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Co-education and Collaboration: Women at Gettysburg from 1945-1955

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Abstract

Women studying at Gettysburg College in the years following World War II (from 1945 to 1955) were given many freedoms and opportunities not previously experienced by female students of the college. The inclusion of sororities and co-educational social clubs open to both men and women expanded the social lives of female students at Gettysburg. Meanwhile, the dormitory environment and intramural sports teams helped women at Gettysburg create a sense of community through healthy competition. With all of these new social, academic, and extracurricular opportunities, there were still setbacks for women. Rules dictated how a woman could dress in certain settings or wear her hair, a concept that now seems ridiculous. Expectations surrounding a woman's place in society led many women to not continue their studies after getting engaged or married during their college years. All that considered, women at Gettysburg had rich academic and social lives, complete with opportunities to expand their horizons inside and outside of the class, even if they were not always considered equal to their male classmates.

Keywords

Women at Gettysburg College, Educating Women, Sororities, Education

Disciplines

Higher Education | Women's History | Women's Studies

Comments

Written for HIST 300: Historical Methods

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Co-education and Collaboration
Women at Gettysburg from 1945-1955

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Dr. Michael Birkner

HIST 300: Historical Methods

6 December 2022

*I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work
and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code. -OT and MW*

Introduction

When 18 year-old Nancy Penniman Young arrived at Gettysburg College in 1950, her parents didn't expect her to last more than two years before dropping out.¹ Young was the president of many organizations including the Phi Mu sorority, the Student Christian Association, the Women's Student Council, and the Kappa Delta Epsilon honor sorority just four years later.² She made the Dean's list multiple times during her time at Gettysburg and was given the Outstanding Junior award.³ The most extraordinary part of Nancy Penniman Young's Gettysburg College experience is that it was not so extraordinary.

Women studying at Gettysburg College in the years following World War II (from 1945 to 1955) were given many freedoms and opportunities not previously experienced by female students of the college. The inclusion of sororities and co-educational social clubs open to both men and women expanded the social lives of female students at Gettysburg. Meanwhile, the dormitory environment and intramural sports teams helped women at Gettysburg create a sense of community through healthy competition.

With all of these new social, academic, and extracurricular opportunities, there were still setbacks for women. Rules dictated how a woman could dress in certain settings or wear her hair, a concept that now seems ridiculous. Expectations surrounding a woman's place in society led many women to not continue their studies after getting engaged or married during their college years. All that considered, women at Gettysburg had rich academic and social lives, complete with opportunities to expand their horizons inside and outside of the class, even if they were not always considered equal to their male classmates.

¹ Devin McKinney, "Interview with Nancy Penniman Young," Gettysburg College Archives (hereafter GCA), 9.

² *Spectrum*, 1954, GCA, 43.

³ *Ibid.*

“Four Years of Mad, Continuous Good Times”⁴

The social lives of female students at Gettysburg College flourished during the post-World War II era at Gettysburg College; whether it was the dances put on by college organizations, fraternity parties, sorority and club membership, or May Day celebrations, women found ways to keep busy during their time outside of the classroom.

Dances highlighted women’s social calendars, with numerous dances a year organized by both the college and its affiliated associations. There were no less than five themed dances hosted by the Women’s Organization and Interfraternity Council throughout the academic year. The first dance of the season was typically the Thanksgiving Dance, which, as the name implies, was held around Thanksgiving every year.⁵ The Colonial Ball was held in early February and was a combination of the Junior Prom and the Soph-Frosh Hop.⁶ The largest dance, however, was the All College Dance, co-sponsored by the Interfraternity council, the Panhellenic council, and the Student Chest Fund, and held every year in late May.⁷

Three faculty members were required to be present and act as chaperones at each of these dances. Male students would ask female students, though “many of the G-Burg males import dates for big dance weekends.”⁸ Men would typically get their dates corsages to wear to the dances.⁹ In turn, women were given dance cards by the dance organizers and the men would write down their names in the book to “reserve” certain dances with them.

⁴ “Hello Freshman,” *The Gettysburgian*, 18 September 1952, GCA.

⁵ Dance Card, 29 November 1946, *Dance Card Collection*, GettDigital
<https://gettysburg.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll9/id/29/rec/75>

⁶ Dance Card, 6 February 1947, *Dance Card Collection*, GettDigital
<https://gettysburg.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll9/id/37/rec/1>

⁷ Dance Card, 14 May 1949, *Dance Card Collection*, GettDigital
<https://gettysburg.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll9/id/401/rec/1>

⁸ G-Book, 1941, GCA.

⁹ Ibid.

Each fraternity on campus would host several parties throughout the year, including both annually planned events, and smaller get togethers. These parties were open to female students in addition to the several dances put on by the college itself. Phi Kappa Rho, one of the college's fraternities, held a Christmas Dance on the same weekend every year, while other fraternities, such as Alpha Tau Omega, were known for holding smaller parties throughout the year.¹⁰

Social and academic clubs were another outlet for female students at Gettysburg. These included the Debate Team, the Nurse's Aides Corps, Le Cercle Francais (the French club), the Spanish Club, the Sociology Club, the Booster Club, and the Chess Club.¹¹ Women also worked for several of the campus publications, such as the "Spectrum" yearbook, *The Gettysburgian*, the G-Book, etc.¹² While these clubs were open to both men and women, it is important to note that there were many additional clubs on campus that were only open to male students during this time, including the Scabbard and Blade (ROTC) and Gavel Clubs.¹³



The staff of the 1955 Spectrum Yearbook (Spectrum, 1955, GCA,139.)

¹⁰ Dance Card, 14 December 1946, *Dance Card Collection*, GettDigital
<https://gettysburg.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll9/id/56/rec/1>

¹¹ *Spectrum*, 1953, GCA, 82- 104

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Spectrum*, 1951, GCA, 99.

The crown jewel of all Gettysburg College social events was the annual May Day celebration. The celebration itself took place on the Saturday of Mother's Day weekend every year, but preparations started much earlier. A highlight of the May Day celebration was the selection of the May Day Queen. Girls from each class would submit a picture of themselves to be judged by a person outside of the college, usually a male celebrity.¹⁴ The girl deemed to be the prettiest would be crowned the May Day Queen with the second-ranked girl as her Maid of Honor. Notable celebrity judges included Bob Hope (1950)¹⁵ and Ed Sullivan (1955).¹⁶ The Queen, Maid of Honor, and Beauty Court of ten other girls were announced publicly at the May Day ceremony.¹⁷ All of the selected girls would enter in a procession with the Queen wearing a white dress and the rest of the Beauty Court wearing pastels, holding bouquets of flowers tied together with ribbons in colors that represented their class year.¹⁸ The Queen was also accompanied by two young flower girls. The whole ceremony, meant to be representative of a wedding, was presented in front of the student body and their parents who were on campus for



Photo of the 1946 May Day Celebrations from the Spectrum Yearbook

¹⁴ *Spectrum*, 1946, GCA, 52.

¹⁵ *Spectrum*, 1950, GCA, 177.

¹⁶ *Spectrum*, 1955, GCA, 170.

¹⁷ *Spectrum*, 1946, GCA, 52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Mother's day. Following the May Day ceremony, there was also a May Pole dance and an award ceremony for both the Scholarship Cup and Activities Cup.¹⁹

Women during the period from 1945 to 1955 were able to attend co-ed dances and fraternity parties, as well as join sororities, social clubs, and college publications, giving them active social lives. Even though they were still excluded from many social events, clubs, etc. on campus, there were increasingly more opportunities for women to engage with both each other and the male students at Gettysburg College.

“Wella, sororities are active in every phase of college life”²⁰

Regardless of whether or not you were male or female, “important to your social life here on the Gettysburg College campus are the social fraternities and sororities.”²¹ The first sorority at Gettysburg College was Chi Omega, followed shortly by Delta Gamma, and by 1955 this number grew to four national sororities and one local sorority.²² *The Gettysburgian* pointed to “the annual increase in enrollment of women students” as the reason for this increase in the number of sororities on campus.²³

Sororities would begin reaching out to women the summer going into their freshman year, both to welcome them to Gettysburg and to promote their organizations. This correspondence would provide the names of girls in each respective organization who were involved in several different facets of campus life. The Delta Gamma introductory letter that Barbara Holley received stated that “sororities are active in every phase of college life form

¹⁹These two awards were presented to the Sororities with the best academic and athletic records, respectively.

²⁰ Summer Correspondence from Delta Gamma Sorority, August 1950. *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, 1950-1954*, GCA.

²¹ G-Book, 1955, GCA.

²² G-Book, 1945, GCA.

²³ “Tri Phi Reveals Plans For Formal Installation Into Phi Mu Fraternity,” *The Gettysburgian*, 16 January 1945, GCA.

sports including; [field] hockey, basketball, volleyball, and softball; to social events such as teas, parties, dances, and even hayrides; and last but not least there is scholarship which every sorority woman tries to maintain.”²⁴

Women who wished to join a sorority had to participate in both a formal and informal rushing process, both of which were supervised by the Panhellenic Council. Rushing was restricted to just freshmen, but in the fall of 1944 “upperclass women and those who transferred into Gettysburg College were now allowed to pledge sororities,” though they did not take part in any formal rush activities.²⁵ Women received invitations to events such as teas to become better acquainted with the sororities individually. The rush process was taken very seriously by the school. If a woman was caught breaking the rushing rules, it would bring disgrace both to the girl and her sorority,” so women abided by the rules to avoid damaging their public image.²⁶ Freshmen would be initiated into their respective sororities following the conclusion of the rushing period.

Women who didn’t join sororities were considered “independents.” In the spring of 1954 the independent women created Lambda Nu, a non-sorority group open to all women on campus, including those who were in sororities.²⁷ The independent women held the “Independent Dance” annually, an event that was picked up by Lambda Nu after it was established. Though women had a variety of opportunities to be involved on campus outside of Greek life, those who were members of sororities did enjoy some special privileges. For example, the only single rooms on campus were reserved exclusively for sorority women.²⁸ Sororities became so ingrained in the

²⁴ Summer Correspondence from Delta Gamma Sorority, August 1950. *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, 1950-1954*, GCA.

²⁵ *The Gettysburgian*, 19 October 1944, GCA.

²⁶ G-Book, 1950, GCA, 87.

²⁷ *Gettysburgian* Article Clipping, *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, 1950-1954*, GCA.

²⁸ Jessica Koshko, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA.

identities of Gettysburg College women that the name of the sorority a woman was in would be listed directly below her name in the yearbook.

“And for the co-eds the college offers a program of sports...”²⁹

A popular choice in extracurricular involvement for women on campus outside of the classroom was and still is, athletics. Male sports dominated the scene, but female participation in athletics became increasingly commonplace in the period following World War II.

At this time women’s sports, intramural or intercollegiate, were overseen by the Women’s Athletic Association (WAA). The WAA was organized in the spring of 1944 by the Women’s Student Government and quickly became “one of the most active organizations on campus.”³⁰ Under the WAA, women could earn credit through their participation in sports on campus and were rewarded through these credits.³¹ The WAA oversaw the addition of new athletic opportunities as well. For example, women could take lessons for five weeks to learn how to ride and manage a horse well beginning in 1946, and would receive credit for it in accordance with WAA rules.³²

If women were interested in sports in this period they “got to participate in everything because there were so few of them,” and they played mostly field hockey³³ and basketball.³⁴ For many years women could only participate in intramural sports against other teams at the college itself. The section of the 1945 G-Book titled “Your Spare Time” claimed that women’s intramural sports “assumed greater proportions than ever before,” and now consisted of

²⁹ G-Book, 1941, 31.

³⁰ Ibid., 71.

³¹ *Spectrum*, 1946, 153.

³² “Riding Open to Coeds,” *The Gettysburgian*, 31 October 1946, GCA.

³³ At the time just referred to as “hockey”

³⁴ Jessica Cannella, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 10.

basketball, volleyball, bowling, softball, badminton, tennis, archery, and ping pong.³⁵ Women would often compete on teams composed of other women from their halls or other organizations that they were a part of on campus, such as their sororities. In fact, the sororities on campus would encourage their members to be involved in anything on campus that suited their interests, including sport. Delta Gamma states in their summer 1950 introductory letter that they “really like the outdoor glow that comes with sports such as hockey and tennis...of course there are plenty of indoor sports throughout the year like volleyball and basketball—fun for all”³⁶

Women were able to participate in intercollegiate sports beginning in 1945, though these opportunities were limited at first. Women’s field hockey, basketball, and swimming³⁷ were introduced as opportunities for women to be involved in athletics at the varsity level beginning in the 1945-46 academic year. The 1945 field hockey team saw three wins and no losses, an undefeated season that placed women in the athletic conversation at Gettysburg College.³⁸

The Athletic Council recommended that a new field house be constructed on campus to turn the Plank Gymnasium over to the school’s female athletes, but penny-pinching by the board of trustees with “too many other compelling demands for far too few available dollars” stunted this project. This idea would not become reality until 1962 upon the completion of the Bream Physical Education building.³⁹

In addition to participating in sports themselves, many women would choose to attend men’s games as spectators. Football, basketball, and baseball were particularly popular, though football and baseball both had to suspend a few of their seasons during World War II due to

³⁵ G-Book, 1945.

³⁶Letter from Delta Gamma to Barbara Holley, *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, 1950-1954*, GCA.

³⁷ Swimming was non-competitive in the 1945-46 academic year. Instead, the women on the team put on a showcase Mother’s Day weekend. The *Spectrum* explains that the purpose of the women’s swim team at this point in time was to uncover and “latent talent” and gauge potential interest in an inter-collegiate women’s swim team.

³⁸ *Spectrum*, 1946, 50.

³⁹ Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1987), 944.

significantly smaller rosters.⁴⁰ Barbara Holley’s scrapbook from the 1950s included several programs from football games during her time at Gettysburg, in addition to a few basketball programs.⁴¹

Women were by no means treated equal to men on the athletic fields in the period immediately after World War II; men’s varsity athletics had greater prominence on campus and were greater in number. It was at this time, however, that the foundation was set for greater athletic equality for women further down the line. In a single decade women saw their opportunities for athletic involvement on campus expand greatly, with the founding of the Women’s Athletic Association, increased participation in intramurals, and a growing number of intercollegiate teams for them to be a part of.

“The ‘fine girls’ in the dorm are always very friendly”

Residential Life for women at Gettysburg College was very different from their male counterparts. At first, female students were not able to live on campus, meaning they had to live at home or stay with relatives who lived in a town a reasonable commute away so that they could



Female Residents of Huber Hall (Spectrum, 1949, GCA, 108.)

⁴⁰ Ibid., 688.

⁴¹ Football programs, *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, 1950-1954*, GCA.

attend Gettysburg. This changed during World War II, when male enrollment was down, and the college had to keep itself alive by “putting girls in every available space.”⁴² When the veterans returned to campus, there was once again not enough room for women to live, so most had to live at home and commute. The college ultimately had to turn towards acquiring marginal residential facilities until seven new dormitories were completed in the 1950s that would provide housing for 900 students.⁴³

While the male students lived in McKnight Hall, the “Old Dorm” (Pennsylvania Hall) and Fraternity Houses in the center of campus, the women who attended Gettysburg College lived in Huber Hall, Stevens Hall, and Lincoln Hall, which were all east of the main campus.⁴⁴ Beginning in 1946, female students were also able to live in one of the College’s three Sorority Houses: Delta Gamma House, Chi Omega House, and Phi Mu House.⁴⁵

Each women’s dormitory was supervised by a housemother whose job was to watch over, care for, and advise the girls who lived in their respective residence halls. A housemother’s duties entailed everything from “listening to troubles and making fudge for a crowd of ravenously hungry gals to being the official hostess at any entertainment which the house may want to give.”⁴⁶ They were also responsible for ensuring that their residents abided by the “closing hour” rules that stated that women had to be in their respective dormitories by certain hours, a rule that was not in place for their male counterparts. Female students were required to be back to the dorms by 8:30 pm on weekdays and had a bit more flexibility on weekends, with a curfew of midnight and 10:30 pm for Saturday and Sunday, respectively.⁴⁷ These curfews would

⁴² Jessica Cannella, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA.

⁴³ Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1935*, (Gettysburg College: Gettysburg, 1987) 841.

⁴⁴ *Spectrum*, 1946, GCA, 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ G-Book, 1945, GCA.

be pushed back to 10:30 pm for weeknights as well as the years went on.⁴⁸ If women wanted to leave their dorms after 6:00 pm, or expected to be back after 6:00 pm, they had to sign out of the building.⁴⁹ The Dean of Women had to grant special permission to female students who wished to leave campus, and they were expected to be back on campus by 8:30 pm the following Sunday.⁵⁰ Failure to adhere to these rules had serious consequences; any girls coming in five minutes after curfew would have 15 minutes deducted from their late permission hours; ten minutes late would result in 30 minutes deducted.⁵¹ If girls failed to sign out, did not sign out properly after 6:00 pm, or were caught signing out on behalf of someone else, they would receive demerit points.⁵²

In addition to curfew rules, there were other living regulations that the female students of Gettysburg College had to follow. Several establishments in the town of Gettysburg were considered “off limits” to the women including the Gettysburg Hotel Grill, Hotel Eberhart, the Blue Parrot Tea Room, Ma Haine’s Bar, and the Lincoln Logs.⁵³ Some women were able to sneak around these rules, as Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley alludes to in an interview, claiming “it was pretty hard to get away with. But yes, we all went to Ma Haines’ bar.”⁵⁴

The Dormitory Committee, a sub-committee of the Women’s Student Council, created and enforced the rules for girls dormitories. The committee was composed of dormitory presidents, housemothers, head residents of the dorms, and other members of the Women’s Student Council. They determined the regulations regarding everything from “wearing jeans under raincoats, quiet hours, sunbathing, signing of late pers, calling out of windows, etc.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ G-Book, 1955, GCA

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “WSG Sets Dance Date,” *The Gettysburgian*, 31 October 1946, GCA.

⁵² G-Book, 1941, GCA.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Michael Birkner, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 56.

⁵⁵ “Women Students Form New Dormitory Council,” *The Gettysburgian*, 3 May 1951, GCA.

Women, unlike men, were not able to room where they pleased, and were “required to live under dormitory supervision.”⁵⁶

Residential life for women at Gettysburg College was lively in spite of the many rules and regulations in place, and ultimately helped female students build a sense of community. Each dormitory would host events within the building as well as open events for everyone on campus.⁵⁷ These events were often small tea parties or other social gatherings. Additionally, groups of girls from each dormitory made up teams for various intramural sports throughout the semester, competing against other girls dormitories and even some of the boys dormitories. The sense of community experienced by female students felt during their time at the college prompted some to return later in life to work in housemother positions. For example, Miss Eva Kochenour graduated in 1940 but returned to the college as a housemother for Huber Hall in 1949.⁵⁸ According to the *Gettysburgian*, “Miss Kochenour loves Gettysburg College. The ‘fine girls’ in the dorm are always very friendly.”⁵⁹



Female residents playing cards in Huber Hall (*Spectrum*, 1946, GCA)

⁵⁶ Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1935*, (Gettysburg College: Gettysburg, 1987), 835.

⁵⁷ *Spectrum*, 1946, GCA, 20.

⁵⁸ “Co-eds discover understanding personality in form of new housemother Kochenour,” *The Gettysburgian*, 27 October 1949, GCA.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Although a majority of the residential life experiences differed between male and female students at Gettysburg College, there were a few aspects of residential life that were shared between both genders. Men and women were separated as far as housing was concerned, but all students, with the exception of men in fraternities, shared the a la carte-style cafeteria in the main lobby of Huber Hall.⁶⁰

Residential life for women at Gettysburg College from 1945 to 1955 was one of strict rules and regulations. Yet in spite of those restrictions, women still managed to make lasting and meaningful connections with others both in their dormitories, on the intramural sports fields, and in the cafeteria they shared with the male students.

“Getting a Sound Academic Footing”⁶¹

The classroom was one of the only places where the male and female students at Gettysburg College were truly equal from 1945-1955. All students were required to take an English class, a mathematics class, a foreign language class, a literature class, a science class,



Male and Female students attend classes together (*Spectrum*, 1955, GCA, 144.)

⁶⁰ Michael Birkner, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 57.

⁶¹ “Freshman, Faculty Discuss Campus Life, Curriculum,” *The Gettysburgian*, 9 October 1952, GCA.

and a physical education class. The only difference in the academic requirements for male and female students was a physical education class. Male students were required to take an activity class for two years while female students had to take both an activity class and a hygiene class for two years.⁶² With the exception of this single class, academic expectations were equal for both male and female students. Punishments for missing or in danger of failing classes were also the same for everyone: academic probation. Students placed on probation were not allowed to participate in sports or any college activity that would require them to miss class and a note detailing their probationary status was sent to their parents or guardians.⁶³

Men and women were also considered equally eligible for academic honors. There were twelve nationally recognized honorary fraternities and sororities that students could be appointed to depending on their major.⁶⁴ Admittance to honor societies was not restricted by gender and did not require a rush process, unlike the social fraternities and sororities. In fact, “women were taking all of the honors because they were more selectively admitted,” according to Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley.⁶⁵ At the time Craley was attending Gettysburg, one year after the end of World War II, the college was about 2/3 men and 1/3 women. One honor sorority that was very popular amongst the female students of Gettysburg was Kappa Delta Epsilon, an educational sorority that targeted women interested in becoming teachers. Women also commonly made (or didn’t make in the case of Ruth Miller) the official College list of honor students that is published in the Alumni Bulletin. Miller was a class of 1946 graduate whose name was accidentally omitted from the honor list her senior year.⁶⁶

⁶² Gettysburg College Catalog, 1946, GCA, 47- 48.

⁶³ Gettysburg College Catalog, 1948, GCA, 49.

⁶⁴ Gettysburg College Catalog, 1946, GCA, 86.

⁶⁵ Jessica Cannella, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 21.

⁶⁶ “Honors List Omits Name of ‘46 Coed,” *The Gettysburgian*, 1 August 1946, GCA.

Female students were also very active in student government positions during this time. In 1946, both the senior and junior class had a female vice president, secretary, and treasurer while the sophomore class had a group of all female representatives. Granted, this large female representation in student government was likely due to the decline of male students enrolled at Gettysburg College because of the second World War. That being said, even in later years when the male to female ratio again disproportionately favored male students, women were still very involved in student government.⁶⁷ The position of secretary was held by a woman for almost every class who attended the college between 1945 and 1955.

This representation in student government is especially impressive when the ratio of male to female students is taken into consideration. During the 1946 summer semester there were 434 students enrolled at Gettysburg and only 50 of them were women.⁶⁸ Later that year, the college admitted 300 new male students and only 12 female students into the freshman class. Among those twelve women, one was a returning student who had joined the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), the U.S. Navy's corps of female service members, during World War II.⁶⁹ For this reason, it would be more accurate to report that in 1946 the Gettysburg College freshman class was composed of 300 new male students and eleven new female students.

Gettysburg College was making advancements in gender equality despite the imbalance between male and female student enrollment. In 1953, Walter Langsam, the president of the college, appointed two women to the Gettysburg College teaching staff.⁷⁰ These two women, Marilyn Reichert and Katherine Taylor, both had Ph.D.s and were hired to teach English and the

⁶⁷ "Gettysburg College to Admit 1,000 New Students in October," *The Gettysburgian*, 22 August 1946, GCA.

⁶⁸ "Men outnumber Campus Coeds Seven to One," *The Gettysburgian*, 27 June 1946, GCA.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1935* (Gettysburg College: Gettysburg, 1987) 779.

Romance Languages.⁷¹ They were hired in an effort to appeal to the American Association of University Women (AAUW), who offered recognition to schools who were supporting and promoting their female students. The 1950s saw fewer women pursuing higher education than in previous years, as is reflected in Gettysburg College's women's attendance rates. In the year 1940, 41.3% of women earned their bachelor's degree, by 1950 that number had dropped down to 23.9%.⁷² Organizations like the AAUW recognized and promoted institutions that it felt were supporting the female students who attended them to ensure that young women had the opportunity to pursue higher education, if desired. President Langsam and the former president, Henry Hanson, had been working on gaining the support of the AAUW for several years before finally being granted recognition in 1953.

Despite the many differences that male and female students faced during their time at Gettysburg College, the actual academic aspect seems to be one of the few places where they were considered relatively equal. Women and men attended the same classes and were given the same recognition for their academic success. By seeking out the recognition of the American Association of University Women and appointing the college's first two female professors, the administration was growing and evolving to become more inclusive.

“Be natural, be neat, be nice”

How a woman or “coed” presented herself at Gettysburg College in the 1940s and 1950s was critical. Women were seemingly expected to be presentable at all times, though a letter to a “Future Gettysburgian” states that “clothes are the least of a Gettysburg coed's worries.”⁷³

⁷¹ *Spectrum*, 1953, GCA, 14-15.

⁷² “Education,” American Association University Women, 10 July 2020, <https://www.aauw.org/issues/education/>.

⁷³ Letter to “Future Gettysburgian,” Women's History Exhibit, GCA.

Expectations for their attire are outlined in detail in G-Books, the student handbooks given to students prior to their arrival in the fall. The G-Book from 1941 states that women should “be natural, be neat, be nice,” and then further outlines what these expectations should look like in practice.⁷⁴ During the week for attending classes, “casual” clothing was suggested, while weekends were for displaying “you at your best.”⁷⁵ Nancy Penniman Young (Class of 1954) notes in an interview with Devin McKinney that women were expected to appear put together, but also notes that their appearance was not held to the same standard as a man’s. While women on campus were expected to dress up for dinner, even just a casual weekday meal, men were not.⁷⁶ That being said, attire for meals shifted drastically after World War II; prior to the war, women would “put on something very flowy and come and sit down to a formal dinner...with the white gloves and all to be waited on,” and following the war, women were eventually allowed to wear pants to their dinners.⁷⁷ Women were not permitted to walk into town wearing jeans, nor could they wear slacks to class. The only exception to the latter of those two rules was during exam week when women were permitted to wear pants while taking their final exams.

The section of the G-Book that outlines what students should bring to Gettysburg College when they move in takes several pages to outline the dos and don’ts of attire for women while the men’s section discusses textbooks, furniture, and accessory items like radios, offering up very little advice on attire, presumably because it was not deemed as important.

Dating was an important part of social life for women, and they were expected to dress the part. A woman’s “very best pink sweater” or “silk blouse and stockings” were perfect for weeknight dates, while weekend dating attire should consist of elegant and simple silk dresses,

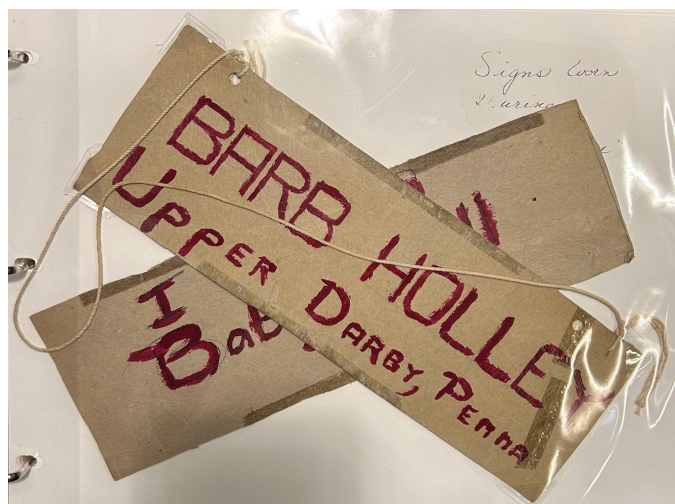
⁷⁴ G-Book, 1941, 7.

⁷⁵ G-Book, 1955, 8.

⁷⁶ Devin McKinney, “Interview with Nancy Penniman Young,” Gettysburg College Special Collections, 19.

⁷⁷ Jessica Cannella, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” Gettysburg College Special Collections.

“without the frou-frou.”⁷⁸ Gowns were encouraged for dorm dances, fraternity house parties, and school balls.



“Signs worn during ‘customs.’” *Barbara Holley Scrapbook, GCA.*

Like the freshman men on campus, under Freshman Customs (codified in the annual G-Book) women were expected to wear a dink⁷⁹ at all times and a sign on their back that they made during orientation during the first six weeks of their freshman year that included their name and hometown. Margaret Blanchard Curtis (Class of 1952) explains in an interview that newly-matriculated freshmen were expected to have studied the G-Book, and if they couldn’t recall information from it when prompted or didn’t adhere to the rules in any way, they were penalized. Breaking the rules could result in being forced to wear “ridiculous outfits,” something that Curtis notes her roommates had to do a lot.⁸⁰ She speculates that some people, her roommates included, on campus might have tried to get caught breaking the rules on purpose because people got to know those who were frequently wearing outlandish clothing. They stood out.

⁷⁸ G-Book, 1941, 7.

⁷⁹ A type of hat.

⁸⁰ Beth Anderson, “Interview with Margaret Blanchard Curtis,” GCA, 7.

Women were discouraged from trying to stand out in any way when it came to their appearance; the “Co-ed Customs” section of the 1945 G-Book states that women were prohibited from wearing lipstick, nail polish, or jewelry.⁸¹ No more than one bobby pin or hair clip could be used in the hair, and if a woman wore an engagement ring, wedding ring, or watch, she had to wear a green ribbon around them, or simply not wear them at all.⁸²

The emphasis on how women dressed in different circumstances at Gettysburg College began to loosen up in the period immediately following World War II but it was by no means gone. Lofty expectations for female attire draw into question the true purpose of women at Gettysburg during this time. Were women on campus to get a degree or to get a husband?

“To get a husband”⁸³

Women became a larger presence on the Gettysburg College campus in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and while they were admitted more selectively, their purpose on campus was still drawn into question, even by women themselves.

According to Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley, a woman at Gettysburg was either a star student or simply there to enjoy the social scene and “to get a husband.”⁸⁴ She herself met her husband at Gettysburg and felt that due to the social climate of the 1950s, really did not even need her education at all; she could just stay home and be a doting housewife. According to Nancy Young, “many of the Freshman girls got married after their first or second year.”⁸⁵ It was common for women to drop out of college after getting engaged, because they felt there was no sense in spending money on a degree that they were unlikely to use.⁸⁶ That being said, both Craley and

⁸¹ G-Book, 1945.

⁸² Customs–1950, Women’s History Exhibit, GCA.

⁸³ Jessica Koshko, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 23.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Devin McKinney, “Interview with Nancy Penniman Young,” GCA, 9.

⁸⁶ Jessica Koshko, “Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Craley,” GCA, 24.

Margaret Blanchard Curtis said that they didn't really think about discrimination between men and women during their time at Gettysburg, nor were they uncomfortable being some of the only women on campus. Curtis notes that this was simply "the way it was."⁸⁷

For men, in addition to being their classmates, women were something nice for them to look at, a fact that is underscored by the sheer quantity of male-judged beauty contests held on campus during this period.⁸⁸ Women had to sit upstairs in the chapel because if they sat on the main floor it would "distract the men."⁸⁹ If men did not approve of how their female classmates were dressed, it was not discouraged that they let them know. The 1941 G-Book makes the claim that "college boys aren't afraid to tell you if they disapprove of your futuristic hats."⁹⁰ One anonymous contributor to the *Gettysburgian* wrote that "there's an old saying that four out of five girls are beautiful and the fifth one comes to G-Burg."⁹¹ Women, it seems, were expected to dress to impress the men on campus.

Conclusion

Women at Gettysburg after World War II were greatly outnumbered by their male counterparts, attending college in a time where women were expected to get married and start a family rather than get an education and start a professional career. Demanding academic schedules, unequal athletic opportunities, high expectations for how they presented themselves, societal pressure, and general on-campus inequality were all challenges that women faced during this time. With that being said, women, like Nancy Penniman Young, still forged illustrious careers at Gettysburg College, both inside and outside of the classroom.

⁸⁷ Beth Anderson, "Interview with Margaret Blanchard Curtis," GCA, 9.

⁸⁸ Discussed previously.

⁸⁹ Jessica Koshko, "Interview with Ruthe Fortenbaugh Caley," GCA, 24.

⁹⁰ Beth Anderson, "Interview with Margaret Blanchard Curtis," GCA, 9

⁹¹ "Night and Day," *Gettysburgian*, 5 October 1944, GCA.

Gettysburg's female students were deeply involved in all facets of campus life; sororities, social clubs, and athletics allowed them to pursue their extracurricular interests, while academic-oriented clubs honor societies and the Women's Student Government helped to intellectually stimulate their minds. Though they did not have all of the same opportunities as the male students, women were deeply involved in everything available to them, over the years becoming a larger and more respected presence on campus.

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