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Clifton J. Phillips Essay Contest

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The Evolution of the DePauw Woman

Widespread participation by women in higher education is something that many people in my generation take for granted. While women now outnumber men on the DePauw campus by about a 55 to 45 ratio, that is a remarkably recent phenomenon. Nearly 150 years ago four fearless women came to Greencastle to pave the way for thousands of women who followed by the 1990s. We do not know, without some research, what our predecessors have had to go through in order for us to be here at DePauw today. Not only have the numbers of women on campus exploded over the past century and one-half, but these DePauw women have become more adventurous with majors and professions, marriage is less of a priority, and more women are attempting additional degrees.

When in 1867 the first four women were admitted to DePauw, “the best men’s college west of the Alleghenies,” they came not for themselves but for all women-kind (Neiswanger, 1). The fearless leader of those “Four Immortals,” Ms. Bettie Locke, explained, “we realized somehow that we weren’t going to college, just for ourselves, but for all the girls that would follow after us – if we could just win out” (Neiswanger, 3). At that time, DePauw (then Indiana Asbury University) propelled itself to the forefront of this movement of integrating women into all male higher education institutions. Only a few colleges such as Oberlin, Bount, Antioch, Northwestern, and Lawrence had already gone coeducational prior to the Civil War. When enrollment dropped due to the war,

colleges had to turn to women to fill the spots in order to keep the institutions up and running. The Land Grant Act of 1862 furnished another catalyst for DePauw attracting female students. This Federal legislation fostered the establishment of new state universities in the West and Midwest which enthusiastically accepted women from the start (Neiswanger, 2). With the change in attitudes brought on by the Civil War and the Land Grant Act, DePauw became “a trailblazer and attracted wide attention and had considerable influence” on the growth of coeducational colleges. Thus, the school year of 1867-1868 was one to go down in history books as Bettie Locke, Laura Beswick, Alice Allen, and Mary Simmons entered Indiana Asbury as the first women students (Neiswanger, 2).

Once enrolled, the first women had a special curriculum, called the “scientific course” which had less difficult requirements than the regular “classical course” because the scientific course was thought to be the only one the women were “qualified” to take (Neiswanger, 3). Even though the women had a special curriculum they still took a few classes with the men, allowing for some direct competition. In addition to the academics being unequal, so were the extra-curricular opportunities. The women were not allowed admittance to the literary societies, nor were they allowed to contribute to the school newspaper. When Bettie Locke failed at obtaining membership into her brother’s fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta, she feared that “women might never be accepted into the student life at the university” (Neiswanger, 4). Realizing how important extra-curricular activities were, Bettie, Laura, Alice, and Mary all established Kappa Alpha Theta, the first Greek letter fraternity and secret society for college women.

At the time that the first women were admitted to DePauw the climate was clearly not the most welcoming. Many of the critics at DePauw had similar arguments to Myra and David Sadker and Edward Clarke. They believed that “men will lose as women advance,” resulting in “a community of defeminated women and demasculated men.” “When we attempt to disturb God’s order, we produce monstrosities” (Sadker, 22). In his article, *Sex in Education*, Dr. Edward Clarke “asserted that prolonged coeducation was physically dangerous to the reproductive health of females” (Sadker, 30). He continued, “an abnormal method of study and work may and does open the flood-gates of the system, and, by letting blood out, lets all sorts of evils in” (Clarke, 78). Some of those who disapproved of female admittance were “adult men back from the Civil War, completing interrupted college courses. Perhaps their campfire memories had sentimentalized women for them and they shared the common belief that woman’s place was still in the home” (Neiswanger, 3). Women were viewed at DePauw as lowering the standards of the university, having inferior minds, losing their femininity and charm, and being physically incapable of doing the college work required. Many of these same thoughts were circulating across the country,

“everyone seemed against them, even their own sex. The hardest thing to bear in that bitter period, one of them said later, was the attitude of other girls of their own age. This snobbish ostracism by their former friends brought tears at night that no amount of antagonism from the young men could provoke” (Neiswanger, 7).

It was almost impossible for women to have a career in a field other than secretary, teacher, nurse, or mommy because of this oppression that men and institutions put on them, limiting their curriculum, career exploration, and extra-curricular activities.

Luckily, women would not stand for their education being oppressed for long. The late 1800s to the early 1900s brought the first women's rights movement to the United States. Topics that were of the utmost concern were women's suffrage, birth control, and advocating higher wages and better working conditions for women. Although the DePauw women slowly became more noticeable, many times the societal demands of a woman caused them to abandon their professions. The Class of 1890 had seventeen female students, fourteen of whom got married within two years of their graduation from DePauw, three within ten years and no one later than ten years after graduation. This means that the majority of the female graduates did not practice their profession very long before they married and as few as 1.8% of the female graduates listed a career with alumni services. However, only a few short years later, the class of 1910 had 44% of their women list a career. Thirteen of the class were teachers, fourteen were homemakers, two were teacher/homemaker combos, one was a principal, one was a librarian, and three listed no profession.

Coming out of the Roaring Twenties with the focus on consumerism, the introduction of the Milton Bradley board game, "Monopoly," and many "Great Gatsby" personas, the woman's role at DePauw continued to evolve. In 1931, following the stock market crash and in the midst of the depression, Dorothy and Margaret Wright, a set of twins from Kendallville, Ind., arrived at DePauw for the next four years of their lives. The 1930s were a very conservative time for the university, but most especially for the women. The girls had to receive special permission from parents to participate in many activities on and off campus – the boys did not. Also, according to one of the Wright girls, the gym uniforms were very traditional with skirts and bloomers.

In a series of letters from the twins to their parents, the main topics concerned men, parties, socials and sororities. The twins reported that they would go to church just to meet guys, and it was important to know a prospective date's major and career objective. Margaret wrote, "you probably wonder how these fellows get a hold of us. Well, there are a lot more men here in school than women, because of many Rector Scholars, so that the girls are more noticeable. So it really isn't such an honor to have a date around here. If the girl is half-way good looking and has a reasonable amount of personality, she is all set" (*Wright letters*). With all of the mention of men and dating, academics were not discussed much; in fact, their parents had to ask twice for a copy of their class schedules. In one letter, Dorothy mentioned the class schedule of a current beau, commenting that, "arithmetic is tough, who would want to take trigonometry or chemistry" (*Wright letters*). The girls' class schedules included the following courses: English Bible, English Composition, English Literature, Philosophy, French, Swimming, Clogging, Interpretive Dance, and European History (*Wright letters*). This shows that while there was still a distinct divide between the genders and the quality of their curricula, the worry the first four had about women being denied access to extra-curricular activities was finally put to rest. Dorothy majored in speech and served on the Association of Women Students Board and as Vice President of the Senior Class. She also acted in various school plays, was a member of Duzer Du, Mortar Board, Education Club, Methodist Student Department, Monon Revue, and National Collegiate Players (*The Mirage*, 1936). Margaret was an English major, served on the board of the Association of Women Students, and was a member of the Education Club, Methodist

Student Department, Religious Education Club, WSA, Junior Class Committee, and the Student Senate (*The Mirage*, 1935).

In the 1950s, even though more women were attending college and feeling comfortable in higher education, they were still oppressed by the era's view that a woman's place was in the home. An ad published in a DePauw publication in 1958 depicted a woman as a homemaker selling appliances, not an uncommon feminine image of the time. In the immediate post-war period the women did not take advantage of the lack of men on campus; instead, they supported the war effort and thus many left college when the men returned from the war. At DePauw, women had a strict curfew but men did not (Sunday – Thursday: 10pm; Friday: 12am; Saturday: 12:15am). They also had to obtain permission to leave overnight. A cartoon in the same publication as the appliance ad, showed that self-image was very important at that time. The main character states, “Doctor – I can’t decide what to do about my 25th college reunion! Should I go fat and smooth faced or skinny and wrinkled?” (1983 Reunion Book). Even though women were becoming respected academically, they still had to fill the shoes of always looking neat and made up.

Over the next twenty or so years women at DePauw truly evolved, with some unique majors and professions being chosen. Nevertheless, the majority of women remained with traditional female career paths as teachers and housewives (24 and 19 respectively). Other occupations included: secretary, sales clerk, business owner, artist, diplomat's wife, clinical psychologist, college professor, journalist, medical technologist, musician, accountant, and social worker. A whopping twenty-one women of the class of 1958 went on to acquire a masters degree, four received PhDs, and one received a law

degree. Even though women had stronger career goals they also married and started families at young ages. Myra and David Sadker, authors of *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls*, observed, “over 80 percent of the graduates entered teaching. Viewed as an extension of the home, the classroom was another setting in which to raise and guide children, and women were welcome, but once they wed, their teaching careers were over” (Sadker, 20). In the 1950s many women attended college to obtain their “MRS degree.” Nancy Lindquist, elementary education major and president of Delta Delta Delta Sorority was also involved in the Association of Women Students as Vice President, the Union Board, the Motet Choir, and the Young Republican’s Club. Upon looking back at her life when she graduated from DePauw Lindquist said, “I left DPU in 1958 to begin the “typical” late 50’s lifestyle – marriage, life in the suburbs, two children.” Twenty female students got married while in college. Twenty-four female students got married within two years of graduation. Only nineteen married later than ten years after graduation from DePauw. While women have been toeing the line for years, many from the class of 1958, in their later years, believed that career counseling for DePauw women should be stronger. Carolyn Jane Duncan, English major and member of Pi Beta Phi, involved in YWCA, Methodist Student Movement, the Young Republicans Club and other activities, commented on the need for good career counseling for women at DePauw. Duncan, a recent divorcee, had this to say,

“while viewing the challenge that I have had managing in our world today, I have great concerns for my girls. Life as a single parent is not easy and I feel they must look to professions that provide more than supplemental income. I have never really been a “libber” but find myself taking that stance more and more. Call it my survival instinct. Career counseling should be a high priority for young females” (1983 Reunion Book).

Another graduate who felt that women at DePauw were too interested in socializing and acquiring their MRS degrees, Frances Allen Wilson, was a home economics major and independent from Mason Hall involved in the YWCA and the Home Economics Club. In looking back on her time at DePauw, she expressed her concerns about career planning and social life,

“DePauw represents a nice place to have attended, but my four years there were years of frustration, hard work, and desire to move on. I guess due to the times, I felt that career guidance was non-existent. Too much emphasis placed on social life – sorority and fraternity life. However, no regrets felt!” (1983 Reunion Book).

The 1970s brought all kinds of movements, protests, changes and ideas - one of the biggest of which was the women’s rights movement. The ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), *Ms. Magazine*, *Roe v. Wade*, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act all had a part in liberating women and had a huge effect on females across the country. In looking at the women of the class of 1975 compared to the other classes we see the results of that movement at work. More women explored different fields of study and were tying the knot much later. Only 18 female graduates became teachers out of the 363. Nursing was second most popular with seven grads and then homemakers with five. All other graduates had very different careers, such as accountant, legislative director, veterinarian, dentist, audiologist, newspaper reporter, dance movement, lawyer, counselor, librarian, professor, and vice president of banking. Forty-seven of the female graduates received a masters degree in a certain area of study – eight of which were MBAs. There were three doctorates, two JDs, one DDS, and one DVM, which were some of the highest numbers ever for DePauw women. Only three women got married while in college and twenty got married within two years after school. However, a whopping

thirty-six waited at least ten years after graduation to get married giving them time to establish a career. Many of the graduates discussed their work as some of the first women in the business world at their 25th class reunion. Eleanor Debney Amann had this to say:

“The Millennium (and middle age!) has brought a new focus for me, and I’ve noticed, for other women in business. Whereas we absolutely concentrated on moving up in the business world though the 70’s and 80’s, the late 90’s caused many of us to re-examine our priorities and, recently, opt for more of the “work-life” balance we’ve spoken of for a decade but not done anything about. It will be interesting to see what effect, if any, this change of “heart” has on the workplace, on volunteerism, maybe even on family, politics and religion!” (2000 Reunion Book).

Another observation that Amann made was that the 1970s allowed people the chance to experiment with alternative lifestyles. For example, the class of 1975 had many more divorced and single graduates than previous classes. Five female graduates turned to adoption, some after trying in vitro fertilization, ten have been divorced, nine are still single, and one is a lesbian.

As you can see women have been setting precedents for years, here at DePauw as well as throughout the country. Since the 1990s, women have surpassed men as the majority of the student body at DePauw with the ratio fluctuating around 55% female to 45% male. Also, women have recently shown a higher four year graduation rate than men and better performance in higher education. According to Bill Tobin of DePauw’s Institutional Research this has been the case for many years. They faced huge barriers from their critics, some with valid arguments and many with absurd ones, but now because of the strength of those first few, we are able to continue to plow through this man’s world and make change for those that will follow us. Who knows what the numbers will tell us in the future?

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