 1, pp. 9 and 707; Vol. 3, p. 78.]

However, not every early graduate chose activism: following the "expected social role," graduates also devoted their post-college life to domesticity. [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 110.] Graduates of women's colleges followed the trends that American women college graduates followed generally. For instance, another observer noted that after 1920, "interest in [college women's] social service and political action peaked significantly, reflecting a concomitant decline in Progressive social reform. A new trend of positive identification with marriage and maternity came to characterize women students." [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 29.] Further, "whereas approximately half the graduates of women's colleges remained single before 1920, after that time college women preferred to become wives and mothers, generally eschewing the career path....during the period 1920-1960, college-educated women married earlier, bore larger families, and turned their attention wholeheartedly to child-rearing..." [Antler, " Culture, Service and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women, " p. 29.] However, not all graduates of women's colleges could afford not to work. Certain graduates in these early years did go beyond the expectations that they become school teachers and became professors, lawyers, and physicians—rare choices for the era.

During the 1930s, the Great Depression limited the job opportunities for women's college graduates: "... one of the side-effects of the thirties was to sideline thousands of intelligent and well-educated women into a lifetime of unpaid volunteer activities." [Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions* , p. 193.] There was a shortage of good jobs, and "it was extraordinarily difficult for even the most ambitious to buck the pervasive American feeling that a woman should not 'take a job away' from a qualified man." Women directed their energies toward volunteerism in hospitals, politics, social and family service agencies, and museums and cultural centers. It is interesting to note that women's attainment of doctoral degrees was relatively high during the 1920s: the *Digest of Education Statistics* reports that in the year 1919-20, the percentage of doctoral recipients who were female was 15 percent; by the end of the decade, in the year 1929-30, that number was still 15 percent. [U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* . Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995, p. 236.]

While educators directed alumnae of women's colleges into graduate professional schools during the Depression, and these women did succeed in finding paid jobs, they were often jobs for which the women were over-qualified. [Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions* , p. 193.]

The war years, 1941 to 1945, provided women with interesting career and post-graduate alternatives: "...from 1941 to 1945 women had a better chance of entering the professional schools than they would until the 1970s." While young men were fighting or organizing the war, women took advantage of the gap and successfully entered fields such as law, medicine, architecture, science, and government. Women also entered a range of working class jobs in the war production effort. Yet, by 1946, it was more difficult for women to gain entrance to graduate school. Also, for women's college graduates, "if launching a career during wartime was simple, getting ahead afterwards was not," as men returned from the war and re-entered the work force, and the pressure for women to settle into domesticity grew. [Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions* , pp. 204-205.]

Post-World War II Graduates

The years between the end of World War II and 1960 were times of ambiguity for graduates of women's colleges. While the dominant social pressure was for female college graduates to return to the home and domesticity, women's colleges attempted to stand by their institutional missions regarding equality of educational opportunity. [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 114.] Maternity and child care were viewed as women's social destiny; however, according to Palmieri, "the Seven Sisters continued to resist attempts to add home economics to their curriculum and continued to inspire some women to go on to graduate school." [Palmieri, " Women's Colleges, " p. 114.]

Women's college graduates in the 20th century have distinguished themselves in the world of work. Researchers have examined some achievement and educational attainment data to see whether graduates of women's colleges have achieved professionally out of proportion to their numbers. Elizabeth Tidball's research in particular suggests that women's college graduates have notable attainments. For instance, in 1980 Tidball sampled 1,500 women from three editions of *Who's Who in American Women*; sixty percent of this sample obtained their B.A. degrees between 1910 and 1940. Of those with B.A.'s, Tidball found that graduates of women's colleges were about twice as likely to be cited for their career accomplishments as were women graduates of coeducational colleges. This held true even after separate ratios were calculated for institutions of similar size and selectivity. [U.S. Department of Education, *Single-Sex Schooling: Perspectives from Practice and Research*, Volume 1. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, December 1993, p. 60.]

Tidball's 1980 research also analyzed the National Academy of Sciences' Doctorate Record File (DRF), looking at women who had received doctorates between 1920 and 1973. Tidball again concluded that graduates of women's colleges were twice as likely to have obtained doctorates across all fields as were women graduates of coeducational colleges. In a separate study, she also found that graduates of women's colleges were twice as likely to enter medical school than women graduates of coeducational schools. [U.S. Department of Education, *Single-Sex Schooling: Perspectives from Practice and Research* , pp. 60-61.] While suggestive, these studies do not take student background characteristics into account, hence, we cannot be sure whether the colleges or the pre-existing characteristics of the women admitted to them are responsible for the higher rates of success after college.

Conclusion

In summary, the nation's women's colleges during this period provided women both liberal arts and practical training, enabling some graduates to establish careers, pursue social service and activism, and sometimes to combine one or both of these with the more common role of homemaker. It seems clear that the 20th century women's colleges in some ways exceeded their mission and went beyond the expectations of their founders' original visions of merely attaining access to higher education.

Beginning in the 1960s, the conversation was not simply about women's colleges, but about the nature of women's participation overall in higher education. The next chapter provides an overview of the issues that have impacted women's colleges over the last several decades.

Chapter 2:

Women's Colleges in the United States,

Recent Issues and Challenges

Introduction

The story of women's colleges between the 1960s and early 1990s can only be told in the context of the larger picture, the social and legal advances made by women during that time. Changing attitudes toward the role of women in American society created new opportunities, as well as new challenges, for women of all walks of life.

Women's colleges began to drop in numbers during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Societal and legal changes led to financial problems for women's colleges. In response, some women's colleges became coeducational, while others merged with other institutions, and still others were forced to close their doors. Those that survived saw a resurgence of interest among American women of all backgrounds and ages. As Mariam Chamberlain, Director of the Task Force on Women in Higher Education, pointed out: "...individual women's colleges are characterized by a great vitality. This strength is apparent in their capacity to sustain a female tradition of intellectual excellence, in their promotion of women as scholars, and in their focus on a healthy educational climate for women." [Mariam K. Chamberlain, (ed). *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988, p.107.]

In contrast to the history told in chapter 1, women today actually have more collegiate options than men. [Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 207.] There are only about 10 men's colleges left in the United States today, but over 80 women's colleges survived the last three decades, during which they were challenged by rising numbers of coeducational institutions. These women's colleges are continually reevaluating and strengthening their institutional missions in order to best serve the women they currently enroll.

The Effects of Societal Changes on American Women

The Early Post-War Era

The history of American women in the second half of the 20th century is far too complex to be covered completely in just a few paragraphs, but a brief discussion is vital to describing what happened to women's colleges during those decades. Paramount to understanding American women during this period, is a knowledge of the women's movement and feminism. Understanding how these and other social forces originated and shaped their times is necessary in order to set the stage for discussion of women in higher education and the fate of women's colleges during the post World War II era.

The liberation of women from traditional roles is usually associated with the 1960s. But events during the 1940s and 1950s were pivotal to the origins of women's liberation. During that period, numbers of women were slowly rising in areas such as government and academia. As one historian wrote of women in politics during that time: "In the 1940s and 1950s, 34 women were elected to the House of Representatives. There were still a large number of Congressmen's widows elected—13 of the 34—but more qualified women made it on their own, and a number were to make the House their career." [Barbara Deckard, *The Women's*

Movement. New York: Harper & Row, 1975, p. 307.] Notable women in government included Margaret Chase Smith, the Senator from Maine; Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, and Oveta Culp Hobby, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. [Deckard, *The Women's Movement*, pp. 307-308.]

During World War II, American institutions of higher education experienced depleted male enrollments and reduced numbers of male faculty. This provided unanticipated opportunities for women as students and professors in higher education. In both coeducational institutions and at women's colleges, women were recruited into the traditionally male-dominated science fields. As one historian noted: "Clearly, the war-time crises, in stimulating plans for future admissions of women, also affirmed confidence in their abilities." [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, p.188.]

Because women were recruited by some college graduate departments during World War II, women's colleges strengthened their undergraduate curricula to meet the requirements of previously rarely chosen fields of study. After veterans returned and men again filled graduate school slots, women's colleges remained a possible choice for women as a place to pursue knowledge in areas that had been traditionally male-dominated. For example, at Barnard College meteorology and electronics were introduced, and at Vassar College, 26 percent of the students majored in science in the early 1940s. [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, p.188.]

The Women's Movement

Successful women in government and academia, however, were the exception, rather than the rule, in post-World War II America. Decades after a former suffragette movement had won the vote for American women, a modern women's movement began to take hold. This modern women's movement and feminism can be described in many different ways. For the sake of this report we shall borrow from Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley in their book, *Women and Public Policies*, in which they define the women's movement and feminism as "a movement seeking to operationalize self-determination for women in political, economic, and social roles." [Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley, *Women and Public Policies* . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 4.] The philosophical foundations of modern feminism began to develop in 1952 with the American publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* of which was written: "...the general tone was one of regret for women's limited opportunities for fulfillment as human beings and it looked forward to a time when men and women, without denying their differences, could function as true equals." [Congressional Quarterly, Editorial Research Reports on The Women's Movement . Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1973, p. 12.]

Following *The Second Sex* was the popularity of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, [Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* . New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963.] published in 1963. Friedan's work resonated with many American women who, contrary to the image of domesticity that was popular at the time, were working outside the home, as one historian found:

.....by 1960, 40 percent of all women over sixteen were in the labor force compared with 25 percent in 1940. More important, most of the new workers were married and many had young children. By the end of the 1960s nearly 45 percent of all married women were employed compared with 15 percent in 1940, and the figure included more than half of all mothers with children aged six to seventeen. Ironically, the same women who were described in the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *McCall's* as thriving on housework were spending an increasing amount of

their time in gainful employment. [William H. Chafe, *Women and Equality* . Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1977, pp. 94-95.]

These increases of mothers in the workforce were attributed to an increasing need for two incomes due to the inflation and rising consumerism of the times. [Chafe, *Women and Equality* , p. 94.] According to one historian, the feminine mystique, or the conflict between the reality of these women's lives and the "image" of domesticity they were trying to obtain as described by Friedan, made the period between the end of World War II and 1960 a "retrogressive one for educated American women." [Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, p. 114.] The conflict described by Friedan as the "problem that has no name" caused frustration in many women. [Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* , p. 15.] One cause for this unhappiness was the fact that when young mothers had completed their child bearing years, they still faced 20 to 30 years in which to carry out their personal missions. Friedan's work, according to one scholar, documented broadening awareness of women as they began to question whether or not their careers in homemaking were fulfilling. [Rosemary Park, " Some Considerations on the Higher Education of Women " in Helen S. Astin and Werner Z. Hirsch (eds), *The Higher Education of Women: Essays in Honor of Rosemary Park* . New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978. p. 23]

As Helen B. Shaffer documented in a *Congressional Quarterly* study on women and the early 1960s: "Friedan's book had a direct impact on the consciousness of women susceptible to its message. The birth control pill had promised a new freedom from unwanted childbirth and overpopulation was being regarded as the new menace....After Friedan came a stream of books carrying her arguments to new realms." [*Congressional Quarterly*, Editorial Research Reports on The Women's Movement , pp. 12-13.] Other writers that discussed the liberation of women in various contexts included Sheila Tobias, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, and Gloria Steinem.

Chapter 1 of this report discussed how the abolitionist movement impacted the early suffragette movement during the 19th century. In a similar fashion, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a catalyst for the modern women's movement. As one historian wrote:

The civil rights movement both provided a dramatic example of the point which women activists were trying to communicate, and it provided a model of protest which helped bring a women's movement to life. It thereby gave women a profoundly political picture of their society and underlined the significance of sex consciousness as an organizing principle. Just as the *Brown* decision had crystallized the issue of protest for blacks, the civil rights movement illustrated with unmistakable clarity to women the possibility of people uniting on the basis of sex identity to preserve their dignity and secure equal treatment. [Chafe, *Women and Equality* , p. 102.]

Women began to mobilize to influence not only the creation of legislation, but also the implementation of public policy that would protect women's rights.

Women and The Law

Women's rights were a part of the political agenda of the 1960s, but getting governmental action on women's issues was a slow and arduous process. President John F. Kennedy created a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in December, 1961. The Commission was a proposal of a female member of Kennedy's campaign staff, Esther Peterson (the head of the Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor, Kennedy's highest female appointee.) The Commission's report, released in October, 1963, recommended the President issue an

Executive Order on equal opportunity in employment. Earlier that year, the Equal Pay Act, which required that women be paid equally when doing the same job as men, was passed by Congress. This Act had been introduced into every Congress for decades. [Deckard, *The Women's Movement*, pp. 325-326.]

Women were included in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was the equal employment section of the bill, partly as a strategy on the part of anti-civil rights legislators to kill the bill. The strategy backfired as the bill, surprisingly, passed with the amendment intact. [Deckard, *The Women's Movement* , pp. 327-328.] When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was established in 1965 to implement the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it refused to consider cases of economic discrimination against women. The frustration of women leaders fighting this discrimination led to the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which became a leading organization and symbol of the women's movement. [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* , p. 201.] Betty Friedan was elected NOW's first president in 1966. [Deckard, *The Women's Movement* , p. 330,] Other groups that formed included The Women's Equity Action League, and National Women's Political Caucus. [Chafe, *Women and Equality* , p. 97.]

Support among women for some type of political organization on their behalf was high. While there was a certain discomfort with radical groups that formed during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the name of women's liberation, a Louis Harris poll in 1972 showed 71 percent of American women at the time believed "if women don't speak up for themselves and confront men on their real problems, nothing will be done." [Deckard, *The Women's Movement* . , pp. 344-345.] However, a simply worded Equal Rights Amendment, proposed in order to make women's rights a part of the U.S. Constitution, easily passed Congress in 1972, but it met opposition in State legislatures and was never ratified.

While Federal laws were enacted during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the improvement of the financial status of American women, some changes in State laws, at about this same time, ended up having a negative effect on women. A *Time* magazine cover story on divorce and its negative impact on women and children contended that 1969 was a pivotal year, because it was when the first "no-fault" divorce law was enacted in California. *Time* described this as the beginning of a national trend which led to rising divorce rates, requiring more women to support themselves and their children. [Elizabeth Gleick, " Hell Hath No Fury, " *Time* . October 7, 1996, p. 83.] Indeed, a study on the effects of no-fault divorce found women and children to be hurt financially, as early as 1973: "Under no-fault divorce, if the state also operates under the common law regarding property rights—as many states do—the loss to the wife may be substantial....Regarding the welfare of children....no-fault divorce *increases* the risk that the interests of children will be overlooked because it may seem useless to struggle over custody if the divorce is to be granted on demand." [Hugh Carter and Paul C. Glick, *Marriage and Divorce* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 466.]

It is clear that the increase in divorce over the past few decades have hurt American women financially and can be counted among the many causes of their rising numbers in the workforce. Women turned to higher education, not just for a liberal arts background that would make them knowledgeable wives and mothers as described in chapter 1, but also to prepare them for professions.

The Effects of Legislation on Higher Education

Early Post-War Legislation

Just as the changes in post-World War II American society propelled the women's movement, these changes also had an influence on higher education institutions and higher education legislation. Due to veterans enrolling in college, institutions of higher education began to expand rapidly to absorb these older students in the years immediately following World War II. The post-World War II "baby boom" eventually resulted in another influx of college students, beginning in the late-1960s, causing enormous pressure on all institutions of higher education. As increasing numbers of Americans desired access to higher education, legislation was passed broadening opportunities for Federal financial assistance.

In 1944, the U.S. Congress passed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act. Known as the "GI Bill," it provided assistance for the education of veterans. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995, p. 366.] As one historian noted, these veterans: "...changed the character of higher education and enhanced the larger public's respect for schooling." [Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women , p.190.] Over 2,230,000 veterans, almost 65,000 of them women, would have their expenses paid to matriculate in college and graduate school. [Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women , p.190.] The women veterans primarily went to public coeducational institutions, while ironically, women's colleges such as Vassar College, Finch College and Sarah Lawrence College began to enroll male veterans. By 1947 veterans were 49 percent of the total college enrollment, and 69 percent of college men were veterans. [Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women , pp. 189-190.]

Legislation also affected the subjects students were encouraged to study. The development of manpower for economic prosperity and national defense was among the justifications for The National Science Foundation (NSF), established in 1950. Seven years after NSF was created, the Soviet Union sent up a satellite, "Sputnik", for space exploration. Competition with the Russians raised concern in America over educational issues, as Thomas Wolanin and Lawrence Gladioux quote a Congressional declaration: "The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women." [Thomas Wolanin and Lawrence Gladioux, " The Political Culture of a Policy Arena: Higher Education, " What Government Does. (Matthew Holden, Jr. and Dennis L. Dresang, eds.) Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975, p. 190-191.] The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 was enacted in order to bolster science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction for all students. Among its many provisions were funds for higher education, particularly student loans and fellowships. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , p. 367.]

Higher Education Legislation in the 1960s and 1970s

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has had lasting effects on higher education, but these changes were slow in coming. Title VI of this law prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin. This would later lead to Executive Order 11246, September 1965, amended by Executive Order 11375, October 1967, which prohibited discrimination in employment under federal contracts. [Gelb and Palley, Women and Public Policies , p. 6.] Additional legislation included the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which authorized grants for college work-study programs. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , p. 368.] This act made possible a broadening of the applicant pool and acceptance rate at all colleges for students from low-income families.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), among its many provisions, authorized insured student loans, established a National Teacher Corps, provided grants for university community service programs and strengthened teacher training programs. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , p. 368.] This law was amended in 1968 to authorize a variety of new programs including assistance to disadvantaged college students through special counseling and summer tutorial programs. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , p. 369.] While previous public policy on higher education had focused on granting land, aiding specifically targeted groups, and encouraging specific fields of study, as Wolanin and Gladieux wrote: "the 1965 act is clearly distinguished by the breadth of programs it initiated and by the size of the federal commitment it represents....The 1965 act stands as a landmark in the development of higher education as a federal policy arena and in defining the substantive scope of that arena." [Wolanin and Gladieux, " The Political Culture of a Policy Arena: Higher Education, " p. 180.]

However, women did not see any immediate positive effects of this legislation. In *Women and Public Policies*, Gelb and Palley note:

By the late 1960s women on American college and university campuses had begun to recognize the discrimination that they were suffering. Perhaps this awareness was wrought in part by ripple effects of the civil rights movement on potential women activists, by the emergence of an organized, albeit small, women's rights movement, by the wave of unmet rising expectations that had been fed by President Johnson's executive orders of 1965 and 1967, and by the various state meetings of commissions on the status of women. [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , p. 100.]

Representative Edith Green, a Democrat of Oregon, held hearings on discrimination against women in higher education in 1970, and subsequently introduced Title IX into the Education Amendments of 1972. [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , p. 100.] Title IX specifically prohibited sex bias in admission to vocational, professional, and graduate schools, and public institutions of undergraduate higher education. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , pp. 369-70.] Gelb and Palley note: "...in 1974 the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) was enacted, providing funds for research and development to undergird women's efforts toward gaining equality in education. No real conflict arose in regard to WEEA in either the legislative or the administrative arena. But controversy began to rage in response to Title IX as soon as the implications surfaced." [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , p. 95.]

Title IX was controversial in its implications because of confusion over exactly what was covered by this statute. Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance...". [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , p. 96.] In their 1982 analysis of the early implementation problems that faced Title IX, Gelb and Palley wrote that the sports establishment of the time "lobbied to prevent what they saw as a potential erosion in their power if equal educational opportunity in athletics and organized sports in particular were provided to all students regardless of their sex." [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , pp. 102-103.] For years, there were attempts to have college athletics made exempt from Title IX regulations. But, as Gelb and Palley concluded:

....despite efforts to stall enforcement of Title IX, especially regarding athletics, some substantial changes have taken place. Increasingly, women's sports are receiving additional institutional funding; scholarships are being made available to women athletes; more options in

sports are open to women; and physical education classes are integrated. [Gelb and Palley, *Women and Public Policies* , pp. 124.]

L. Leotus Morrison, in her analysis of women in college athletics, would later write that Title IX was probably "the most far-reaching influence contributing to the growth of women's sports..." [L. Leotus Morrison, " From the Playing Fields and Courts, " *Educating the Majority: Women Challenge Tradition in Higher Education*. (Carole S. Pearson, Donna L. Shavlik, and Judith G. Touchton, eds.) New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1989, p. 254.] . She presents data on higher education athletics to support her claim, showing that in 1971-72 only 15.6 percent of all college athletes were women and that this increased to 30 percent by 1980-1981. [Morrison, " From the Playing Fields and Courts, " p. 254.]

Title IX implementation battles would continue in the courts during the 1980s and 1990s. A 1984 ruling by the Supreme Court stated that Title IX covered only programs or activities funded with federal money. [Bernice Sandler, *The Restoration of Title IX: Implications for Higher Education* . Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, Project on the Status of Women, 1989.] In 1988, the Civil Rights Restoration Act ensured that Title IX applied to the entire institution, regardless of where federal funds were used. [Sandler, *The Restoration of Title IX: Implications for Higher Education* .] While private, single-sex education at the undergraduate level was protected, the fate of public single-sex higher education institutions became open to judicial interpretation. (This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.)

Additional legislation providing higher education funding assistance would also effect women and their access to higher education institutions. The Middle Income Student Assistance Act of 1978 allowed middle-income as well as low-income college students to qualify for federal education assistance. [U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1995* , p. 370.] The Student Loan Consolidation and Technical Amendments Act of 1983, which legislated an 8 percent interest rate for Guaranteed Student Loans and extended the Family Contribution Schedule, [U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1995* , p. 371.] had a direct effect on the education of women. As Amy McCandless reports: "On a regional level, educational opportunity grants and guaranteed student loan programs have made it possible for more Southerners to attend college." [Amy Thompson McCandless, " The Higher Education of Black Women in the Contemporary South, " *The Mississippi Quarterly*. Vol. XLV, No. 4, 1992, p. 454.] The long-term effect is that today more Southern women earn bachelor's and master's degrees than do men. [McCandless, " The Higher Education of Black Women in the Contemporary South, " p. 454.] McCandless describes a trend that has actually taken hold nationwide.

The Effects of Societal Changes and New Legislation on Women's Colleges

Changes at All Higher Education Institutions

The combined effects of the demographic changes, societal trends, and legislative advances described earlier in this chapter significantly changed higher education institutions during the second half of the 20th century. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): "The 1950s and 1960s marked two major developments. First, large numbers of students entered college and second, public colleges expanded dramatically to meet the demand." [U.S. Department of Education, 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993, p. 66.] Higher education enrollment increased by 49 percent in the 1950s; during the 1960s, the increase was 120 percent. No longer were private four-year colleges the venue for half the students as in the pre-war years. Now 74 percent of students were in public institutions. [U.S. Department of Education, 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait, pp. 65-66.]

Women became a far more familiar sight at higher education institutions, constituting the majority on college campuses by 1979. [U.S. Department of Education, 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait, p. 66.] In Fall 1961, approximately 38 percent of all college students were women. Three decades later, almost 55 percent of all students in higher education were women. [U.S. Department of Education, 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait, pp. 76-77.]

As women became an increasing presence in higher education and more concerned with earning a living, their educational and career aspirations changed. As one education researcher noted during the 1970s: "Women are increasingly disinclined to opt for careers in traditionally feminine fields (school teaching in particular) and now represent more than one-third of all freshmen aspiring to traditionally masculine careers such as engineering, medicine, law, and business. [They] reject the traditional view that the proper place for married women is with the home and family." [Alexander Astin, " The Undergraduate Woman, " in The Higher Education of Women: Essays in Honor of Rosemary Park , p. 111.] Some examples from current education statistics show women obtaining a majority of accounting degrees, 42 percent of law degrees, and increasing numbers of medical degrees. [U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 1995 , pp. 264, 278.] Chapter 3 of this report provides more statistics on women in higher education.

Changes at Women's Colleges

Women's colleges have historically played a part in raising women's career expectations. Access to higher education for women in the first half of the century meant, as described by one women's college president, "nursing, domestic science, food science, home economics, library science and teacher training." [Jill Kerr Conway, " Higher Education for Women, " American Behavioral Scientists. Vol. 32, No. 6, 1989, p. 633.] During that period it was only at private women's colleges dedicated to the liberal arts that women studied mathematics and mathematics dependent fields, including economics, in significant numbers. [Conway, " Higher Education for Women, " p. 633-639.]

After World War II, women entered higher education in record numbers, aided by changing societal attitudes, increased availability of financial assistance, and lowered barriers to higher education institutions. During this time, women's colleges were becoming a smaller part of the higher education universe. One historian calculated that there were 233 women's colleges in 1960 and that only 90 remained in 1986. [Chamberlain, Women in Academe: Progress and

Prospects, p. 119. Determining which institutions were women's colleges over three decades ago has proven to be quite a challenge. Estimates differ. The Women's College Coalition estimates the number of women's colleges in 1960 to be close to 300, Florence Fasanelli, in her own research, identified almost 315 institutions that were women's colleges at that time. As stated in an endnote in chapter 1, according to the Education Directory, prepared by the United States Office of Education, there were an estimated 252 women's colleges in 1960. However, comparisons of education statistics from several decades ago can be misleading due to different collection methods, problems in estimating for nonresponse, and the lack of resources available to collect this information compared to today. For more information on data collection problems throughout the history of collection of data on education, see *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.] Another scholar wrote: "Between June 1968 and October 1968...64 women's colleges went coeducational or closed their doors, a remarkable phenomenon. Many prestigious men's colleges also opened their doors to women during this time." [Joy K. Rice, " Separation and the Education of Women, " *Initiatives* . Vol. 53, No. 3, 1991, p. 6.]

One historian of women's colleges estimates that 81 women's colleges closed their doors between 1960 and 1986. [Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, p. 121.] For example, Ladycliff College, a small women's college, formerly in New York, went out of business in the early 1980s for financial reasons. Its grounds and buildings were purchased by the U.S. Military Academy and are now West Point's museum and visitor's center. [Conversations with current administrators at the U.S. Military Academy.]

According to Mariam Chamberlain, women were finding new avenues of access to higher education for many reasons, including the establishment of many new 2-year public colleges in the 1960s and 1970s. [Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, p. 120.] Chamberlain also suggests that women's colleges were sometimes considered outdated as they were "no longer playing a significant role in higher education because they had not maintained their special historic role and promise." [Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, pp. 120-121.] All of these factors left many women's colleges struggling with declining enrollments and shrinking financial support.

Women's colleges that were a part of larger, coeducational universities were merged with the larger institutions. Pembroke College in Rhode Island is an example of a women's college that disappeared as a women's college, because it merged with a coeducational institution. Pembroke Hall housed the women's college of Brown University, which began admitting women in 1891. Pembroke officially became a college in 1928, however, it no longer had separate degrees or faculty after 1954. During the 1960s and early 1970s, as at many other institutions, Brown's campus was rocked with protests. Issues that students protested included the Vietnam War, as well as Brown's curriculum, the role of minorities at the University, and curfews and restrictions that only applied to women at Brown. In this turbulent climate, Brown also decided to undergo an internal reorganization. In 1971, the dissolving of Pembroke as a college was officially called a merger. [Janet M. Phillips, *Brown University: A Short History*. This history appears on Brown University's web site: " <http://www.brown.edu> " .]

During this time, other leading single-sex institutions were turning to coeducation. As Shaffer noted in her report for *Congressional Quarterly*: "More significant than numbers is the standing of colleges taking the coeducational plunge. So long as institutions like Princeton, Yale and Vassar stood fast, the position of the one-sex liberal arts college seemed secure; when they fell, the cause seemed all but lost." [*Congressional Quarterly*, Editorial Research Reports on The Women's Movement, p. 149.] She went on: "Because of the reluctance of many bright girls

to pursue their studies in an all-female environment, it is now taken for granted that all of the seven sisters' will become coeducational before long." [Congressional Quarterly, Editorial Research Reports on The Women's Movement , p. 151.]

As it has turned out, this analysis may have been premature. It is true that since 1960 there were women's colleges that became coeducational institutions, but the women's colleges that debated the possibility of going coeducational, and then decided to remain single-sex, including such well-known women's colleges as Smith and Wellesley, are thriving today. Discussion of changes in the status of women's colleges over the past three decades, however, must include the Religious status of Catholic women's colleges, and the single-sex status of both public women's and men's colleges, as these institutions were also affected by the changing times.

Women's Colleges That Became Coeducational

Coeducation at the most famous institutions of higher education is commonplace today. But, in the late-1960s, when the Ivy League schools and others first started to become coeducational, there was a lot of interest and concern. For this was, after all, a radical change for schools that had been single-sex in some cases for well over 200 years.

Yale and Vassar considered developing a coordinate relationship that would have Vassar moving from Poughkeepsie, New York to New Haven, Connecticut, and keeping separate administration and financing while sharing some academic programs. Vassar turned down the plan and instead decided to stay where it was and become coeducational. Beginning in 1969, Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth began to make plans to move to coeducation. Other all-male schools that joined them that year were Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., The University of the South in Tennessee, Union College in New York, and Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Colgate University in New York actually housed 56 young women from Skidmore in what they called a "coeducation tryout." [Congressional Quarterly, Editorial Research Reports on The Women's Movement , pp. 149-151.]

Women's colleges that decided to become coeducational institutions during the past few decades in addition to Vassar included Goucher College, as well as Wheaton College in Massachusetts, Queens College in North Carolina, Skidmore College in New York, and Connecticut College. There are women's colleges that have had documented success in increasing enrollments, however, others were disappointed at various problems that arose while changing to a coeducational institution.

One women's college became coeducational in the late 1980s because of shrinking enrollments, a decrease of 13 percent in applications, and "dismal demographic projections." [---" Women's Colleges, " The Economist. May 30, 1987, pp. 35-36.] When another announced that it would go coeducational its applications increased by 65 percent. [---" Women's Colleges, " The Economist , pp. 35-36.] When one women's college became coeducational it restructured and revamped its curriculum adding a full-scale sports program. [Douglas Lederman, " To Survive, Queens College Switched to Coeducation and Revamped Its Curriculum - And Now It's Added a Full-Scale Sports Program, " Chronicle of Higher Education. February 21, 1990, pp. A43-A45.] This college's decision to become coeducational followed a survey conducted by the college which showed, in the words of the college's president, that if the college "wished to maintain quality in the undergraduate program, it was going to be very difficult to do as a single-sex institution." [Lederman, " To Survive, Queens College Switched to Coeducation and Revamped Its Curriculum - And Now It's Added a Full-Scale Sports Program, " pp. A44-A45.] Becoming coeducational, however, was only one of the major changes which turned around this college

after it faced major financial problems and low enrollment in the 1970s. Between 1978 and 1990, the enrollment tripled and the endowment quadrupled as adult education programs had been added with degree options for students above the traditional college age, which along with the restructured undergraduate curriculum were credited for the improvement in this college's fortune. [Lederman, " To Survive, Queens College Switched to Coeducation and Revamped Its Curriculum - And Now It's Added a Full-Scale Sports Program, " pp. A43.]

The president of one women's college told how coeducation came about at the faculty's request. Scientists on the faculty, concerned that young male scientists in the surrounding community needed more education for professional advancement, suggested that a Master's degree be offered to men, as it was to women. As she explained:

The presence of the men in the classes in science, we felt, would have a good effect on the women. In those days there was a kind of folklore that women didn't do very well in either science or mathematics and that tended to be a self-fulfilling diagnosis. Anything that could make the women's study of these two subjects more serious would be an advantage. The enrollment of committed young male scientists in our classes might contribute to this result. [Helen S. Astin, " Interview with Rosemary Park, " in *The Higher Education of Women* , p. xvii.]

Some colleges saw the downside of becoming coeducational institutions. One college assessed its first decade of coeducation and found that it "...fails to contribute positively to the changes occurring in society and instead, simply reinforces traditional male and female roles." [---" *Women's Colleges*, " *The Economist* , pp. 35-36.] An assessment of another women's college's decision to go coeducational in the early 1970s found 17 years later that it had fallen behind comparable women's colleges in the numbers of women it sent to medical schools and "...men now dominate faculty councils." [---" *Women's Colleges*, " *The Economist* , pp. 35-36.] Indeed, one account of a study of four former women's colleges reported that "the transition to a mixed campus took at least 10 years and cost the colleges large sums of money for new sports facilities, residence halls, and recruitment of male students and male teaching staff. The most telling disadvantage was that men soon came to dominate both classroom discussions and the student community." [---" *Women's Colleges*, " *The Economist* , pp. 35-36.]

In a 1977 study on what he termed "change colleges," colleges that had moved from single-sex to coeducational, researcher Richard Anderson noted: "the change to coeducation had serious and undesirable environmental consequences at hitherto female colleges." [M. Elizabeth Tidball, " *Women's Colleges: Exceptional Conditions, Not Exceptional Talent, Produce High Achievers*, " *Educating the Majority: Women Challenge Tradition in Higher Education*. (Carole S. Pearson, Donna L. Shavlik, and Judith G. Touchton, eds.) New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1989, p. 168.] Researcher Elizabeth Tidball, in 1985 and 1986 studies, found lower numbers of women graduates from women's colleges that had become coeducational going on to medical school or earning a doctorate in one of the natural sciences, than women from women's colleges. [Tidball, " *Women's Colleges: Exceptional Conditions, Not Exceptional Talent, Produce High Achievers*, " p. 168.] (See further discussion of this issue in chapter 4.)

Women's Colleges That Chose to Remain Women's Colleges

For women's colleges that have survived the changes of the last few decades, one strategy for success included enhancing connections with all-male or coeducational institutions. Another strategy at women's colleges involved revising curricula, restructuring management, and adding new programs, not unlike other small, liberal arts institutions of the times that faced new competition from the rising numbers of public institutions. A few women's colleges were unique in that they were protected by large endowments and active alumnae, allowing them to

keep their institutional missions of serving women in the face of many challenges by coeducational institutions, both public and private.

From the mission statement of Scripps College we learn: "While many colleges are now coeducational, Scripps continues as a women's college because it believes that having women at the core of its concerns provides the very best environment for intellectually ambitious women to learn from a distinguished teaching faculty and from each other." [" The Mission, " Scripps, The Women's College, Claremont; 1994-96 Catalog, p.4] Scripps' mission statement, adopted by the college's Board of Trustees in 1994, demonstrates Scripps' commitment to remaining all-female. However, Scripps also publicizes the fact that it is a part of the Claremont consortium, situating it across the street from coeducational institutions:

Modeled after the Oxford University plan of small, coordinating residential colleges with central, university-level services and a graduate school, Scripps and the five other Claremont Colleges—Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer, Pomona and The Claremont Graduate School—are the finest assembly of small, liberal arts colleges in the United States. [" The Mission, " Scripps, The Women's College, Claremont; 1994-96 Catalog, p. 5.]

Smith College, in its promotional materials, also reaffirms its mission as a women's college. From a Smith College catalogue:

Not surprisingly, when Vassar began to accept men, and Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth to accept women as candidates for degrees, some members of the college community wondered whether Smith should also become coeducational. In 1971, a committee of trustees, faculty, administration, students and alumnae...concluded that admitting men as candidates for the Smith degree would detract from the founding purpose of the college, the best possible education for women. [Smith College Bulletin : 1994-1995 Catalog , p. 8.]

Like Scripps, Smith publicizes that during the 1960s it formed a way of broadening student experiences through participating in consortia: "The college made more varied educational experiences available...by extending cooperation with its neighbors—Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke colleges and the University of Massachusetts." [Smith College Bulletin : 1994-1995 Catalog , p 7. This Five College interchange was developed as a part of the founding of Hampshire College.]

In Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr College and Haverford College have an exchange program. As one historian wrote: "In this case, it was the men's college that turned to the women's college in time of economic need. Haverford College, afflicted with a \$2 million deficit, tried to merge with Bryn Mawr College in 1974. Bryn Mawr wanted to keep its autonomy but was willing to engage in an exchange. Each campus has maintained its identity, but options have opened for both." [Susan Romer Kaplan, " Women's Education: The Case for the Single-Sex College, " in The Higher Education of Women , p. 63.]

Women's colleges continue to publicize their connections with coeducational institutions today. Currently, Wellesley College has a close relationship with MIT, allowing students to enroll in courses at both schools. Wellesley, Smith, and Mount Holyoke participate in a twelve college exchange program with Amherst, Bowdoin, Connecticut, Dartmouth, Trinity (CT.), Vassar, Wesleyan (CT.), Wheaton, and Williams, allowing students to spend a semester or a year at each other's schools. In Virginia, a similar seven-college exchange program includes Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Hollins College, Mary Baldwin College and Sweet Briar College, all of which are all-female, along with the all-male Hampden-Sydney College, and the coeducational Washington and Lee University, and Randolph-Macon College. Randolph-Macon

Woman's College and Sweet Briar College also have cross-registration with the coeducational Lynchburg College. [Various college catalogues.]

As *The Economist* reported in 1987, "survival tactics" of women's colleges included these academic exchanges with men's colleges and the development of continuing-education programs for older women. [---" Women's Colleges, " *The Economist* , pp. 35-36.] For example, Chatham College has remained a women's college by adapting to the needs of older students in creating new programs. As stated in the college catalogue: "The Gateway Program, begun for women over the age of 23 seeking a baccalaureate degree, was one of the first such programs in the country designed to address the needs of the adult woman student." This program was established in the 1970s. [*The Chatham College Catalog 1995-96* , p. 10.]

Like many small, primarily liberal arts colleges during the past three decades, women's colleges restructured in order to increase efficient use of resources. For example, Hood College in Maryland, was determined to remain a women's college and took a pragmatic approach to preserving its institutional mission. The college faced the challenges of the last few decades by using various strategies to bolster its enrollment. The college eliminated some under-enrolled or duplicative courses, launched new programs of study, adopted a core curriculum, and made planning an integral part of every department, improved budgeting and student services, and professionalized its fund-raising. [Donna Shoemaker, " Hood College, " *Educational Record* . Vol. 63, No. 1, Winter 1982, pp. 52-57.] Another example is Russell Sage College in New York. Russell Sage ended a 15-month self-study by deciding to remain a women's college, enhancing enrollments by expanding its career services and internships, and adopting new recruitment techniques. The college found it had a "special market niche" because it offered training in nursing and physical therapy, as well as public administration and business. [---" Women's Colleges, " *The Economist* , p 36.]

One education historian notes: "A century ago separate private colleges for either men or women constituted an economic luxury. Only men's colleges that could afford it kept women out. Today only the few women's colleges that have large enough endowments and sufficient alumnae support can remain single sex." [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, p. 207.] Endowments have been a factor in the ability of some women's colleges to remain solvent within larger institutions, or remain totally independent. For example, Radcliffe College has kept its own endowment separate from that of Harvard University, even though Harvard and Radcliffe classes have included both sexes as far back as 1943, during World War II when the faculty was depleted. [Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, p. 188.] Chapter 1 describes how Radcliffe and Harvard merged in the 1970s and women were granted Harvard degrees.

Also noted in chapter 1, H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College for Women in New Orleans began with a generous endowment. Tulane University, where Newcomb is a coordinate college, was forced to use some of the endowment to cover operating deficits during the 1970s. The income from the now fully restored fund will offset expenses for the "unique and historic mission of Newcomb College to educate women." [Nick Marmielo, " For Newcomb's Future, " *Tulanian* . New Orleans, LA: Tulane Office of University Publications. Summer 1996. p. 5.] Some autonomous women's colleges have strong financial foundations due to their generous endowments. Agnes Scott, Smith, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and Bryn Mawr have endowments that rank among the 120 largest endowments of higher education institutions in the United States. [U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1995 , p. 360] However, some smaller institutions such as Bennett College and the Catholic women's colleges have still survived and thrived despite smaller endowments.

The involvement of women's college alumnae was notably and publicly strong at some institutions when consideration of closing or going coeducational was debated. The alumnae have played important roles in strengthening the missions of women's colleges. When the trustees of Wilson College, in Pennsylvania, voted to close Wilson, a group of alumnae brought a lawsuit to keep the doors open. Since then, the college's programs have been transformed to meet the changing interests and ages of its students. For example, the college created a division of continuing studies. [Julie L. Nicklin, " The Renaissance of Wilson college, a Financial and Academic Success, " Chronicle of Higher Education . Vol. 36, No. 27, March 21, 1990, p. A3.]

Russell Sage College, mentioned previously, studied the possibility of becoming coeducational for 15 months before deciding to remain a women's college. One key factor was that 99 percent of the alumnae wanted it to remain single-sex. [---" Women's Colleges, " The Economist , p. 35-36.] Alumnae involvement has not always helped keep women's colleges single-sex. At one women's college, the plan to admit men started a bitter fight on and off the campus. [Michael W. Hirschorn, " Plan to Admit Men to Wheaton College Stirs Bitter Fight on and off the Campus, " Chronicle of Higher Education. May 20, 1987, p. 30.] Student and alumnae groups mobilized through "legal action to fight what they believed was a breach of faith," but were ultimately unsuccessful. [Hirschorn, " Plan to Admit Men to Wheaton College Stirs Bitter Fight on and off the Campus, " p.31.]

Changes at Catholic Women's Colleges

The societal and legislative forces that changed so many of the women's colleges in the last few decades also had an effect on Catholic women's colleges. In their early history, Catholic women's colleges, which began as academies for Catholic girls, all had a mission of providing religious education. This began to change when nuns asked for additional secular education, and again, when the church hierarchy bent its traditional ways to allow for general education for Catholic women. [Stewart, George C. Jr., *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns*, Huntington, IN.: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1994, p. 328.]

Chapter 1 described how many Catholic women's colleges were founded between World War I and World War II. But the numbers of Catholic women's colleges declined in the decades after World War II. For example, the College of New Rochelle in New York decided to become a secular institution, and during the 1960s and 1970s it expanded, adding a graduate school, a nursing school, and a school for adult learners. But the college did continue its original mission of serving women by keeping its School of Arts and Sciences all-female. [College of New Rochelle, *School of Arts & Sciences, 1994-1995*, pp. 7-8.]

One historian used Webster College of Missouri (now Webster University, a coeducational institution), as an example of how a Catholic women's college decided to become a secular institution, for in 1967, as the curriculum was becoming more secular, more and more lay faculty were teaching at the institution. "The reshaping of the curriculum made the reshaping of the governance necessary for educational and financial reasons." [Esther Rauschenbush, " Three Women: Creators of Change, " in *The Higher Education of Women* , p. 38.] Finances were a major consideration: "Costs spiraled and funds for education in the religious sector became more difficult to find." [Rauschenbush, " Three Women: Creators of Change, " p. 40.]

Other Catholic women's colleges, such as Ladycliff mentioned earlier in this chapter, failed for financial reasons. But some of the Catholic women's colleges founded in the 1920s, such as Regis College in Massachusetts, Rosemont College in Pennsylvania, Mount St. Mary's College in California, and Notre Dame College of Ohio, have remained true to their original institutional

missions and are still Catholic women's colleges. Elizabeth Tidball wrote about the strengths of Catholic women's colleges and how these institutions developed strategies that keep them functioning today:

They have the highest proportion of women presidents of any group of colleges or universities in the country (Office of Women in Higher Education, 1984). Both in terms of opportunities for professional women and in terms of role models for women students, this is an asset of considerable value. Roman Catholic women's colleges have pioneered a variety of educational delivery systems—the weekend college, summers-only programs, competency-based education, credit for non-college experience, contract learning—many of which have been especially beneficial to women with meager financial resources and minimal previous contact with higher education. In these ways the Roman Catholic colleges have adapted their dedication to service to the modern era and in particular, to serving women who would otherwise remain underserved. [Tidball, " Women's Colleges: Exceptional Conditions, Not Exceptional Talent, Produce High Achievers, " pp. 158-159.]

A scholar of Catholic women's colleges found that they were more likely to have tenured women faculty than other women's colleges, and that they had "an increasing commitment to the enrollment of minority students." [Abigail McCarthy, " A Luminous Minority: The Contributions of Catholic Women's Colleges, " in *Educating the Majority: Women Challenge Tradition in Higher Education* , p. 179.] (Catholic colleges have played a role in providing higher education opportunities for the Latino population.) This scholar found that alumnae giving to Catholic women's colleges was higher than to other women's colleges, and therefore suggested that "The loyalty of so many women to these institutions suggests a bright future for networking and the possibility of forming strong alliances among Catholic educated women." [McCarthy, " A Luminous Minority: The Contributions of Catholic Women's Colleges, " p. 180.] Indeed, such famous women as Barbara Mikulski, the Senator from Maryland, and Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice presidential nominee of a major political party, are graduates of Catholic women's colleges. [McCarthy, " A Luminous Minority: The Contributions of Catholic Women's Colleges, " p. 173.]

Changes at Public Single-Sex Institutions

As discussed in Chapter 1, only three public women's colleges remain today, Douglass College of Rutgers University, Texas Woman's University, and Mississippi University for Women (MUW). Douglass College is one school of a coeducational university, and Texas Woman's University and MUW both admit men, but clearly state in their promotional materials that their institutional mission is to further women's education.

In 1982, MUW was ordered by the United States Supreme Court to admit men as a result of a suit brought against the school by a man who had been denied admission to the nursing program because of his sex. This case, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said in the opinion of the court: "...presents the narrow issue of whether a state statute that excludes males from enrolling in a state-supported professional nursing school violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." [*Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan*, 102 S.Ct.3333 (1982).]

The State's argument for maintaining a single-sex admissions policy was that it "compensates for discrimination against women, and therefore, constitutes educational affirmative action." [*Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan*, 102 S.Ct.3337.] The Supreme Court accepted the State's argument, however, it found that for the nursing school there was an affirmative action rationale for encouraging male applicants. The Court stated that "MUW's policy of excluding

males from admission to the School of Nursing tends to perpetuate the stereotyped view of nursing as an exclusively women's job." [*Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan*, S.Ct.3339.] The Court decided in favor of Hogan, ruling that the school violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning in Mississippi required the institution to admit men: "In 1988, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed the mission of MUW as an institution of quality academic programs for all qualified students with emphasis on distinctive opportunities for women. Today, the university refers to itself as Mississippi University for Women...and smart men, too!" [*Mississippi University for Women 1994-95 Bulletin* , p. 9.]

More recently, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in favor of the United States in the case "*United States v. Virginia et al.*" brought discussion of single-sex public institutions into the public's eye. The Virginia Military Institute (VMI), a public military institution of higher education, is famous for its over 150-year history of admitting males only, its rigorous physical and emotional challenges to its freshmen, including the infamous "Rat Line" where cadets endure face-to-face inquisitions, and its influential and loyal alumni network. In 1989, the U.S. Justice Department received a complaint from a female Virginia high school student who had been denied an application to VMI. In 1990, the Justice Department put then-Virginia governor Douglas Wilder on notice that, "VMI's male-only policy violated the U.S. Constitution and the federal Civil Rights Act." [Donald P. Baker, " By One Vote, VMI Decides to Go Coed, " *The Washington Post* . September 22, 1996, p. A10.]

This set in motion six years of litigation, during which the state, under court order, established the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership (VWIL) at Mary Baldwin College, a private women's college near the VMI campus. According to the *Mary Baldwin College Academic Catalogue*, VWIL students, in addition to completing both the college's General Education requirements and an academic major, would be required to do additional work in four areas: (1) academic curriculum; (2) physical and health education curriculum; (3) military leadership (ROTC); and (4) co-curricular program. ROTC classes were to be held on the VMI campus. [*Mary Baldwin College Academic Catalogue 1995-1996* , p. 143-144.] Women began their training in the VWIL in the summer of 1995. [Baker, " By One Vote, VMI Decides to Go Coed, " p. A10.]

In October 1995, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the VMI case. The Women's College Coalition (WCC), an organization representing women's colleges, sponsored the drafting of an amicus brief in support of the government's challenge to VMI's single-sex status. This brief, signed by 26 members of the WCC, presented the position of private women's colleges, that the mission of some single-sex schools was to end rather than continue traditional gender classifications. [*United States Supreme Court Amicus Brief*. October Term, 1995. November 16, 1995. *Brief of Twenty-six Private Women's Colleges As Amici Curiae in Support of Petitioner*. West, 1996.]

One of the issues decided was that the plan Virginia had put in place was unconstitutional because it was unequal in its public support of VMI and the VWIL. The constitutional standard that Virginia failed to meet was the same one that had been used previously "...in the *Hogan vs. Mississippi University for Women* case where Justice Sandra Day O'Connor characterized the constitutional standard for gender discrimination." [Jadwiga S. Sebrechts, " The Perspective of Women's Colleges on the Supreme Court Decision on VMI " in a Memorandum, Washington, D.C.: Women's College Coalition, August 1, 1996.] The Court's seven to one decision (Justice Clarence Thomas abstained) that VMI must admit women or give up its state funding was announced in June, 1996. Faced with a choice of becoming a private institution or admitting women, VMI's Board of Visitors voted nine to eight to admit women starting in 1997. As The Citadel, of South Carolina had decided earlier to become coeducational, the VMI vote ended

the history, not only of public all-male institutions of higher education, but also of public all-male military colleges in the United States. [Baker, " By One Vote, VMI Decides to Go Coed, " p. A10. The Citadel of South Carolina, was the only other state-supported military college left existing in the U.S. in 1996 with a history of being all-male. After the much-publicized short admission of Shannon Faulkner in 1995, and the Supreme Court ruling in 1996, The Citadel chose to go officially coeducational and enrolled 4 women in the Fall, 1996 class. All other public U.S. military higher education institutions have been coeducational for over 20 years.]

Regarding the outcome of the case, the Executive Director of the WCC stated that: "Neither private women's colleges, nor private men's colleges are adversely implicated by the Supreme Court's decision." [Sebrechts, " The Perspective of Women's Colleges on the Supreme Court Decision on VMI. "] Indeed, the public debate over coeducational vs. single-sex education has brought more attention to the remaining single-sex higher education institutions. The women's colleges that remain today are increasing their enrollments, as documented in chapter 3 of this report.

Conclusion

The social trends that have changed America in the second half of the 20th century, and the legislation that opened many doors of higher education to those who had previously been denied access, affected the history of women's education at coeducational and women's colleges in the period from 1960 to today. A drive for equality in educational opportunity, as well as changing demographics and new legislation, caused many men's and women's colleges to change to coeducation over the past three decades.

As women's roles changed in American society, women sought more education and different educational opportunities in order to fulfill those roles. During the past three decades there was sometimes doubt as to whether attending a women's college was the best way to meet women's educational and career aspirations. In addition to uncertainty over their institutional missions in the face of societal changes, financial problems and competition from coeducational institutions caused many women's colleges to close during this period.

This chapter told the story of women's colleges that chose to become coeducational, but also of those that weathered the last few decades by reevaluating and restating their institutional missions. In some cases, these colleges added new programs and appealed to students above the traditional college age as a part of restructuring their institutions in a way that supported their original mission as women's colleges. While many women's colleges fell victim to the changing times, those that have survived have adapted themselves to best prepare women to meet the new challenges that they face in American society today.

Chapter 4:

Women's Colleges in the United States,

An Overview of Research and Questions for the Future

Introduction

This report has studied women's colleges, their history, and the issues surrounding single-sex education in higher education, from an institutional standpoint. The concluding chapter will continue this focus, but will look at what can be called "institutional effects," that is, the effect attending women's colleges have had on some women as individuals, according to education researchers. This chapter will also attempt to identify where more research is necessary on how attending a single-sex institution affects women.

Most research on women's colleges to date specifically examines whether and how the college environment or institutional characteristics of women's colleges impact the educational and occupational aspirations and achievement of women's college graduates. Among the issues examined by researchers:

- whether or not women have more opportunities to be leaders at women's colleges compared to coeducational colleges;
- whether women who graduate from women's colleges are more likely to enter traditionally male-dominated fields; and
- whether female faculty at women's colleges have an impact on women students.

These factors are the most frequently cited as contributing to the unique environment at women's colleges.

The previous chapter identified data reported to the U.S. Department of Education that showed women's colleges to be small institutions having similar or larger percentages of women obtaining bachelor's degrees in male-dominated fields, and having much larger percentages of women in professional, managerial, and administrative roles on campus than similar coeducational institutions. Other recent reports find that women's college graduates make up 24 percent of women members of Congress, and 33 percent of women board members of Fortune 500 companies. They are more likely to have studied mathematics, science, or economics, are more than two times as likely to receive doctoral degrees and more likely to attend medical school than their coeducational counterparts. [Nadia Lerner, "Women's Schools: Where the Brains Are, The Boys Aren't," *Advocate and Greenwich Times*. August 8, 1993. Myra Smith, "Single-Gender Colleges Thrive with No Eds," *Chicago Tribune*. April 10, 1994. Maria Newman, "Women's Colleges Find a New Popularity," *New York Times*. January 15, 1994, p. 1. Mary-Christine Phillip, "For Women Only: After Years of Decline, Women's Colleges Gaining Popularity," *Black Issues in Higher Education*. October 21, 1993.]

Findings from many studies show that attending a women's college does impact students in positive ways. There are, however, studies that show little or no effect of women's colleges on various outcomes. Flaws in the methodologies of several studies have raised questions regarding their validity. Methodological problems include the lack of ability to control for background characteristics (such as student motivation, socio-economic status, and academic

ability), small sample size, and focus on single institutions. Studies that use national survey data, multi-variate, and causal analyses generally yield more reliable results. This brief review samples current literature, focusing on frequently raised issues, specifically student satisfaction, opportunities for leadership, educational aspirations and attainment, career aspirations and occupational outcomes, and the campus climate.

Summary of Findings

Student Satisfaction

Several researchers have examined the relationship between institutional gender type and student satisfaction. Generally student satisfaction refers to satisfaction with social and academic life and personal and institutional goals, and is a component of satisfaction with the overall campus environment. Smith, Wolf, and Morrison (1995) [Daryl G. Smith, Lisa E. Wolf, and Diane E. Morrison, " Paths to Success: Factors Related to the Impact of Women's Colleges, " *Journal of Higher Education* . Vol. 66, No. 3., 1995.] and Smith (1990) [Daryl G. Smith, " Women's colleges and Coed Colleges: Is there a Difference for Women? " *Journal of Higher Education* . Vol. 61 (March/April 1990).] examined the experiences of women students at coeducational institutions and women's colleges. Both studies use Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) data. [The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system and is sponsored by the American Council on Education and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles. CIRP has collected data since 1966 involving 1,300 institutions, over 8 million students and 100,000 faculty.] In her earlier study, Smith examined how institutional type (women's vs. coeducational) affects student satisfaction as well as perception of institutional goals, degree attainment, and educational aspirations. Smith found that, while controlling for background characteristics, attendance at a women's college relates positively to the quality of students' academic experience and involvement with faculty and staff.

Smith, Wolf, and Morrison (1995) examined student and institutional priorities and goals. Using path analysis and controlling for background characteristics, Smith *et al* found that women attending women's colleges perceived their institutions to be more concerned with student learning and civic involvement, and multi-culturalism. The researchers also found that these perceptions predict academic and extracurricular involvement which in turn predict leadership, sense of competence, overall satisfaction, social satisfaction, success goals, learning goals, civic involvement goals, and multi-cultural goals. Although findings indicated that women attending women's colleges were less satisfied with their social lives, the authors believe that the perception of institutional concern for student development and growth "mediates the negative impact on social satisfaction." [Smith, Wolf, and Morrison, " Paths to Success: Factors Related to the Impact of Women's Colleges, " p. 263.]

Opportunities for Leadership

Participation in campus activities and opportunity for leadership roles are often used as measures of student satisfaction. Miller-Bernal (1989) [Leslie Miller-Bernal, " College Experiences and Sex-Role Attitudes: Does A Women's College Make A Difference? " *Youth and Society* . Vol. 20, No. 4. June pp. 363-387.] found that women at coeducational colleges were generally more active in campus activities than their peers attending women's colleges. On the other hand, in a 1977 study, Astin found women attending women's colleges were more likely to obtain leadership positions, become involved in student government, develop high

aspirations and persist to graduation than women attending coeducational institutions. [Alexander Astin, *Four Critical Years* . San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1977, p. 233.]

Whitt (1994) [Elizabeth J. Whitt, " I Can Be Anything!: Student Leadership in Three Women's Colleges, " *Journal of College Student Development* . Vol. 35, May 1994.] looked more closely at students' actual leadership experiences at three women's colleges. Specifically, Whitt looked at how women's colleges accomplish their goals of women's education by exploring the following questions:

- How do women students lead?
- How do they learn to lead?
- How do students describe their leadership experiences?
- How does the environment affect leadership experience?
- What are the implications of these students' experiences for coeducational colleges and universities interested in developing leadership opportunities and skills for undergraduate women?

Whitt interviewed 200 respondents (including students, faculty, administrators and alumnae) at three women's colleges (Wellesley College, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, and Westhampton College) for the study. Findings from this study indicate great similarities across institutions in terms of institutional practices and student descriptions of their experiences. Respondents indicated that involvement in leadership activities was associated with increased social and political awareness; improved thinking, writing, communication, and organizational skills, and expanded notions of majors and career choices. Self confidence and a sense of self-efficacy were also attributed to involvement in leadership activities. [Whitt, " I Can Be Anything!: Student Leadership in Three Women's Colleges, " p. 202.] Whitt suggested that women's colleges might serve as models of leadership development for institutions dedicated to encouraging women leaders. [Whitt, " I Can Be Anything!: Student Leadership in Three Women's Colleges, " p. 200.]

Educational Aspirations and Attainment

Research on women's colleges has also examined their impact on educational attainment and aspirations. The majority of studies focus on comparisons of women's college students and graduates with female students and graduates of coeducational institutions. Most of these studies look at whether attending a women's college makes a difference in entering a traditionally male-dominated field of study, and aspiring to or attending graduate school.

Riordan (1994) looked at some of the possible benefits of attending women's colleges on several human capital outcomes, including educational attainment, by measuring actual attendance (in years and semesters) rather than graduation. Using data from The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72), and controlling for initial ability (as measured by SAT scores) and socio-economic status, Riordan found no consistent differences in educational attainment between women attending women's colleges and their peers at coeducational institutions, although women who attended a women's college for only one year and then transferred to a coeducational institution were significantly more likely to continue their higher education for more time (years or semesters), than women at coeducational schools who never attended a women's college. Stoecker and Pascarella (1991), [Judith L. Stoecker and

Ernest T. Pascarella, " Women's Colleges and Women's Career Attainments Revisited, " Journal of Higher Education . Vol. 62, No. 4 (July/August 1991).] found nonsignificant impacts of women's college attendance on women's post-college educational attainments. Their study, using CIRP data, examined women who remained at one institution throughout their 4-year college career, whether that institution was a women's college or a coeducational institution. They controlled for background characteristics, precollege aspirations, and several institutional characteristics, such as selectivity.

Other research supports the idea that women's colleges have a positive impact on educational attainment and aspirations. Smith (1990) found women attending women's colleges were more likely to earn degrees than their peers at coeducational institutions. Miller-Bernal (1989) compared a women's college with a similar coeducational college and controlled for background characteristics. In her investigation of ways a women's college might promote women's achievement, Miller-Bernal found evidence that the environment at women's colleges supports the development of women's abilities, particularly on such measures as faculty interaction, and relationships with peers that encourage academic work.

On the other hand, Kim and Alvarez show that having a high number of female faculty was not a *significant* predictor of women students' self-reported academic ability. But they also found that "attending a women-only college has a positive effect on students' academic ability, presumably due to being surrounded by peers who see themselves as intellectually able. It appears that at a women-only college, women students not only experience fewer distractions, but they also gain the self-confidence necessary to further develop themselves." [Mikyong Kim and Rodolfo Alvarez, " Women-Only Colleges: Some Unanticipated Consequences, " Journal of Higher Education . Vol. 66, No. 6 (November/December) p. 661.] Kim and Alvarez suggest that future research should examine whether a high proportion of female faculty has any *indirect* effects on student development.

Career Aspirations and Occupational Outcomes

Similar to issues examined under the area of educational aspirations and attainment, the most frequently examined issues related to career aspirations and occupational outcomes are whether women who go to women's colleges have higher career aspirations and occupational outcomes than their counterparts at coeducational institutions, and whether women's college graduates enter traditionally male-dominated occupations at a higher rate.

As discussed in chapter 1, Tidball was one of the first researchers to examine the career and occupational outcomes of women's college graduates. A review of a recent study by the Henry A. Murray Research Center at Radcliffe by Bales and Sharp indicates that the presence of high percentages of female administrators at women's colleges was associated with higher career aspirations of seniors. Robinson, in reviewing the work of Tidball, Macoby, and Jaclin, reached the same conclusion. However, other researchers suggest caution in interpreting the results of some of these studies because of inadequate controls of students' background characteristics and certain institutional characteristics.

As mentioned previously, Riordan (1994) did do a study in which initial ability (SAT scores) and home background (SES) were controlled. In examining human capital outcomes of college graduates, Riordan found that attending a women's college is directly related to occupational attainment and indirectly related to personal income through occupation. His findings indicate that women's college attendees and attendees of coeducational institutions obtain the same amount of education, he also found that women's college attendees achieve higher occupational prestige. He identified a negative relationship between women's college

attendance and number of hours worked, indicating that women's college attendees achieve significantly higher salaries despite working fewer hours per week.

In terms of attainment of job-related skills with which to initiate careers, Kim and Alvarez found that women seniors at coeducational institutions appear more likely to have acquired such skills. They also found that seniors at women's colleges have no advantage over their peers attending coeducational institutions in terms of preparation for entry into graduate or professional schools. Similarly, Riordan found that "graduates of coeducational colleges were significantly more likely to attain further postgraduate schooling than women's colleges." [Cornelius Riordan, "The Value of Attending a Women's College: Education, Occupation, and Income Benefits," *Journal of Higher Education* . Vol. 65, No. 4 July/August 1994, p. 488.]

Bressler and Wendler (1980) [Marvin Bressler and Peter Wendell, "The Sex Composition of Selective Colleges and Gender Differences in Career Aspirations," *Journal of Higher Education* . Vol. 51, No. 6. 1980.] examined gender differences in career aspirations. Using data from CIRP (1967-1971), the authors looked at career preferences and educational plans of men and women attending selective, residential coeducational, men's and women's colleges. Their findings indicate that college experiences result in causing both sexes, but particularly women, "to reject conventional role prescriptions and are thus instrumental in markedly reducing initial male-female differences in occupational choice." [Bressler and Wendell, "The Sex Composition of Selective Colleges and Gender Differences in Career Aspirations," p. 661.] However, they found that the gender composition of the institution accounts for a great deal of the impact on career choice.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) [Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students* . San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1991.] in a synthesis of research on how college impacts students, examined various research studies on how institutional gender influences women's career choices as well as their careers. They found evidence suggesting that single-sex colleges have a tendency to enhance students', and particularly women's', socioeconomic aspirations and career aspirations after taking into account college selectivity and background characteristics. They also found graduates of women's colleges are strongly over-represented in the high-status, male-dominated occupations of medicine, scientific research, and engineering. [Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students* , p. 601.]

However, there is research indicating that college selectivity or even student recruitment factors, as opposed to institutional gender composition, play a role in students' occupational aspirations and achievement. In a 1991 study of 1971-80 CIRP data on 2,485 women, 273 of whom had attended women's colleges, Pascarella with Stoecker (1991) [Stoecker and Pascarella, "Women's Colleges and Women's Career Attainments Revisited," pp. 394-406.] controlled for several student background variables and institutional selectivity variables. They found no statistically significant direct or indirect effect of attending a women's college on women either entering male-dominated careers or on the occupational status of the jobs held by women graduates of women's colleges. Stoecker and Pascarella suggest that success may be due to recruitment efforts rather than socialization.

Lentz (1982) [Linda P. Lentz, "College Selectivity, Not College Type, Is Related to Graduate Women's Career Aspirations." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, March 1982 ED 216 628.] compared career aspirations of graduates of women's colleges and coeducational colleges at three levels of college selectivity. Selectivity was based on ratings from *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* (1973). Lentz first compared aspirations based on college type and found no differences between women's and coeducational colleges in terms of plans to enter

traditionally male-dominated careers, to pursue graduate or professional education, or what she calls "level of the organizational ladder aspired to" (plans to enter various levels of management). When differences were looked at in terms of selectivity level, Lentz found only a relationship between selectivity level and desire to pursue traditionally male-dominated careers. Lentz suggested that further research be done on the climate of selective colleges and also whether women attending more selective colleges have different college experiences than women attending less selective institutions.

The Campus Climate Debate

Studies to date have provided insight into environmental impact and college climate on student outcomes. In their research synthesis, Pascarella and Terenzini found evidence pointing to a relationship between attending a single-sex institution and higher levels of persistence and educational attainment, particularly for women. [Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, p. 453.] The research they examined also supports the idea that women's colleges provide a uniquely supportive climate for women and suggest that the large number of female faculty role models may be an important factor explaining not only high levels of educational attainment, but also career aspirations and attainment. [Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, p. 383.]

In general, other researchers find that it is unclear as to whether the positive outcomes of women's college students and graduates are related more to gender composition of the institution, selectivity, or institution type (as most women's colleges are relatively small, liberal arts institutions). Miller-Bernal (1993) [Leslie Miller-Bernal, "Single-Sex versus Coeducational Environments: A Comparison of Women Students' Experiences at Four Colleges," *American Journal of Education*. Vol. 102, No. 1, November, 1993.] did compare experiences of women students at four similar liberal arts colleges of different gender compositions (a women's college, a coordinate of a men's college, a long-time coeducational college, and a college that had recently become coeducational). The purpose of the study was to test for differences among these four types of institutions on the following common factors leading to high achievement among women's college graduates: the presence of faculty role models, opportunities for leadership, and supportive environment of women's colleges. Miller-Bernal's findings indicate that both the women's colleges and the coordinate college in the sample did differ from the others in terms of these three factors. The study, however, did not find that these "college experience" factors had a great deal of impact on student outcomes.

There is research that suggests single-sex schools and women's colleges provide a unique environment conducive to high levels of learning and achievement for women. In comparing the merits of single-sex education vs. coeducation, numerous articles point to a "chilly climate" for girls and women in coeducational classrooms at both the secondary and postsecondary level. [Martha Brant, "Far Beyond White Gloves and Teas," *Newsweek*. April 25, 1994, p. 59. Susan Estrich, "Separate Is Better," *New York Times Magazine*. May 22, 1994, pp. 38-39. Riordan, "The Value of Attending a Women's College: Education, Occupation, and Income Benefits." Bernice R. Sandler, "The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students," in *Women in Higher Education, A Feminist Perspective*. (Judith S. Glazer, Estela M. Bensimon, and Barbara K. Townsend (eds.)). Washington, DC: American Council on Education, pp. 175-76. Myra Sadker and David Sadker, "Why Schools Must Tell Girls: You're Smart, You Can Do It," *Daily News, USA Weekend*. February 4-6, 1994, pp. 5, 28. Smith, Wolf, and Morrison, "Paths to Success: Factors Related to the Impact of Women's Colleges," p. 245. Ben Gose, "Classroom Climate Found Still 'Chilly' for Women," *Chronicle of Higher Education*. March 1, 1996, p. A 38.] A number of recent studies found that teenage girls frequently leave high school with lower aspirations and poor self-esteem as a result of the

climate in coeducational classrooms. [Sandra Reeves and Anne Marriott, " A Burst of Popularity: Most Women's Colleges Are Flourishing By Offering Students A Sense of Empowerment, " U.S. News and World Report. September 26, 1994, pp. 105-108. Sadker and Sadker, " Why Schools Must Tell Girls: You're Smart, You Can Do It, " p. 28. Riordan, " The Value of Attending a Women's College: Education, Occupation, and Income Benefits, " p. 486.] Williams (1990) [Dana Williams, " Is the Post-secondary Classroom a Chilly One for Women? A Review of the Literature, " The Canadian Journal of Higher Education . Vol. 20, No. 3. 1990.] reviewed some of the literature on this issue and found little research at the postsecondary level. However, Williams suggests based on her literature review, that women do not participate as much as men students in coeducational classrooms, especially those taught by male faculty.

These reports are in contrast to national data showing not only that the number of women enrolling in postsecondary institutions has surpassed that of men, but also that women have achieved great gains in educational attainment over the last several decades. For example, data from the National Center for Education Statistics show an increase in the aspirations of female high school seniors between 1982 and 1992. [U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1996 . Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996, p. 413.]

Several reports using nationally representative data such as the NLS-72 point to strong evidence of womens' achievements in higher education. Adelman, in his 1991 report, *Women at Thirtysomething*, used the NLS-72 high school records, test scores, and the postsecondary transcripts to examine women's behavior in education and the labor market. He found women's academic performance in high school was far stronger than that of men. [Clifford Adelman, *Women at Thirty something* . Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1991, p. v.] He also found that although women had lower educational aspirations, they continued on to postsecondary education at the same rate as men, received more scholarships, and completed both associate's and bachelor's degrees at a faster pace than men [Adelman, *Women at Thirty something* , p. 7.] Adelman also found that women earned consistently higher grade point averages in college than men no matter what field.

Apling and White (1993) [Richard Apling and Liane E. White, *Women's Educational Status: Some Indicators* . Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1993.] using Census data, showed a steady growth in the proportion of women enrolling in postsecondary institutions between 1976 and 1990. They also found substantial increases in the number of associate's and bachelor's degrees between 1965 and 1989, with women earning more than 50 percent of these degrees by the end of the 1980s. [Apling and White, *Women's Educational Status: Some Indicators* , pp. 11-12.] The paradox here is, if the climate is indeed a chilly one for women at various educational levels, why are they achieving at such high rates?

Conclusion

Several research studies suggest that further study of women's colleges is warranted, given the large numbers of women enrolled in higher education. Stoecker and Pascarella suggest looking more closely at how various factors affect both short and long-term post-college outcomes for women at both women's colleges and coeducational institutions. These factors include:

- student-faculty interactions;
- presence of female role models;
- influence of peer groups;
- classroom and institutional climate; and

- college experiences.

Riordan suggests looking at the potential of colleges to develop what he calls "social capital" of their students, particularly women. Riordan defines social capital as a parental or institutional outlay (investment) utilized as an input by children and students toward the production of their own physical, human, and social capital. Moore, Piper and Schaefer [Mary Moore, Valerie Piper, and Elizabeth Schaefer, " Single-sex Schooling and Educational Effectiveness: A Research Overview, " Single Sex Schooling: Perspectives From Practice and Research, Volume 1 . Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 1993.] also feel more research is needed to reflect changes in students and society in terms of women's roles and their motivations. They also suggest examining whether the positive differences noted as a result of attending a women's college are lasting differences and "whether the apparent benefits of these schools continue to be equally applicable to future classes of students as college enrollment and recruitment patterns change." [Moore, Piper, and Schaefer, " Single-sex Schooling and Educational Effectiveness: A Research Overview, " p 27.]

More research needs to be done on women-only institutions to answer questions raised by current studies and inconsistencies in findings. For example, findings are inconclusive regarding evidence of both the numbers of women entering traditionally male-dominated fields and a definitive relationship between the campus environment and outcomes. There is no nationally representative research on why women choose to go to women's colleges. Researchers themselves have pointed out limitations in their own research based on lack of ability to control for certain factors, inadequate measures of variables, and samples that don't adequately reflect the experiences of women of color.

It would also be useful to look at differences between women at coeducational institutions and women at women's colleges, not only in actual achievement of graduates, but also between their precollege aspirations and eventual academic achievement. More comparisons of similar institutions, using larger samples, needs to be done to determine whether it is the gender composition of an institution or the institution type (ie: liberal arts) that has a greater impact on college experiences and outcomes. And finally, in light of statistics showing great strides in degree achievement and academic achievement of women over the last two decades, is there indeed a "chilly climate" for women at coeducational institutions?

In addition, other issues that have come up throughout this report specifically related to women's colleges warrant further investigation. For example:

- What happened to women's colleges that closed or became coeducational?
- What happened to 2-year women's colleges that became 4-year institutions?
- How do schools that remain women's colleges survive?
- What can other institutions learn from those women's colleges that have survived, in terms of such issues as marketing, enrollment management, and program development?

Further research on women's colleges would not only help to further and clarify our understanding of these institutions and of their impact on students and higher education in general, it would also provide valuable information to the entire field of higher education. Women's colleges have had a long and distinguished history of serving the higher education needs of American women. It is important that all higher education institutions learn from their success.